

2912 will correct an injustice by Medicare to prevent coverage for the venipuncture service that is needed.

□ 1530

So, Mr. Speaker, let me again thank the veterans of the Vietnam War and thank the families who gave through their loved ones the ultimate sacrifice. Let us never forget.

And then as we proceed into this legislative agenda year, let us not forget those who need the patient bill of rights who now live with us today in America. Let us assure them of good health care and the rights of physicians and patients to make the decisions about life and death, not about good health care.

And, as well, I ask my colleagues to support H.R. 2912 to correct the injustice of eliminating the venipuncture visitation by home care agencies. Let us support the Venipuncture Fairness Act of 1997.

Mr. Speaker, I submit the following for the RECORD:

Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to urge this Congress to remedy a wrong we perpetrated upon America's home-bound seniors and disabled people when we passed one of the Medicare provisions in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. As of February 5, 1998—last Thursday—home venipuncture services for individuals who do not receive any other skilled home health services are no longer covered by Medicare. H.R. 2912, the Medicare Venipuncture Fairness Act of 1997, would reinstate Medicare coverage for this vital medical service.

Venipuncture is simply the drawing of blood. Thousands of home-bound individuals rely on this service to ensure that their doctors are able to monitor their medication levels, particularly with the most complicated drugs such as heart medications, blood thinners, and insulin. Section 4615 of the Balanced Budget Act removed venipuncture from the list of prescribed services that qualify a Medicare beneficiary for other home health services. Therefore, unless a patient has been prescribed another skilled service, he or she will no longer be reimbursed for the cost of having blood drawn at home.

There are several problems with this new approach. The reason most of these patients require their blood to be drawn at home is that they are unable to travel to their doctors' offices, either because they are located in a rural area, or because their health is such that leaving home is not feasible or safe. For those patients that are able to leave home, public transportation is often unavailable, and ambulance services to and from the doctor's office may cost up to \$250 a trip. For those patients who cannot leave home, their only option may be placement in a nursing home. We are all acutely and unfortunately aware of the exorbitant cost of those facilities.

In addition, this policy change may in fact be unnecessarily increasing the amount spent on skilled home health services. Essentially, we are forcing doctors to prescribe additional, costly services in order to ensure that their patients' medication levels are appropriately adjusted and safe.

I voted for the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. I believe it is important to combat waste

and fraud in the Medicare system. However, I have been presented with absolutely no evidence to support the contention that home venipuncture services were a source of either waste or fraud. There are no estimates as to either how much venipuncture services were costing the system before the Balanced Budget Act, or how much this dangerous change will save the Medicare system. In fact, the removal of coverage for home venipuncture may in fact end up increasing overall health costs by forcing seniors and disabled citizens into nursing homes when they otherwise could have stayed at home.

I have, therefore, not heard anything to convince me that there was abuse of home venipuncture services, such that the change made by section 4615 was warranted. I have, however, heard much to convince me that this change is endangering the health and well-being of senior citizens and disabled people throughout this country. I have heard from people in my district who do not know how they are going to provide their elderly relatives' doctors with blood samples now that this policy change has been instituted. I have heard from one family that, faced with the discontinuation of Medicare reimbursement for venipuncture, sought to have someone continue to come to their home to draw their elderly mother's blood. However, they were unable to find any agency or organization that could provide this vital service, even if they scraped together the funds to pay for the service privately.

What am I to tell these families, who are making personal sacrifices by caring for their loved ones at home? How can I tell them that we appreciate their devotion but that somebody had a suspicion, not apparently supported by any statistics, that this was a good service to discontinue so we did? I will not tell them that, without also telling them that we are trying to remedy this terrible error.

I urge this Congress to support those Americans who need our help the most, our home-bound senior and disabled citizens, by supporting H.R. 2912, the Medicare Venipuncture Fairness Act of 1997. We must, as representatives of the American people, be willing to admit when we have made a mistake and remedy it as soon as we possibly can.

#### SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PITTS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, it has been 2 years since we passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996. When we passed that act, we were all very encouraged that our communities would enjoy local telephone service that had not been available in the past at a competitive rate. Those of us from rural communities were particularly hopeful about the prospect of such service.

Unfortunately, I have yet to see one of those companies that lobbied us in any of the counties I represent in rural North Carolina. Instead, they have set up shops in Charlotte and in the Research Triangle serving big business and large corporations. That is not

what Congress intended. So it may be time to encourage regulators to help bring down the barriers to competition and all markets, including rural communities. At the same time, I want to invite companies interested in offering local services at affordable rates to come on down to eastern North Carolina and offer my constituents a choice. We are waiting for them.

Mr. Speaker, another issue I just want to raise is the issue indeed of the Afro-American farmer. We are now talking about Afro-American History Month, and this is the time not only to cite progress and to cite renewed hope for the future, but also to cite some of the opportunities we have to make corrections.

The black farmers known in North Carolina and known throughout the South have been suffering for many reasons. But one of the reasons they have been suffering is not to have access to capital, not to have opportunities to the resources of USDA in an nondiscriminatory manner. This issue has been highlighted recently because a number of farmers had really had foreclosures on their homes and a number of them have been in a struggle with their government to make sure they treat them fairly for the last 20 or 25 years. And yet, our government has not found an opportunity not only to address the agreed and admitted discrimination but not to make them whole, not to make sure that they get their land back, which was taken indiscriminately and they should make sure that the remedy they fashion and offer to black farmers are not empty gestures where there is no opportunity to make them whole where they can farm again and have a quality of life, which indeed all Americans want.

So I want to urge my colleagues, as they reflect with me on Black History Month, they also reflect on the small black farmer, which has been an intimate part of our struggle and our development in feeding our country. They simply want to farm. They simply want to have the opportunity as any other farmer to have the resources, have the technical assistance, to have the programs offered to other farmers offered to them.

There may come a time when this Congress has to step in and make those corrections to make sure our country lives up to the code and make sure that all farmers, all Americans, have the same equal right access to capital, access to American programs, and to make sure that our country honors, honors, their commitment, when they make a commitment they will not discriminate, and if they are found to be discriminatory, there will be a remedy that will be a remedy fashioned according to the damage done to them.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to consider that as they reflect.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. JONES addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. TIAHRT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TIAHRT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### SALUTE TO LITHUANIAN AMERICANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Fawell) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FAWELL. Mr. Speaker, I simply want to take this occasion, along with my colleague from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS), to extend my best wishes to Lithuanian Americans all across this land. And most especially, I would extend those warm regards to the Lithuanian Americans who are in the 13th Congressional District back in Illinois, a district that I have had the honor of representing here in Congress for 13, going on 14 years. I would also especially like to mention the fact that a constituent of mine by the name of Valdas Adamkus, Val Adamkus as we have known him, from Hinsdale, Illinois, and, believe it or not, has been elected the President of Lithuania.

Val Adamkus is quite a tremendous person. He came from Lithuania. He is still a Lithuanian citizen, obviously holding dual citizenship between this country and also in Lithuania. He was a part of the fighting force that resisted the Soviet invasion.

Actually, before the Nazis came in World War II, the Soviet Union had taken over and taken away the liberty of the Lithuanian people which they had gained in 1920. But after the Soviet Union came in after World War II, Val Adamkus came to this country, got a degree at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, went on to quite an able career. And just recently, after retiring from a distinguished career with the Federal EPA, at the age of 71, he decided that he might want to go into politics and traveled back to his homeland in Lithuania, gradually became involved in politics, and now will be sworn in as President of Lithuania on February 26.

But over the years of my tenure in Congress, I have often attended Lithuanian Independence Days at the World Lithuanian Center in Lemont, Illinois. I have learned to have a deep and abiding respect for the Lithuanian Americans and their deep, deep desire, especially when I first was in Congress, for freedom and democracy to come back to Lithuania. I felt then that it was perhaps decades away.

And every year I was invited to the Lithuanian World Center, where I came to have so many dear friends in the Lithuanian community. As a result I grew to recognize what their culture

was, danced a few of their polkas, got to know these people and their deep desire to finally once again see the birth of freedom in Lithuania. And lo and behold, perestroika finally came and ultimately, in February of 1991, I recall there was a declaration of independence by the Lithuanian people. And at that particular February gathering, in regard to Lithuanian Independence Day, we had an awful lot of people in my district who shed in tears of joy because freedom had finally come to their native land. There have been ups and downs since then. And truly a remarkable thing has occurred, when an American who has dual citizenship, as I have indicated, has been elected the President of Lithuania.

So my very, very best regards to Val Adamkus and his wife Alma and to the Lithuanian people in my district. They have a great heritage. And we look forward to a rebirth of freedom and all the knowledge of the American democratic ways which Val Adamkus has, being brought to the Presidency of Lithuania.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. METCALF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. METCALF addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 5 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 3 o'clock and 40 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until approximately 5 p.m.

□ 1705

#### AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PITTS) at 5 o'clock and 5 minutes p.m.

#### SUPPORTING THE PRESIDENT ON IRAQI POLICY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGRICH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GINGRICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise and I note the presence of my colleague, the distinguished minority leader, who also will speak this afternoon, because both of us I think want to make the point that the leadership of this Congress is very committed to supporting the President of the United States and in supporting, frankly, all of the people around the planet who are concerned about Saddam Hussein and the danger of bacteriological and chemical weapons of terror.

The fact is that the United States has no argument with the people of Iraq. The United States has no wish to

harm the people of Iraq; the United States wishes that we could reach an agreement which would allow the sanctions to be limited, the people to have prosperity, and Iraq to live in peace with its neighbors.

But the current dictator, Saddam Hussein, has a track record unlike any other leader in the world. He has used chemical weapons against his neighbors. He has used chemical weapons against his own people. He shot his own son-in-law when he returned from defecting. He is clearly a brutal and dangerous dictator who, despite having lost a war against the coalition, despite having subjected his own people to 7 years of economic sanctions, despite the United Nations inspectors in this country, despite the world media watching him, despite pressure diplomatically from virtually every country in the world, has persisted in trying to build and retain chemical and bacteriological weapons of mass destruction. These are particularly frightening because they are potentially usable by terrorists and have for their size and weight a remarkable capacity to kill human beings.

A future terrorist act in which bacteriological or chemical weapons could be used as in the World Trade Center, in a subway, or any other site where there are a lot of people could produce a horrifying casualty rate. The United States has made it clear that we will not accept biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction in the hands of someone with a proven record of using them.

We are working with the United Nations. We are working with our allies. It is our hope that our allies will help us bring Saddam Hussein to recognize that he should not proceed, that he should allow unlimited United Nations inspections so the world can rest assured that he is not building biological and chemical weapons.

If he refuses, at some point, the President has made clear the United States will use whatever level of force is necessary in order to eliminate the sites that we believe currently are being used to build biological and chemical weapons. If after that there is still a problem, I think the United States will have to continue to explore the options of making sure that Saddam Hussein, under no circumstance, is able to build and distribute biological and chemical weapons.

But no one in Iraq should be confused. Just as we were in 1991, the United States is committed. The United States will, in fact, follow through on its commitments. I urge Saddam Hussein to save the people of Iraq from violence. I urge him to take a step towards ultimately some day lifting the sanctions. I urge him to comply with United Nations resolutions. And I want him to know that, on behalf of the overwhelming majority of Republicans who are deeply committed to a safer world for our children and