

predictable. Puerto Rico has the lowest part B participation rate in the country—81 percent compared to the national average of 92 percent. There are at least 130,000 island residents enrolled in part A but not part B. Without this coverage, beneficiaries have limited access to doctors' services and outpatient hospital care. If these individuals do eventually enroll in part B, as most will, the 7-month window will have closed and they will be required to pay a lifetime penalty.

Moreover, there are at least 53,000 seniors or disabled individuals in Puerto Rico who are already paying a lifetime penalty for enrolling late in part B. Each year, in fact, island residents pay a total of over \$7 million in late fees. This is profoundly unfair. Through no fault of their own, my constituents are required to forfeit money to the Federal Government they should be using to meet their basic needs and support their families.

On the administrative front, I have worked hard with Senator SCHUMER to ensure that the relevant Federal agencies improve the educational materials provided to Puerto Rico beneficiaries, and I am pleased they have taken positive steps in response to our demands. But the only true solution to this problem is legislative.

My bill would do three things:

First, it would amend Federal law so that, going forward, beneficiaries in Puerto Rico are treated like their counterparts in every other jurisdiction, automatically enrolled in part B with the option to opt out of coverage;

Second, to ease the burden on those who enrolled late in part B, usually with no understanding of the consequences of that choice, the bill would reduce the monthly penalty they are required to pay by 85 percent;

Finally, to address those beneficiaries who are enrolled in part A but not B and who will pay a late penalty whenever they do enroll, the bill would authorize a special period during which those individuals could enroll in part B and pay a monthly surcharge that is 85 percent less than the penalty they would be subject to under current law.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in both the House and the Senate to enact this much-needed bill into law.

I should also mention that I was impressed with the State of the Union delivered by President Obama last evening, and I particularly support his call for democracy in America. But I remind, respectfully, both the President and all Americans that Puerto Rico has a status that is undemocratic. There are 3.7 million American citizens living in Puerto Rico who lack the most basic voting rights in a democracy. They cannot vote for the President, and they do not have voting representation in Congress. They have rejected this status, and the least that this Congress should do is give Puerto Rico the choice of joining the Union as a State or be treated as a sovereign nation.

IT'S TIME TO GET TO WORK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Oregon (Ms. BONAMICI) for 5 minutes.

Ms. BONAMICI. Mr. Speaker, today is February 13, but it feels like Groundhog Day. Here we are, back again, facing the prospect of devastating cuts from sequestration.

Families in Oregon don't understand why Members of Congress can't seem to set aside their differences and get things done; and, frankly, neither do I. We don't want to see these devastating cuts go into effect. We don't want to see a government shutdown. We don't want to tell the children that they have to have even more students in their already-crowded classrooms or explain to senior citizens that the Meals on Wheels they rely on might not be delivered. We don't want to see cuts to food safety or air traffic control or maritime and border security.

We're in the home stretch, racing towards yet another deadline, but instead of sitting at the bargaining table, we're headed out for recess.

In Oregon alone, sequestration would kick more than 900 kids out of Head Start programs that make a difference in their school readiness. It would trigger a 9 percent cut in Federal funding to Oregon's public university system, slashing student aid and ongoing research and development. Law enforcement agencies throughout the country would lose the equivalent of 1,000 Federal agents, 1,300 prison officers, and more than 5,000 Border Patrol personnel. Small businesses across the Nation would lose more than \$540 million in loan guarantees.

Despite the talk of uncertainty, our economy really is poised to take off, but it can't do that if Congress decides to take off from work. It's sad but true: The biggest obstacle to economic growth tomorrow is congressional foot-dragging today.

We've been governing by crisis for too long. It's time to rally around common sense. It's time to take a seat at the bargaining table. And most of all, it's time to get back to work.

No sequestration deal, no recess.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION MONTH

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

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of Career and Technical Education Month. I'm proud to be joined by Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania, who I know spoke earlier this morning. Mr. THOMPSON is my good friend and fellow cochair of the bipartisan Congressional Career and Technical Education Caucus.

CTE is an investment in the future of our economy, our workforce, and our country. From skills training in high schools to community colleges and pro-

fessional programs, CTE plays a critical role for workers of every age. And I'm so proud that President Obama called for more support for CTE in his State of the Union message last evening.

The most important step I believe we can take this year to support CTE is to fully reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. Currently, the Perkins Act is authorized at a level set in 2010, which doesn't reflect the reality of a modern economy where more workers are looking at high-skilled fields.

More and more employers need highly skilled workers. I hear too often from Rhode Island employers with job openings that they can't fill because they can't find the workers with the right skills to fill the jobs that they do have available. Meanwhile, our unemployment rate remains unacceptably high.

Closing the skills gap is one important step we can take to ensure that workers can fit and fill the needs of expanding industries, both today and in the future. After all, how can we expect to help individuals start a company or to relocate jobs from overseas if we don't have the workers with the right skills to do the jobs that would be and are available?

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to a continuing partnership with my good friend, G.T. THOMPSON from Pennsylvania, in the 113th Congress, and I strongly urge my colleagues to join the Career and Technical Education Caucus and to support the full reauthorization of the Perkins Act.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 50 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

Archbishop Emeritus John Quinn, Diocese of San Francisco, San Francisco, California, offered the following prayer:

Lord, we give deep-felt thanks for the great providential blessing that makes us citizens of the United States of America.

The men and women of this House, in their service to our country, daily confront seemingly intractable public issues, a burden at times overwhelming; but You work even in the dark places of human history.

Teach us this day not to fear the darkness but to put our hand in Yours and resolutely seek the light.

You reveal Yourself as the Father of us all. We ask You to bring us together in civic harmony and in the common task of making real in our time the ideals and the dreams that make us America.

As we turn now to the work of this day, we ask for more than human wisdom, and pray that Your blessing, moving across our continent, will keep us one nation under God with liberty and justice for all.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GENE GREEN) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS JOHN QUINN

The SPEAKER. Without objection, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. ESHOO) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Ms. ESHOO. Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to welcome Archbishop John Quinn to the House of Representatives and to thank him for offering the opening prayer today.

Archbishop Quinn is one of the pre-eminent spiritual leaders and theologians of our Nation. His church service spans over four decades, beginning with his ordination in Rome in 1953. He has served as a pastor, as an educator, as Provost of the University of San Diego College for Men, as Auxiliary Bishop of San Diego, as Bishop of Oklahoma City and Tulsa, as the first Archbishop of Oklahoma City; and in 1977, he was named the sixth Archbishop of San Francisco.

His fellow bishops elected him President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1977, where he led with great distinction for a 3-year term. In December 1995, after 18 years of "tending his flock" of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, he resigned and was given a visiting fellowship at Campion Hall, Oxford.

My colleagues, our country has been blessed by the great patriotism, wisdom, scholarship, deep spirituality, and inspirational leadership of this humble and holy man.

Thank you, Archbishop Quinn, for gracing the House of Representatives with your prayer and your presence and for strengthening our country with a faith that calls each of us to be instruments of peace and justice.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. FOX). The Chair will entertain 15 further requests for 1-minute speeches on each side of the aisle.

AMERICA'S FIRST PRIORITY—A BUDGET

(Mr. MCCARTHY of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. MCCARTHY of California. Madam Speaker, last night, I had hoped to hear from the President that he would challenge both Houses to pass the first priority—a budget. The House has done it. The Senate has not for the last 3 years.

In this House, we talk a lot about the sluggish economy and our continual debt. We talk in trillions, so let's take the zeros away and talk in household income. If we were a household, we would, roughly, bring in \$24,500 a year, but we would spend \$35,500. That means we'd have to add \$11,000 to the credit card each year, but when we'd look to the credit card, it would already have \$160,000 on it.

We have to get the House in order. The Senate has refused to pass a budget in 3 years. The time is now to move America forward.

REBUILDING AMERICAN INFRASTRUCTURE

(Mr. HIGGINS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HIGGINS. Last night, President Obama argued that rebuilding American infrastructure is crucial to job creation, and with 70,000 structurally deficient bridges, it is long overdue.

Today, the United States Chamber of Commerce is holding a summit on infrastructure investment. According to the U.S. Chamber, our broken infrastructure costs \$78 billion annually in lost time and fuel, and we will experience \$336 billion in lost growth over the next 5 years. Our decaying infrastructure is a significant drag on the economy. Freight rail bottlenecks cost us \$200 billion a year—air traffic delays \$33 billion a year. Our inadequate ports will lose up to \$270 billion in exports by 2020, costing 738,000 jobs.

Lots of people around here spend a lot of time whining about China. China invests 9 percent of its economy in infrastructure. We invest less than 3 percent. Stop whining about China and do something about it. President Obama and the U.S. Chamber agree that it's time to nation-build right here at

home, right here in America, and Congress should listen.

CONGRATULATIONS TO GAINESVILLE, GEORGIA

(Mr. COLLINS of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I rise to congratulate my hometown—the city of Gainesville, Georgia—for its leadership in creating and sustaining jobs despite the economic challenges facing our Nation. A new Milken Institute study ranked Gainesville as the best-performing small city in Georgia last year.

The study found that 24 new and expanded industries created 1,200 jobs, retained 742 existing jobs, and generated \$164 million in capital investment for Gainesville and Hall County in 2012. This performance puts Gainesville in the top 10 small cities for job growth in the U.S.

I am proud that Gainesville continues to be a leader in economic development. Gainesville was ranked sixth in job growth nationwide from 2010 to 2011 and was ranked second in job growth from 2011 to 2012. From food and auto services to manufacturing and retail, more businesses are calling Gainesville home, which means more job opportunities for Georgians. I commend the leadership of Gainesville and Hall County for creating an environment where businesses can thrive, and I look forward to their continued success.

I hope that other cities across the Nation, as well as Congress, will look to Gainesville as an example of how job creation can be achieved even in a difficult economic climate.

SEQUESTRATION

(Ms. CHU asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. CHU. Last night, President Obama challenged all of us to come together to improve our country's fiscal health today and for generations to come.

Automatic budget cuts, or sequestration, was never intended to be good fiscal policy. It was never intended to be policy—period. If these cuts take place, the American people will actually be harmed by the Representatives who were sent here to serve them. This is unacceptable. In just 2 weeks, if we don't act, across-the-board cuts will deeply hurt every aspect of our lives—schools, health programs, law enforcement, research and development. Under sequestration, all of these will be decimated.

In our fragile economy, our Nation cannot afford to wait, so I call on our colleagues from the other side of the aisle to rise to the challenge. We cannot keep on going from one manufactured crisis to the next. Work with us to stop sequestration before it's too late.