

Mr. REGULA. I yield to the gentleman from Wisconsin.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for yielding. I certainly agree with the gentleman's comments. I have great respect and affection for the gentleman from Texas. I know that he believes what he believes deeply, and I respect that. But I just would have to say that I wish we were at the stage in this country in terms of our recognition of mental illness. I wish we were at the stage in this country where we could provide every child with the opportunity to be screened, so that we can catch ahead of time developing problems and help families who otherwise have nowhere to turn.

I join with the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. REGULA) in opposition to the amendment.

Mr. REGULA. Mr. Chairman, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY), a member of our subcommittee.

Mr. KENNEDY of Rhode Island. Mr. Chairman, I think we have before us a choice between science and stigma. Stigma is the biggest barrier to us making sure millions of Americans gain access to what is fundamentally a physical illness. You do not need to take my word for it. You have every Nobel Laureate, the Surgeon Generals of the United States, all saying this is a physiologically, biologically based illness. So the notion that we are going to shut kids out from being screened so that we can intervene and make a difference in their lives, I do not understand.

I would add one more thing: our colleagues have learned the hard way. Three of our colleagues have lost their children in the last couple of years alone as a result of suicide. We voted on one of those bills on suicide prevention on Senator SMITH's son, who died a year ago yesterday as a result of suicide. We know of many others whose tragedies we do not want to go into.

But to think that suicide and mental illness are not scientifically based is to look back and think we are still living in the Stone Age.

Mr. REGULA. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. PAUL).

The question was taken; and the Chairman pro tempore announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. PAUL) will be postponed.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. BROWN OF OHIO

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment offered by Mr. BROWN of Ohio: At the end of the bill (before the short title), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used for administrative costs for the collection of monthly premiums under part B of the Medicare program for months in a year at monthly premium rates that exceed the monthly premium rates for months in the previous year.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

Mr. REGULA. Mr. Chairman, I reserve a point of order against this amendment.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The gentleman from Ohio reserves a point of order.

The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes on his amendment.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 3 minutes.

Mr. Chairman, last week, the Bush administration on Friday afternoon when no one was paying attention, right after he made a speech at the convention assuring seniors that Medicare would be strong and prosper, and right as Labor Day weekend began and no one was paying attention, the President announced a dramatic increase, a historically high increase in Medicare part B premiums paid by seniors and the disabled, a 17 percent increase, the single biggest premium hike in Medicare history.

Most seniors rely on the Social Security cost-of-living adjustments, COLAs, to offset Medicare premium increases. Though the administration has not published it yet, the Social Security COLA will be about 3 percent, making the Medicare increase almost six times what the COLA increase for Social Security will be.

Usually they are announced at the same time. This year, because of the election, presumably, the President thought he could sort of quietly do this right before Labor Day. He did not really want to announce them at the same time, presumably because the premium increase for Medicare was five to six times what the COLA increase would be.

Why are those premiums rising so dramatically? The Bush administration spokesman says it is because seniors are going to receive enhanced benefits. He did not acknowledge that the premium increase will help cover enhanced benefits for HMOs, \$12 billion worth.

So we have a \$130 increase for seniors' premiums, and we have \$12 billion more going into HMO pockets. HMO profits already are soaring; they increased 50 percent last year. Yet the Bush administration is tapping the Medicare trust fund and making seniors pay more out of pocket to finance a \$12 billion HMO slush fund. That is just the beginning. The total HMO payment changes in last year's law will cost taxpayers \$46 billion.

So even as it is emptying the Medicare trust fund, the Bush administration has the audacity to ask the American seniors to pay more. The change would require each of 40 million senior and disabled Americans to pay \$139 more next year for Medicare coverage. My amendment would stop the premium increase.

Unfortunately, my friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. REGULA), is using his discretion to object to the amendment on procedural grounds. I urge my friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. REGULA), to reconsider because we need to look at this bigger picture: how much money are we paying the insurance companies; how much are we telling seniors they have to reach into their pockets.

There is no justification for pouring billions into the pockets of already very profitable HMOs and asking seniors on fixed incomes to absorb a 17 percent increase just to appease a President bent on privatizing Medicare.

Asking seniors to finance the President's privatization agenda is not just unjustifiable; it is, frankly, shameful. If this amendment does not pass, seniors will see their premiums rise sharply while HMOs take billions more in so-called bonus payments.

The chairman can and should permit a vote on this amendment so we can begin to restore the trust of seniors and the fiscal integrity of Medicare.

Mr. REGULA. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I would point out that the gentleman that just spoke is a member of the authorizing committee with jurisdiction, and, therefore, this ought to be handled there.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the amendment offered by Mr. BROWN, my good friend and the ranking member of the Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee.

Last week the Bush administration announced a 17-percent increase in premiums for Medicare Part B benefits. This is the highest increase in Medicare's long history.

In fact, since the Bush administration came to town, Medicare premiums have increased twice as much as they did during all 8 years of the Clinton administration combined.

On every account, it is wrong for our seniors on fixed incomes to face double digit increases in their Medicare premiums.

But to make matters worse, our seniors are left footing the bill as a result of this administration's failed health care policies.

If this administration wants to increase access to health care, it should ensure that Medicare—as a safety net program—is truly affordable to America's senior citizens.

Instead, this administration is charging our seniors an extra \$5.5 billion next year, all the while diverting \$12 billion from the Medicare Trust Fund to help HMOs lure Medicare beneficiaries away from traditional Medicare.

Instead of siphoning money from the Medicare Trust Fund to the HMOs' pockets, the administration should focus on the fiscal realities facing the Medicare program.

By stopping the Medicare Part B premium increase, the Brown amendment will force them to do just that.