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House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 17, 2009.

I hereby appoint the Honorable SHEILA JACKSON-LEE to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2009, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes and each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

THE BUDGET

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BOEHNER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BOEHNER. I welcome my colleagues to St. Patrick's Day and I hope everyone has a happy one.

Madam Speaker, we are 2 months into this Congress, and Washington has done nothing to ease the economic challenges facing middle class families and small businesses.

We've watched the administration approve another \$350 billion for more bailouts for the financial industry, and we've watched passage of a trillion-dollar "stimulus" bill, and then we've

watched the passage of a \$410 billion omnibus bill loaded with some 9,000 unscrutinized earmarks.

Soon we are going to debate the President's budget, a budget which spends too much, taxes too much, and borrows too much from our kids and our grandkids. This budget raises taxes on everyone, from middle class families to small businesses, to seniors and to schools. It even punishes anyone who would have the audacity to flip on a light switch thanks to a brand new \$646 billion energy tax. This means less money in the family budget and more jobs being shipped overseas.

The American people are looking for real solutions that will help create jobs, rebuild savings, and create more investment in our economy. And in spite of what some disingenuous political operatives are saying, Republicans are offering better solutions.

So far this year, we've presented clear, superior alternatives to Washington Democrats' flawed proposals. We've asked the administration for an exit strategy to get the government back out of the private sector and get taxpayers off the hook for more billions in handouts to the financial sector. Our whip, ERIC CANTOR, and I personally delivered to the President an economic recovery plan that would create twice as many jobs as the Democrats' plan at half the cost. And we fought for a spending freeze as the majority fought for their bloated \$410 billion omnibus spending bill.

Listen, the American people are fed up with what they're seeing here in Washington. Don't they deserve to keep more of what they earn as we try to get this economy back on track? Don't they deserve better solutions than the spending, taxing, and borrowing that they're seeing out of this Congress?

Republicans are offering better solutions, and we hope the majority will join us.

THE CONTINUED NEED FOR HEALTH REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LANGEVIN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. I would like to just take this opportunity to wish all of my colleagues and the American people, particularly my constituents, a happy St. Patrick's Day.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak on an issue that continues to be a top priority for American families and businesses, one that is fundamentally intertwined with the strength of our Nation's economy and the government's long-term fiscal sustainability. I'm speaking, of course, about the need for health care reform.

Health care costs in the United States are rising at an alarming rate. Yet despite the fact that we spend more per capita on health care than any other industrialized country, we produce some of the worst outcomes by a number of important health measures. Furthermore, the U.S. remains the only developed nation that does not guarantee health coverage as a right to its citizens.

Recent estimates indicate that over 45 million Americans lack health insurance, leaving one in six without access to proper medical care. Even more shocking is that over 80 percent of the uninsured come from working families. Health care costs are imposing an increasing burden on families and placing employers at a further competitive disadvantage in our global economy.

Now, as we seek to unfurl the complex economic challenges facing our country, it remains abundantly clear that our success will not only depend on our ability to stem housing foreclosures and create new jobs; it will also depend on our will to change a system of health care that is fundamentally flawed and under tremendous strain.

□ 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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According to Dr. Peter Orszag, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in his recent testimony before the Housing Budget Committee on which I sit, "the single most important step we could take to put this Nation back on a path to fiscal responsibility is to address rising health care costs." He further stated that "health care is the key to our fiscal future. We cannot afford inaction."

I could not agree more, Madam Speaker. But this is not just an economic or a fiscal imperative; it is also a moral one. For many years I have continually heard from Rhode Islanders who are struggling to pay their share of health care premiums, as well as from businesses that can no longer afford to operate under the existing system. Those constituents who are fortunate to have access to health insurance are struggling in the face of increasingly daunting costs, while many of them are afraid, of course, that they will lose the benefit altogether.

Now, this cannot simply continue any longer, and I am very pleased that within the last 2 months, this Congress and President Obama have already taken extraordinary steps to begin addressing these challenges by expanding coverage and investing in innovative technologies that will ensure better treatments and outcomes for the future.

On February 4 Congress passed and the President enacted a bill to provide health coverage to 11 million low-income children through SCHIP, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, which I was proud to support. Also included in the Recovery Act were a number of important measures to provide additional funding to State Medicaid programs, extend health benefits to the unemployed, and ensure proper investment into health information technology so that we can achieve higher quality care with greater efficiency.

As recently as last week, President Obama signed an executive order lifting the ban on Federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, an act, I believe, will fundamentally alter the course of science and medicine in the same manner as did the discovery of the first vaccine or X-rays or other significant medical discoveries.

We have made amazing strides in a short period of time, but there is obviously so much more work to be done. I believe it is incumbent upon us, as policymakers, to offer a new vision for health care in America, one that contains costs, improves quality, increases efficiency, promotes wellness, guarantees universal coverage, and encourages investment in treatments and cures for the 21st century.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with my colleagues in Congress, the President, health care providers, community advocates, business leaders, families, and patients across the country to find real solutions that permanently address the longstanding need to health reform in America.

HONK IF YOU'RE PAYING MY MORTGAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. McCLINTOCK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. McCLINTOCK. Madam Speaker, I have been asked to present more than 6,000 postcards that were generated by the Armstrong and Getty radio show to protest policies that can best be described by the new bumper sticker "Honk if You're Paying My Mortgage" or today's reprise "Honk if You're Paying AIG's Bonuses."

These postcards represent the first stirring of the public against some of the excesses that we are seeing out of this administration on the mortgage issue.

Rick Santelli of CNBC struck a nerve last month when he asked, "How many of you want to pay your neighbor's mortgage who has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills?" Jack Armstrong and Joe Getty, who host the popular radio talk show in Northern California, asked the same question of their listeners. And here's their response:

On each of these thousands of postcards is the story of a responsible family struggling to make ends meet in the worst recession in a generation, families who are meeting their obligations, who are staying current with their mortgages, even though many of them are upside down on their home values and owe more than their home is worth. And they're watching as this government says to borrowers who lied on their applications, who put no money down and accepted teaser rates, and who withdrew all of the equity of their home to pay for stuff, don't worry, we'll force your neighbor to pay your mortgage.

They're watching as this government says to lenders like AIG who knowingly made loans to people they knew couldn't afford them, who made millions creating the housing bubble, don't worry, we'll cover your million dollar bonuses with taxpayer money.

But the families who sent in these postcards keep making their payments, many eating into their savings, foregoing vacations, postponing retirements, turning down consumer purchases because they stand by their word. These are the families that turned down the opportunity to flip that house, to make that quick fortune, to cash in on their equity for a second home or a boat they couldn't afford. They are the 92 percent of borrowers who are making their mortgage payments, despite all of the incentives that this administration's offering them to stop. And these postcards are eloquent testimony to their resentment at being required to bail out the banks and the borrowers who created the housing bubble, who caused the credit collapse, and who now are being subsidized, bailed out, and lavished with multi-million dollar bonuses paid for with our tax money.

Joe Getty asked the question yesterday, "What has happened to the words 'sadder but wiser'? What has happened to that American tradition that you make your own decisions, good or bad, and then you live with those decisions?"

The President tells us that if your neighbor's home is on fire, you don't quibble over who pays for the water. And that's true. But as Jack Armstrong pointed out, if my neighbor burns down his house by shooting off Roman candles in his living room, I'll be darned if I'm going to pay for him to rebuild it.

Armstrong and Getty, Rick Santelli, and others are speaking for the vast silent majority of Americans who pay their bills, who honor their commitments, and who make this country run.

The President recently said that we are all to blame. Well, no, we not all to blame. Those families who passed up the get-rich-quick real estate seminars and turned down the loans they couldn't afford or settled for a smaller home or who rented because that's what they could afford, they're not to blame, and they shouldn't be left holding the bag.

Ninety-two percent of Americans are making their mortgage payments not only because it's the right thing to do, but because they know that the sooner the market corrects itself, the sooner our homes will begin to appreciate once again.

By prolonging the real estate correction, by propping up bad loans, by undermining responsible homeowners, and by rewarding the smartest guys in the room who created this catastrophe with taxpayer-paid bonuses, this government is extending the agony and postponing the day when the market will bottom out and home buyers can safely re-enter the housing market.

Madam Speaker, I take great hope from the public's response to Armstrong and Getty's invitation to protest the mortgage bailouts. It means that the American spirit is not dead, that there are still millions of Americans who believe in individual responsibility and integrity. And even if such people are in short supply in Washington today, they still comprise the vast majority of our Nation, and that great silent majority is fast tiring of remaining silent.

CENSUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MCHENRY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCHENRY. Madam Speaker, tomorrow the President's nominee for Commerce Secretary will have his confirmation hearing in the Senate.

Gary Locke, the former Governor of Washington State, is the third nominee for this Cabinet position. As you recall, the second nominee, Senator JUDD GREGG, withdrew his name from consideration.