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No. 79

House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. MILLER of Florida).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
June 7, 1999.

I hereby appoint the Honorable DAN MILLER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate had passed with an amendment in which the concurrence of the House is requested, a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 435. An act to make miscellaneous and technical changes to various trade laws, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the Senate had passed bills of the following titles, in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 704. An act to amend title 18, United States Code, to combat the overutilization of prison health care services and control rising prisoner health care costs.

S. 1059. An act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2000 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe personnel strengths for such fiscal year for the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.

S. 1060. An act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2000 for military activities of the Department of Defense, to prescribe personnel strengths for such fiscal year for the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.

S. 1061. An act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2000 for military construction, and for other purposes.

S. 1062. An act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2000 for defense activities of

the Department of Energy, and for other purposes.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes, and each Member other than the majority or the minority leaders, or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

GUN SAFETY LEGISLATION

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, at home this last week, and in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this weekend, I heard from people from all across the country who want the Federal Government to be a better partner in promoting livable communities so that our families can be safe, economically secure and healthy. Reducing the threat of gun violence is at the core of what will make communities more livable, yet the apologists for gun violence have been hard at work during our recess seeking to derail the modest steps that would make our children safer from guns. People of conscience should push back.

During my 3 years in Congress, there have been nine multiple shooting deaths on our school campuses involving children shooting other children and their teachers. The epidemic of gun violence amongst our youth has tragic consequences in terms of loss of life, physical safety and the health of our communities. Yet for all the media attention given to Jonesboro, Springfield and the Littleton massacres, tragedies like this occur daily, with over 12 chil-

dren being killed in a typical 24-hour period. The only difference is that unlike Littleton or Springfield, the pain is scattered from town to town in isolated bursts. Even though these tragedies occur without massive media attention, they nonetheless produce pain every bit as real and lasting in communities across the country.

This Sunday, in Milwaukee, the papers were full of a tragic example of a young man shooting his best friend. While I was reading that on the plane, a 3-year-old in Baltimore shot himself in the head and he lies in the hospital now, critically wounded.

These numbers are staggering and uniquely American. Each year more than 5,000 children are killed by firearms. By contrast, only 15 people in the entire Nation of Japan were murdered with handguns last year. At the same time, the apologists for gun violence contend that there are no useful government initiatives to reduce this violence other than simply stricter enforcement of the laws, more prison time for criminals and wider use of firearms. I strongly disagree.

We in the House of Representatives should vote and pass the three gun safety elements in the Senate legislation, which would require safety locks on all new handguns, background checks for sales at gun shows and a ban on the sale of ammunition magazines of more than 10 rounds. These are minor steps, but meaningful if they serve as a starting point for a more deliberate and comprehensive approach to ending gun violence.

An important bill which I was pleased to cosponsor with the gentleman from New York (Mrs. MCCARTHY) includes several measures designed to keep guns out of kids' hands. H.R. 1342 is being supported by a growing number of people of conscience on both sides of the aisle. It should be the vehicle that deals comprehensively with these concerns.

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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Another important approach is legislation that I just introduced today that takes a page from our successful efforts at reducing death and injury on our highways. Thirty years ago Congress started simple, common-sense legislation that has cut the death rate on our highways in half. We can do the same with handguns.

My legislation would, for instance, assure that the Consumer Product Safety Commission devotes as much time to regulating real guns as it does to toy guns. It would require new guns to have an indicator to show it is loaded. It would extend the Brady law to deny people with a history of violent and reckless behavior the ability to purchase and own firearms, and it would require the Federal Government to establish a date in the near future when all the guns that we purchase for our Federal employees are personalized so that those guns cannot be used against them or stolen.

The Speaker of the House has argued against extraneous riders dealing with gun safety laws. I find this ironic when we just passed an absolute abomination of a spending bill supposedly to finance our troops in Kosovo and other emergencies, but included everything from defining reindeer as livestock to relaxing environmental regulations on mining. Why is it that when it comes to the special interests we are willing to make exceptions, but not when it comes to our children? They should be at least as important as well-connected lobbyists.

It is time to pass comprehensive legislation to protect our children, our families and our communities from senseless gun violence, and we ought to do it now.

PRICE CONTROLS DO NOT WORK

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

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about prescription drugs. There has been a lot of talk lately about how expensive they are and how many people who need them cannot afford them. I understand these concerns, but like my colleagues, while I want to make sure that our constituents have greater access to prescription drugs, I am concerned about the debate that is evolving about prescription drugs here in the House.

Fixing drug prices could very well mean reducing discounts to the veterans and other Federal purchasers. In fact, a GAO study concluded that expanding access to the reduced prices could lead in fact to higher prices. This is what price controls do. The larger the market, the greater the economic incentive to raise prices to limit the impact of giving lower prices to more purchasers. That makes sense.

Ultimately that move, Mr. Speaker, could put veterans' access to health

care at risk. While this type of legislation, these legislative initiatives that are coming here, could put the veterans' health care at risk, there is no guarantee that it will significantly reduce the cost of medicine for Medicare beneficiaries.

Therefore, I believe we need to figure out how to expand insurance coverage for drugs, not attempt to give the government the ability to fix prices. Price controls never work. All they do is reduce supply or eliminate discounts that are available to some. We have all seen this idea before. Their great idea, the people advocating price controls for prescription drugs, is it will expand the government discount for everyone, give everybody a chance for lower prices, and everyone will have access for cheap drugs. That is the basic appeal. But, my colleagues, that is socialism. Let us not forget who is getting the benefit of these discounts, and of course, we could put others at risk who are now getting them.

Last year there was a misguided attempt to expand the Federal supply discounts to State and local governments also. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimated that by expanding these discounts so broadly that makers of drugs would be forced to respond by reducing or eliminating the discounts they give to the Veterans Administration. The VA estimated this proposal would cost them as much as \$250 million, or it would equal the cost of providing care to 50,000 veterans. And just so that we all understand, Mr. Speaker, if the drug companies are no longer able to give large discounts to the veterans, it means those very discounts will not be available to Medicare beneficiaries.

I believe we should be doing everything we can to help Medicare beneficiaries improve access to the drugs they need, but not through price controls. One of the easiest things that could be done right away is for the administration to move forward on regulation to expand Medicare Plus Choice plans. Because of the way the current Medicare managed care plans are paid, many areas, including portions of my district, do not have managed care plans available to them.

By simply enacting the Medicare Plus Choice program as part of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 that we passed, Congress sought to expand Medicare beneficiaries' access to prescription drugs by allowing them to join HMOs that offer these benefits. Congress' goal in the Balanced Budget Act was to extend to Medicare beneficiaries the same range of choices that exist for all working Americans. Choosing between competing health care plans provides greater promise than price controls, giving them greater access. It is better than telling the pharmaceutical companies that they have to meet a price.

Mr. Speaker, the administration should no longer delay in expanding access to these plans. There was a bipar-

tisan commission that developed a proposal that is really worth more discussion. It said that we should figure out how Medicare beneficiaries can take advantage of the change in health care delivery benefitting every privately insured person, including Members of Congress. That is the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program. We have discount pharmaceutical drugs. Why not adopt a program like the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program, something that we all have, Mr. Speaker, and the President and the Senators?

So why are we talking about this? We should stop talking about socialized medicine and the age-old false hope of price controls that have never worked.

Medicare beneficiaries need more from their Members of Congress than false promises of cheap drugs through price controls. We need to help them gain access to affordable prescriptions through insurance coverage and the truly effective price competition of an active marketplace. We also need to make sure that whatever reform we pass does not hurt those to whom we owe a great debt: veterans. Veterans should not be put at risk to give someone in this body a political win.

Mr. Speaker, I am certain we can find an answer that will help our Nation's senior citizens while at the same time protecting our veterans.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 42 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PETRI) at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Reverend James David Ford, D.D., offered the following prayer:

With gratefulness and praise we begin a new week imploring Your mercy upon us, O God, and seeking Your blessings. We especially pray for those who have committed themselves to the work of ending hostilities in our world, and we pray for all those who seek to alleviate suffering or hunger or loneliness. For all those who are involved in bringing food to the hungry, shelter for the homeless, a comforting word to those who are alone, we offer these words of thanksgiving and appreciation.

Bless, O God, those good people who in our own communities or in the world are agents of reconciliation and messengers of peace. For them we offer our prayer. Amen.