June 20, 2000

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—HOUSE

11465


In honoring the heroism of these Asian Pacific veterans, I am reminded of the sacrifices of all our minority veterans. Today, several weeks after Memorial Day, I would like to take a few moments to talk about the tens of thousands of minority Americans who set aside political, economic and social disenfranchisement, to answer the call to arms against the forces of tyranny.

Minorities have served in the American military since the early days of the republic and valiantly fought in every major engagement including the Civil War, Spanish-American War, WWII, WWII, Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf.

The moment of truth for most minority veterans was solidly demonstrated in WWII. Undaunted by discrimination and racism, they deeded to serve their country. In the beginning of the war, many minority servicemen were relegated to serve only in "rear echelon" positions or support positions during the war. They served as munitions men, truck drivers, cooks, stewards, and in cleaning and repair details. I am reminded of Uncle Bob Liza, a native son of Guam who served in the U.S. Navy as a steward. His naval career spanned over 30 years including service in three major wars.

Minorities also labored in the factories and farms throughout the United States working towards the war effort. In many cases, when in combat zones, the men in these positions manned weapons and fought honorably side-by-side with white soldiers and sailors during furious engagements.

Later in the war, after tremendous lobbying efforts by minority civic leaders, combat units were established for minority populations. These brave men and women came from all walks of life but were bound by a love of country and a desire to serve. They lived in a separate component of American society that was defined by an unfortunate climate of prejudice. African-Americans, Hispanics, native Hawaiians, Chamorros, Samoans, Asian Americans, Filipinos, American Indians, and Native Alaskans all served honorably in many capacities with the U.S. military to combat the hegemonic forces of Germany, Italy and Japan.

In segregated units, often led by white officers, these noble men distinguished themselves on the battlefield. They were denied the recognition that they too were willing to lay down their lives for freedom. The Tuskegee Airmen, the famed 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the 100th Infantry Battalion, the Navajo Code Talkers, the U.S. Navy's Fita Fita Guard (a U.S. Navy auxiliary unit in American Samoa), the 1st Samoan Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps, and the Guam Combat Patrol (a U.S. Marine Corps auxiliary unit in Guam) are just a few of the organizations where minorities fought valiantly in some of the most difficult combat assignments anywhere in World War II.

After WWII, President Harry S. Truman desegregated the U.S. military. Beginning with the Korean war, minority soldiers, sailors, and airmen have fought alongside with all Americans. Recently, Congress passed a resolution honoring all of America's minority veterans. I am very pleased to have worked with both Representative SHEILA JACKSON-LEE and Senator EDWARD KENNEDY to ensure that the Pacific Islanders were represented in the resolution's text.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the level of dedication, sacrifice and honor, that minority veterans displayed while serving in our nation's military, we must in every instance ensure that any past instance of wholesale discrimination be addressed and corrected. In this light it may be prudent to have legislation that establishes a commission to ensure that minority veterans during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts were not denied awards for valor on account of the color of their skin or on the basis of their national origin. At the beginning of the 21st Century, we should conclusively and exhausitively rectify as many of these past racial injustices so that we can finally proceed forward in unity and in the spirit of brotherhood.

The noble sacrifices of our forbearers who fought valiantly for our freedom should never go unrecognized, nor be tarnished by societal ignorance. We, the benefactors of their sacrifice owe them at least that much.

THE REPUBLICAN PRESCRIPTION DRUG PROPOSAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, the last couple of weeks have produced some of the most spectacular propaganda we have seen here in some time. It relates to the Republicans Medicare prescription drug proposal. First PHRMA, the drug industry and prescription drug manufacturers' lobbying group, launched an advertising campaign in the newspaper Roll Call and other papers claiming that a plan like the Republican proposal could cut prices by 30 to 39 percent.

By expressing their exuberant support for this plan and its alleged results, the drug industry as much as said it can comfortably weather price cuts in the 30 to 39 percent price range. If that is the case, the drug industry should do us all a favor and simply make the cuts in price. It is a lot easier than requiring seniors to go into a prescription drug coverage market that does not exist to purchase a stand-alone product that cannot stand alone.
The second wave of rhetoric came yesterday when Chairman Thomas announced the GOP prescription drug plan which purports to offer individual prescription drug coverage saying it would cut prices twice as much as the Democrats’ Medicare-based plan. If only it were true. The Congressional Budget Office said the Republican plan may cut costs by 25 percent, not through lower prices but by restricting access to medically necessary drugs.

It is an important division. I will say it again. The Republican plan saves money not by miraculously convincing drug companies to lower their prices but instead by limiting access for seniors to medically necessary prescription drugs. It cuts costs by decreasing the value of the prescription drug benefit. The insurers win, the drug companies win, the government wins but senior citizens lose.

The Republican plan gives insurance companies carte blanche to do what they are doing today, that is, put price tags on treatment decisions and deny coverage for medically necessary treatment. Sound familiar? The President’s plan is explicit in requiring coverage, on the other hand, for any medically necessary drug prescribed by a doctor, which makes sense given it is the doctor, not the insurer, who should be and is making medical decisions and who is actually treating the patient.

The Republican plan guarantees nothing other than assistance for low income seniors. Prescription drugs, however, are not just a low income problem. Seniors who thought they were financially secure are watching their savings go straight into the pockets of drug makers. Some of my colleagues are trying to tell seniors that there is an alternative to reliance on affordable private prescription drug insurance plans available to them. Based on what? Certainly not history. Even the insurance industry is balking at the idea. It says something that insurers do not sell prescriptively drug coverage on a stand-alone basis today, even to young and to healthy individuals. That is because it does not make sense.

Medicare is reliable. Medicare is a large enough insurance program to accommodate the risks associated with prescription drug coverage. Individual stand-alone prescription drug policies are not.

Some in this body are actually trying to convince seniors who stand firmly behind Medicare that expanding the current benefit package is less efficient, more onerous, than manufacturing a new bureaucracy, as the Republican plan does, and conjuring up a new purchasing pool that market knows the individual health insurance market is not even a model for Medicare prescription drug coverage. The insurers win, the government wins by offering private insurance now. I do not want to forsake volume discounts and economies of scale by segmenting the largest purchasing pool in this country, and then waste trust fund dollars on insurance company margins, on insurance company market expenses, on insurance company executive salaries.

I do not think the individual health insurance market is a reasonable model for Medicare prescription drug benefits. In fact, as anyone who has had to purchase or sale coverage in that market knows the individual health insurance market is not even a good model for individual health insurance. It is the poster child for selection problems, for rate spirals and for insurance scams.

The very fact that the drug industry backs Citizens for a Better Medicare supports the private plan approach is a giant strike against it. The drug industry and their puppet organization clearly feel that undercutting seniors’ collective purchasing power, relegating seniors to private stand-alone prescription drug plans, is the key, underscore this, is the key to preserving discriminatory monopolistically set outrageously high prices.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that Members of this Congress read the fine print when we decry these Medicare prescription drug bills.

RESOLUTION OF KASHMIR ISSUE MUST INCLUDE THE KASHMIRI PANDITS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, in recent years the United States and the world community have been forced to confront the need for a resolution of the conflict in Kashmir. This conflict as the U.S. National Advisory Council on South Asia at the State Department earlier this month, Mr. Inderfurth acknowledged that the U.S. has not always mentioned the Pandits in its statements on the Kashmiri issue. Mr. Speaker, India’s Prime Minister Vajpayee has indicated that his government would be willing to meet with Kashmiri groups to address their concerns. But the Prime Minister has emphasized the need for the United States to urge the Indian government to take action.

Mr. Speaker, there is overwhelming evidence of Pakistani support for the continued terrorist campaign in Jammu and Kashmir. Indeed, Pakistani involvement and terrorist activities in Kashmir have been acknowledged by our State Department and a Congressionally appointed advisory panel has recommended that Pakistan be designated as the government that is not fully cooperating.

The Pakistani government itself has at least tacitly acknowledged, under heavy international pressure, that it must take action to curb the network of militants that has taken root on its soil. The one aspect of this tragedy that is frequently overlooked is the plight of the Hindu community of this region, the Kashmiri Pandits. As I have known to the Kashmiri American community, and hearing about the situation facing the Pandits, I have been increasingly outraged not only at the terrible abuses they have suffered but at the seeming indifference of the world community. At the same time, I