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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. FLEISCHMANN).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
December 9, 2015.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CHARLES J. "CHUCK" FLEISCHMANN to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

PAUL D. RYAN,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2015, 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 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

HONORING THE SERVICE OF MICHAEL HAROLD

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, one of my pleasures in public service is the opportunity to work with some extraordinarily motivated and talented staff. Nowhere in my career has it been more evident than here on Capitol Hill.

The joy of working with smart, dedicated, committed young people, often under very difficult, even chaotic, situations, who are here because they

make a difference, brightens every day I work here.

There are inevitably bittersweet moments when it is time for some trusted members of your team to move on to other careers, graduate school, or move to follow their families. Today in my office we are celebrating one such moment.

Michael Harold has been in our office for over 7 years in positions of increasing responsibility until ultimately becoming our Legislative Director.

He is preparing to leave for graduate school. Long before he assumed the management of our legislative operations, Michael had made significant impacts far beyond my office. One specific area that he carved out was international water and sanitation.

Thanks to Michael's heroic efforts on the Paul Simon Water for the World Act and dealing with funding for related programs, literally millions of lives will be saved.

Another key achievement has been Mr. Harold's personal commitment to the Special Immigrant Visa Program to protect those Iraqis and Afghans who put their lives on the line to help American personnel as drivers, interpreters and guides under the most difficult of circumstances.

Michael understood and fought for their protection to avoid leaving those who are relying on us to the tender mercies of the Taliban and al Qaeda.

Now, one would think that that would be a relatively simple issue. They risked their lives to help us. We made a commitment to protect them. But it became hopelessly confused and complex, with frayed nerves, long hours, and frustration.

Now, unlike his work on international water and sanitation, which was massive, long term, and dealt with millions of people he would never meet, this was intensely personal.

There were a few thousand people, having been confronted with the most

personal and searing examples, often on a one-on-one basis. But whether it was saving millions with water policies or saving thousands with Special Immigrant Visas, Michael was relentless. He managed key efforts on public broadcasting and started our Neuroscience Caucus. I could go on and on.

He was resolute, focused, and determined. He built a network of partners at the staff level with legislative leadership, with the committee staff, and other member offices in both the House and the Senate.

It was a textbook example of how progress on often overlooked sets of issues have profound consequences for the United States' credibility, our moral standing, and for future generations around the world.

Michael and his wife Brynne are pursuing new academic and career opportunities in Boston that will make them more effective in the long run, but also enable the ability to share their attitude and experience and effectiveness, the results of his model, that so much of the public will never see that takes place behind the scenes.

While Members are obviously essential to the process, it is absolutely critical that men and women like Michael Harold make it happen.

It has been amazingly satisfying for me to watch Michael progress professionally, to marry, start a family, all the while advancing some of the most consequential actions in Congress.

Everyone who works with Michael Harold knows what he has done and appreciates all his special efforts to make the world and Capitol Hill a better place.

PENNSYLVANIA HUNTERS SHARING THE HARVEST

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

□ 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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Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an important program which is assisting needy Pennsylvanians at a pivotal time of the year.

In my State, this is deer season, with hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians estimated to participate through the end of this week.

It is also the holiday season, which is, of course, a very difficult time for people across the Commonwealth who are less fortunate.

This is why the Hunters Sharing the Harvest is so important. Through this program, hunters across Pennsylvania can take a deer they have harvested to a participating meat processing facility, and it will be donated to a food pantry, a soup kitchen, or other organization which assists the needy.

This program is in its 24th year of assisting people across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. One deer alone can provide enough meat for up to 200 meals. Last year more than 2,300 deer were donated, amounting to nearly 100,000 pounds of venison.

This is a season of giving, and I am proud of the hunters, the meat processing facilities, and charitable organizations across Pennsylvania who are participating in this program.

THE URGENT NEED FOR CONGRESSIONAL ACTION ON PUERTO RICO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues are aware, the heavily indebted U.S. territory of Puerto Rico is ensnared in a severe economic crisis.

My constituents are not responsible for this crisis, but they are its primary victims. I know they would prefer to live, work, and raise a family in Puerto Rico, but thousands are departing for the States every month in search of quality of life, which is not available in Puerto Rico. Each time an individual leaves because they feel compelled to go, it represents a small human tragedy.

I have participated in five congressional hearings on Puerto Rico this year. The message I delivered about the roots of the crisis was clear and consistent. I have acknowledged that, over the years, Puerto Rico's leaders, with a few exceptions, have demonstrated a lack of discipline and transparency in managing Puerto Rico's public finances. For this, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

But, as I have reiterated time and again, the crisis has a second, equally significant source. It is the relationship between the Federal Government and Puerto Rico, which is like the relationship between a master and his servant.

This relationship is a national disgrace. It denies my constituents, countless numbers of whom have served this country in uniform, the

fundamental right to vote for their national leaders. Remember this the next time you hear our country lecture another country about the importance of democracy.

As an advocate for statehood for Puerto Rico, I am a proud American citizen. But protesting the mistreatment of my people will always take precedence over being polite.

The relationship between the Federal Government and Puerto Rico allows you to treat us decently when it suits you and to treat us poorly whenever it does not. We live at your whim, subject to your impulses, which are bound by virtually no legal rules or moral standards.

If there is a silver lining in this crisis, it is that the crisis has caused a clear majority of my constituents to conclude that the relationship between the Federal Government and Puerto Rico must change.

Puerto Rico must have equality in this Union or independence outside of it. No longer should we be reduced to begging this Congress for crumbs and hoping you throw some our way. We must get off our knees, stand up straight, look you in the eye, and say "No more."

However, until Puerto Rico becomes a State or a sovereign nation, our fate rests largely in the hands of Congress. I have introduced a series of bills that would empower Puerto Rico to help itself. These bills don't seek a handout or special treatment. They seek the same or similar treatment as the States receive under the Federal health and other safety net programs, Federal tax credit programs, and the Federal law that authorizes debt restructuring.

If Congress declines to act, it will not be because my colleagues did not have options to choose from. It will be because they made a conscious decision not to choose at all.

Federal action is necessary to prevent a default by the Puerto Rico Government on its obligations to creditors, which would be catastrophic for all parties. To avoid this outcome, Congress should authorize Puerto Rico to restructure a meaningful portion of its bonded debt, but in a way that honors the territory's constitution.

Such authority can be provided at no cost to American taxpayers. If it is, I will not oppose the creation of a temporary, independent board that respects the Puerto Rico Government's primary role in crafting its budget and making fiscal policy, but that is authorized to ensure that the Puerto Rico Government complies with appropriate budgeting standards and fiscal metrics.

Ultimately, what Puerto Rico needs is good elected leadership, not heavy-handed Federal intervention that further erodes democracy in the territory. It is in the national interest for Congress to act and to act now.

OBAMACARE IS COSTING JOBS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACK) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BLACK. Mr. Speaker, just this past week the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office confirmed again what we already knew: ObamaCare is costing jobs. Yes, 2 million of them over the next 10 years, to be exact.

But those aren't just numbers. Represented within this study are real people whose lives and livelihoods are being upended by a Government-knows-best law that, more than 5 years later, still remains underwater with the American public.

We saw a real-life picture of the damage of ObamaCare in my home State of Tennessee when a Music City institution, the Nashville Deli, announced this week that it would close its doors after 19 years because of the onerous mandates and high cost of this law.

The restaurant's owner, Tom Loventhal, said this: The administrative time and cost of managing a mandated healthcare insurance in the restaurant industry create an untenable burden, and that's before the cost of premiums.

He goes on to say: I've spent many hours, including some sleepless nights, trying to find a solution, but I can't find one.

Mr. Speaker, the Nashville Deli is one of a kind, but, sadly, its story is not. It is being repeated across the country every single day.

While I continue to believe that the only real solution to the damage of ObamaCare is to repeal this law, root and branch, I am pleased that the House and the Senate have passed a reconciliation bill combating the most onerous portions of this law.

When we put this bill on the President's desk, I hope he will think of the real people, like Tom and the employees there at the restaurant, who are being hurt by ObamaCare.

□ 1015

The next time that my colleagues across the aisle want to call ObamaCare a jobs bill, as Leader PELOSI infamously said, I would invite them to come to the Nashville Deli, where they can get a good meal and a healthy dose of reality. But they had better do it quickly because, thanks to their votes, time for this beloved Nashville icon is running out.

DENYING FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES TO DANGEROUS TERRORISTS ACT

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

Ms. ESTY. Mr. Speaker, we are approaching the third anniversary of the day 20 6- and 7-year-old children and 6 brave educators were gunned down at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in my district in Newtown, Connecticut.

Many advocates and families from Newtown are here in Washington this week. They are joining with survivors and families of victims all across America. We are holding a vigil tonight—the third, sadly. The third annual national vigil to end gun violence