

United States of America. Now we are going to have a chance for marriage penalty elimination. Talk about sensible tax relief for all taxpayers.

So let us not start the rhetoric of this new year and this new millennium with accusations of foot dragging and partisanship. I implore the other side of the aisle to be calm, to be rational, and to be deliberate as we debate the very important issues confronting the American people. But if we are going to start with these types of one minute accusations, innuendo and character assassination, then I think the year will start off just as it ended last year, with acrimony and bitterness.

Let us start for the American people a better way on this floor by proving we can legislate and not sit here and constantly belittle the other side of the aisle.

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GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT REAL HMO REFORM

(Mr. GREEN of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I follow my colleague from Florida in saying that I agree that we should work together. In fact, last year this House passed and worked very hard on a bipartisan Norwood-Dingell bill, on managed care reform, but we have not seen any action in months.

We should stop the delay in managed care reform. We do not need gimmicks or watered down proposals that wind up doing nothing for patients.

In my home State of Texas, we passed these protections in 1997 included in the Norwood-Dingell bill, and there have been no massive premium increases or mass filing of lawsuits that are used against the bill. What Texas residents do have is elimination of gag clauses, open access to specialists, timely appeals processes, coverage for emergency care and holding the medical decision maker accountable.

We do not need any more delays. We need to act this year on a bipartisan basis and pass this bill. Hopefully, the conference committee will at last meet after all these months and pass real HMO reform, and today we will have that opportunity with the motion to instruct the conference committee. We need HMO reform now.

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CONTINUING THE RECORD U.S. ECONOMIC EXPANSION

(Mr. DREIER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, it is generally known that success has 1,000 fathers and defeat is an orphan. I would like to stand here and go one step further and compliment the President, for in his State of the Union he used the plural "we" in describing the fact that as we mark this February 1, 2000, it is

the anniversary of the longest economic expansion in our Nation's history. I am glad that he used the plural "we" in describing the fact that we have encouraged policies which have allowed the American people to bring about this economic expansion.

The real challenge is are we going to continue to do everything that we can to pursue those shared goals of maintaining a balanced budget, reducing the tax burden on working Americans, encouraging global trade, which is very, very key, making sure that we continue to reform welfare, and encourage work and productivity. I think we have a chance to do that.

HMO reform, I would say to my friend from Texas, is among those priorities. Congress adjourned before Thanksgiving. It is true that in the last couple of months we have not been working on it, but we are committed to moving ahead with that legislation just as quickly as we possibly can. I am glad that we are working together.

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ENSURING STRONGEST POSSIBLE PATIENT PROTECTIONS IN HMO REFORM

(Mr. WYNN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WYNN. Mr. Speaker, this year Congress can begin to address one of America's most pressing problems, reforming managed care. But HMO reform will be meaningless if we do not have a real Patients' Bill of Rights with teeth.

Last year we got the process started. We passed the bipartisan Dingell-Norwood bill, which has real teeth in it. What do we need to do now? First, we need to get started. There has been too much delay. Let us convene the conference committee. Second, we need to insist on the part of the House that we include the tough standards that give patients the right to sue, that require utilization review, that require independent appeals processes and that enable constituents to have an explanation in writing of why they were denied care.

When people are denied care by HMOs, they are harmed. When HMOs harm citizens, they have to be held accountable. The way to hold them accountable is to insist that our legislation includes the tough standards that the House passed last year. We can do it together. I certainly believe this ought to be one of our first orders of business as we begin the new year. I think if we do that we can make real progress for the American people.

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PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(Ms. DELAURO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, 4 months ago we passed a bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights. This is a monumental piece of legislation to reform HMOs. It provides basic rights of care for all Americans. It ensures that we are able to choose our own doctors; that we have access to the nearest emergency room; that we have a specialist when we need one, if we need one for our health; and, yes, indeed, to hold HMOs accountable for the medical decisions that they are making every single day.

Unfortunately, the GOP leadership continues to stall this legislation. I call upon the Republican leadership to stop their delay tactics, pass meaningful HMO reform. This is a bipartisan bill; we have broad support amongst the rank and file Members. We must act to give 160 million Americans access to health care in this country. We owe it to the American people to enact this legislation and to enact these reforms now.

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PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(Ms. SCHAKOWSKY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, now is the time for a real Patients' Bill of Rights; and today is the day that we should instruct the conferees to move quickly to pass a strong bill.

I have a letter from constituents.

Dear Representative Schakowsky: We beg you to please do everything you possibly can to support a Patients' Bill of Rights for those of us who find ourselves in the merry-go-round of dealing with HMOs and reluctant insurance company benefit providers. It has gotten to the point of being ridiculous when patients are subjected to mental torture by these big companies.

This certainly cannot be what our Founding Fathers had in mind. Ultimately, we have only one means of relief, the United States Congress. I understand the big providers have lobbyists, with deep pockets, fighting any legislation that would force them to be more fair and of understanding their responsibilities to their customers, but this cannot be allowed to interfere with what we all know to be basically right and wrong. This is what the average American cannot understand. Why cannot Congress just do what is right for the people whose well-being has been entrusted to them?

It has been entrusted to us. This is the day that we can act to say move quickly, move now.

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PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(Mr. GEJDENSON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GEJDENSON. Mr. Speaker, it is time for the conferees to move forward with a patients' bill of rights. The leadership of this Chamber, which has

blocked the legislation for years now, has to recognize that the American people are rightly demanding that their elected leaders give them a fair chance at getting decent health care.

There are 47-some million Americans without health care. That is a tragedy and an embarrassment for this great Nation, but the fact the people who pay their premiums and expect to get care when they are ill, or their loved ones are in danger, end up fighting the bureaucracy of these large corporations with their hands tied behind them and virtually no rights, which is an outrage.

This House and the Senate need to come together and pass a real bill that gives citizens the right to protect themselves in these medical emergencies.

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PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(Mr. ROMERO-BARCELO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELO. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning with a hopeful heart. We return to Congress at the dawn of the millennium, and we face many challenges and opportunities. I wish to remind our colleagues that during the last session, the House approved legislation that greatly impacts Americans and assures their access to health care, but today, 4 months after the Patients' Bill of Rights was approved, we are still waiting for action.

We cannot allow any more delays that place the health of Americans at risk. Millions of American families suffer from managed care decisions made by HMO bureaucrats that are based on profits and not medical need. We must return medical decisions back to where they belong, to doctors and patients.

I urge conferees to produce a strong bill that will help families and give patients the right to make health and life decisions together with their doctors and not subject to the decisions of insurance bureaucrats.

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WELCOME BACK TO OUR GREAT CITY

(Ms. NORTON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor to welcome back Members. Welcome back to the city that is still on the rise, about to report another surplus. Welcome back to the city that has been substantially helped by this Congress. Welcome back to a city whose improvements could be seen as one comes to the House this morning because the streets were, of course, cleared. The city now has the funds and the wherewithal to act like a city and do what cities do well.

I am very pleased that the Congress passed my \$5,000 home-buyer credit because that has helped us to get more

people in this city. We still need a couple hundred thousand more. And I am going to be coming to talk about that with bills this term, but I want to say for the people who live in this city that we are very pleased that Congress is back.

I want Members to know that if they have a problem, and inevitably even with a government in good working order there will be problems, I hope they will come to their Congresswoman while they are away from their districts, because that turns out to be me. I will be sending a letter to Members about how to do that and how they can maneuver their way through problems with the District government. Again, welcome home.

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COMMUNICATION FROM RICHARD A. GEPHARDT, DEMOCRATIC LEADER

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD) laid before the House the following communication from RICHARD A. GEPHARDT, Democratic Leader:

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
OFFICE OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEADER,
Washington, DC, February 1, 2000.

Hon. J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to Section 602(b) of the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000 (Public Law 106-120), I hereby appoint the following member to the National Commission for the Review of the National Reconnaissance Office:

Mr. Dicks, WA.

Yours very truly,

RICHARD A. GEPHARDT.

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ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair announces that he will postpone further proceedings today on each motion to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

Any recorded votes on postponed questions will be taken up later.

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HONORING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 409) honoring the contributions of Catholic schools.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 409

Whereas America's Catholic schools are internationally acclaimed for their academic excellence, but provide students more than a superior scholastic education;

Whereas Catholic schools ensure a broad, values-added education emphasizing the life-long development of moral, intellectual, physical, and social values in America's young people;

Whereas the total Catholic school student enrollment for the 1998-1999 academic year was 2,646,844, the total number of Catholic schools is 8,217, and the student-teacher ratio is less than 17 to 1;

Whereas Catholic schools provide more than \$17,200,000,000 a year in savings to the Nation based on the average public school per pupil cost;

Whereas Catholic schools teach a diverse group of students and over 25 percent of school children enrolled in Catholic schools are minorities;

Whereas the graduation rate of Catholic school students is 95 percent, only 3 percent of Catholic high school students drop out of school, and 83 percent of Catholic high school graduates go on to college;

Whereas Catholic schools produce students strongly dedicated to their faith, values, families, and communities by providing an intellectually stimulating environment rich in spiritual, character, and moral development; and

Whereas in the 1972 pastoral message concerning Catholic education, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops stated, "Education is one of the most important ways by which the Church fulfills its commitment to the dignity of the person and building of community. Community is central to education ministry, both as a necessary condition and an ardently desired goal. The educational efforts of the Church, therefore, must be directed to forming persons-in-community; for the education of the individual Christian is important not only to his solitary destiny, but also the destinies of the many communities in which he lives": Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) supports the goals of Catholic Schools Week, an event sponsored by the National Catholic Educational Association and the United States Catholic Conference and established to recognize the vital contributions of America's thousands of Catholic elementary and secondary schools; and

(2) congratulates Catholic schools, students, parents, and teachers across the Nation for their ongoing contributions to education, and for the key role they play in promoting and ensuring a brighter, stronger future for this Nation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. SCHAFFER) and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KILDEE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. SCHAFFER).

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, America's Catholic schools are internationally acclaimed for their academic excellence. They also provide students more than a superior scholastic education. Catholic schools ensure a broad values-added education, emphasizing the life-long development of moral, intellectual, fiscal, and social values in America's young people. The total Catholic school student enrollment for 1998 and 1999 was 2,646,844. The total number of Catholic schools is 8,217, and the student/teacher ratio in those institutions is less than 17-to-1.

Catholic schools provide more than \$17 billion a year in savings to the Nation based on the average school per pupil cost.

Catholic schools teach a diverse group of students and over 25 percent of school children enrolled in Catholic schools are minority students. The graduation rate of Catholic schools is