



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 106th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 145

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1999

No. 28

House of Representatives

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

DESIGNATION OF THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
February 23, 1999.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CLIFF STEARNS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

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

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, except the majority leader, the minority leader or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ) for 5 minutes.

WHY ARE CITIZENS IN THE TERRITORIES DENIED WHAT ALL OTHER CITIZENS ARE GUARANTEED?

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand before you as we return from the district work session. The impeachment trial is officially behind us, and the Nation is ready for congressional action. The American people expect us all to work together in a spirit of cooperation and bipartisan so that we can renew national confidence for a strong and uni-

fied America. It is now time to set aside the differences that have divided us along party lines and work together for the good of the country.

Yesterday we commemorated George Washington's birthday, an everlasting model of leadership and achievement, 200 years ago, as our first President ably led the United States from revolution into democracy.

Today, there are many issues that claim congressional attention for immediate action, including specific improvements for Social Security, education, greater access to health care, employment, taxes, the environment and economic opportunity and prosperity.

Our Nation faces many challenges on the eve of the millennium, but inherent in those challenges are a great many opportunities. Our Nation has flourished during this decade and right now, as we face the new millennium, the most appropriate message we can provide to all Americans is to express our commitment to the fundamental values of our democracy.

As new initiatives to benefit American citizens, immigrants and the children of undocumented immigrants in the country are developed and implemented, I do not see the same concern for the 3.8 million United States citizens in Puerto Rico. The Americans in the island continue to be neglected and discriminated against by being barred from equitable participation in the most fundamental rights of citizenship, the right to vote and the right to representation, not to mention participation in the safety net programs that provide basic relief to the neediest in the Nation, the disadvantaged, the aged, the handicapped and the children.

It is distressing to behold that, by virtue of living in a territory, some American citizens do not have the same rights and benefits as all other Americans in the Nation. Why are citizens in the territories denied what all

other citizens are guaranteed? Are there two different kinds of citizenship in our Nation, the example of democracy?

What is even more discouraging is that not only the great expectations for future success and equal participation do not apply to Puerto Ricans in the islands but that residents in the island will continue to lag further and further behind as they are fenced out from the rest of the Nation.

Throughout my political life, I have fought to provide equality for the United States citizens in Puerto Rico and I wonder how our Nation can continue to maintain separate but equal policies similar to the discriminatory policies that were the force that brought about the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

I am compelled to provide a voice for the thousands of low income, disadvantaged, the handicapped, elderly and children who are deprived of the most basic safety net programs that all other Americans and immigrants can participate in the 50 States of the Union. It is terrible to consider that our Nation's commitment to equality in health does not extend to the American citizens in Puerto Rico or in Guam or in the Virgin Islands and thus deprives us of the necessary medical care that may prove the difference between life and death by virtue of the fact that we reside in a territory. Health discrimination is an abomination.

This includes Medicaid, for which Puerto Rico, contrary to the policy for all other States, receives a block grant capped this year at \$171.5 million. I am also talking about our exclusion from supplemental security income, the supplemental income that ensures blind, disadvantaged and handicapped individuals have income protection. I am also talking about Medicare and how reimbursement for providers has been set at a lower rate despite the fact that

□ 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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costs are comparable to the provision of services in many States.

Unfortunately, as the Nation benefits from the tremendous budget surplus, the Americans in the territory will also be excluded from many of the most significant policy initiatives presented this session.

The \$500 billion Social Security enhancement proposed by the Universal Savings Accounts, commonly referred to as the USA accounts, will not apply to the citizens in the island, even though we contribute to Social Security equally as all other citizens. What is more, money from our contributions to the Social Security funds will be used to manage and administer the program which will be denied to us.

But this initiative is just one of the many new proposals that will not apply to the nearly 4 million U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico. Many other proposals, ranging from welfare to work, to building new schools, to providing incentives to workers and even the empowerment zones and the new market initiatives that aim to simulate the economic, will bypass us in the next century. We will not have the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the economy nor participate in the tax credits that are being proposed.

Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to bring these matters to your attention and to the attention of all my colleagues in Congress, because our Nation must do something to ensure that the American citizens in Puerto Rico are equal Americans. How can our Nation stand as a model for the world when it maintains a policy of discrimination, a policy of economic and political apartheid?

For 100 years, we have stood shoulder to shoulder as we have defended freedom and democratic values wherever and whenever it has been needed in the world. As we enter the millennium, we should not be pushed behind our fellow citizens in the 50 States. It is a national shame that in our country American citizens must time and time again beg to be given equal access to the programs that will promote economic prosperity, health and well-being.

REGARDING A 2-YEAR FEDERAL BUDGET PROCESS

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

Mr. REGULA. Mr. Speaker, on the first day of the 106th Congress I introduced H.R. 232, the Biennial Budget Act of 1999. This is an issue that I have been working on for the past 10 years, and I think it is time that we enact this important reform.

My legislation, and I might add that the Speaker pro tempore this morning has also introduced a similar bill, along with others, establishes a 2-year budget and appropriations cycle in-

tended to reduce the repetitive annual budget votes. It would also improve the entire process by allowing more time for long-term planning and careful oversight of government spending.

The bill converts the annual budget, appropriations and authorization process into a 2-year cycle. The first session of Congress would be devoted to decisions on budget and appropriations issues. The President would start the process by submitting a 2-year budget, which would cover the 2 years of the biennium, and planning levels for 2 additional years.

Then Congress would adopt a 2-year budget resolution, a 2-year reconciliation bill, if necessary, and 2-year appropriations bills during the first session of a Congress. The second year could be used to consider multiyear authorization bills and to oversight of Federal programs. We do not do enough oversight now. We do not have time with an annual budget to really look into programs to see if they are working well.

The current budget process consumes more and more of Congress' time. In 1996, budget votes totaled about 70 percent of all votes. It does not leave time for many of the other responsibilities of the Congress; and, obviously, it leaves less time for systematic oversight.

Another problem is that we do not get the appropriations bills done on time. Only twice since 1974 have we completed action on all of the 13 appropriations bills on time. Whereas, with a 2-year cycle, we would have the opportunity to get this legislation completed and then go into the oversight program.

Now, another benefit would be that federal managers, who are managing the taxpayers' funds, would know for 2 years how much they have to operate a park or other federal programs, and they could plan more wisely and could spend the money more efficiently.

I believe that the benefits of moving to the 2-year budget cycle would be many, including reducing repetitive budget votes, allowing Congress to engage in long-term planning and management reforms for Federal programs, improving the systematic oversight of current government programs, and providing greater stability and predictability in Federal spending.

I would just urge all my colleagues to take a look at H.R. 232 and sponsor this bill or some of the others, such as that introduced by our Speaker pro tempore today. It is an idea whose time has come, I think, as we try to manage the resources of our people and of our Nation more efficiently.

IT IS NOT ABOUT SPRAWL BUT ABOUT HOW WE BUILD

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, yesterday there appeared an article in The New York Times entitled, "There's Plenty of Space for Suburbs to Keep Sprawling". This article, I feel, represents a wrong turn in the discussion about our communities and how to make them more livable. The facts are true but beside the point.

It is true that we have only increased the amount of developed land in this condition by two-tenths of a percent in recent years. It is true that we have a great deal of farmland. It is true that we are protecting more open space around the country. But I think it is important for us to take a deep breath, step back, and look at what those facts represent.

To suggest somehow that we do not have a problem in terms of development in this country because we have a large inventory of land is a lot like suggesting that just because the earth is 78 percent water we do not have problems of water supply and quality. The fact is for much of the world, and many places in the United States, we often have too much water or we do not have enough or it is too polluted or sometimes we have a combination of all three of those problems.

As it relates to the quantity of farmland, the fact is that we have generated this farmland in the past in ways that we are probably not likely to do in the future: filling in wetlands, irrigating the desert, destroying forest lands. Many of these practices today we now recognize are harmful. We no longer do it and, in fact, there is a very real question whether or not that is sustainable in the future, particularly given the lack of water supply in many parts of the country.

It is also true that while we have added to the inventory of publicly protected forests and park lands, that is simply a reaction to the fact that we have more and more of this space imperiled. The good Lord is not making more forests and open space. We are having increasing pressure on those areas that we have now, and so we have taken this extraordinary step of trying to buy and protect more and more of it. That is not adding to the inventory. That is trying to just simply hold on to what we have.

We need to look no further than the jewels of our national park system, the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Yellowstone, to see that we are severely under assault. Even in the Pacific Northwest, in my home area, the Mt. Hood National Forest and the Columbia River Gorge are subjected to problems of pollution, overcrowding, traffic congestion and development encroachment. It is an indication of the problems that we need to face in the future.

It is also suggested that government intervention has been part of the problem in the past, to which I say: Amen. But the question is, how are we going to proceed from this point? Even if sprawl were possible to sustain into the