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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. DUNCAN of Tennessee).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,

April 20, 2016.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JOHN J. DUNCAN, Jr. 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 5, 2016, 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.

PUERTO RICO AND WHO WILL BAIL OUT AMERICA?

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

Mr. BROOKS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, America has blown through the \$19 trillion debt mark and rapidly approaches the \$20 trillion debt mark.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office warns Washington that America faces an unending string of trillion-dollar-a-year deficits beginning a mere 6 years from now and that America's debt will blow through the \$29 trillion debt mark in a decade. Further, as debt

principal and interest rates surge, America's debt service costs will increase by \$600 billion a year within a decade.

For perspective, \$600 billion is more than America spends on national defense, which begs the question: Where will that \$600 billion in additional debt service cost come from?

America must learn from financially reckless nations like Greece and Venezuela, and from Puerto Rico, an American territory that has had its credit rating cut to junk bond status and is defaulting on its \$70 billion in debt. For emphasis, Puerto Rico owes roughly 40 percent of all Puerto Rican tax collections, \$4.1 billion, in debt payments this year. That is tax revenues not building roads, not educating children, and not growing the economy.

Puerto Rico, like America, suffers from a bloated central government, welfare programs that undermine the work ethic, decades of financial mismanagement by elected leaders, and a resulting anemic economy and shrinking job market that causes roughly 7,000 citizens to flee Puerto Rico each month.

Only 40 percent of Puerto Ricans are employed or looking for work. Why bother to get a job when American taxpayers pay Puerto Ricans to not work by doling out free food, free health care, and other welfare worth \$1,743 per month, almost \$600 more than minimum wage take-home earnings?

Puerto Rico's debt defaults and resulting economic morass have forced Puerto Rico to delay tax refunds, fire public sector workers, raise sales taxes to a record 11.5 percent, and close over 100 schools.

Unfortunately, these austerity measures, and more, are inadequate because Puerto Rico's self-serving and financially irresponsible elected officials waited too long. Puerto Rico still cannot pay its bills or creditors.

Puerto Rico Governor Alejandro Padilla recently stated that, if Con-

gress does not intervene, "a humanitarian crisis will envelop the 3.5 million American citizens on the island."

Puerto Rico asks Congress to let Puerto Rico default on its legal operations via bankruptcy or force American taxpayers to bail out Puerto Rico's decades of financial mismanagement. Never mind that, according to a 2010 Government Accountability Office report, mainland American taxpayers already subsidize Puerto Rico to the tune of \$16 billion per year, or roughly \$4,500 per Puerto Rican.

As Puerto Rico desperately seeks an American taxpayer bailout, Americans should ask: Who will bail out America when America defaults on its debt?

Mr. Speaker, America must learn from Puerto Rico, a territory that is spiraling into bankruptcy and insolvency because of a \$20,000-per-capita debt burden—a debt burden, I might add, that is three times better than America's \$60,000-per-capita debt burden.

If America's creditors stop loaning America money, if America is forced to go cold turkey on its debt addiction, America could be forced to slash military pay or eliminate the volunteer Army altogether and go back to a draft, cut Social Security and Medicare benefits, and the like.

Mr. Speaker, America's spending binge and accompanying debt and deficits are unsustainable. If voters do not elect financially responsible officials to Washington, America will endure the same debilitating insolvency and bankruptcy that wreaks havoc in Greece and Puerto Rico—with one major difference. Unlike Greece, which has been bailed out three times by the European community, and unlike Puerto Rico, which may yet be bailed out by American taxpayers, there is no one—no one—who can or will bail out America.

□ 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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AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

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

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, an open letter to President Barack Obama.

Dear Mr. President:

In 2009, less than a year after assuming the Presidency, you accepted the Nobel Peace Prize. You began your acceptance of this honor by acknowledging that it was bestowed at the “beginning, and not the end of, my labors on the world stage.”

You spoke on that day with eloquence and conviction about fundamental human rights, rights that are endowed not by accidents of birth like nationality or ethnicity or gender, but by our common humanity. And the principles that you articulated have indeed guided and defined your Presidency.

In your foreign policy, you have emphasized the rights of ethnic and religious minorities worldwide and put these causes closer to the center of our foreign policy. You have extended aid to refugees fleeing horrific violence. You established the Atrocities Prevention Board to coordinate and monitor our efforts to prevent mass atrocities and genocide.

In a few days, you will have a chance to add to your legacy. On April 24, the world will mark 101 years since the systemic extermination of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, from 1915 to 1923. The facts of the slaughter are beyond dispute, and I know that you are well-acquainted with these horrors visited upon the Armenian people, having spoken eloquently about them as a Senator.

I have sat with survivors of the genocide, men and women, their numbers dwindling year after year, and heard them recall the destruction of their lives and their families and all they had known. As children, they were forced from their homes and saw their family beaten, raped, and murdered. They fled across continents and oceans to build lives in our Nation.

Mr. President, for them and for their descendants, the word “genocide” is sacred because it means that the world has not and will not forget. To deny genocide, on the other hand, is profane. It is, in the words of Elie Wiesel, a “double killing.”

This April 24 will be your final opportunity to use the Presidency to speak plainly about the genocide. In past years as President, you have described the campaign of murder and displacement against the Armenian people as a “mass atrocity,” which it surely was.

But, of course, it was also much more; and you have avoided using the word “genocide,” even though it has been universally applied by scholars and historians of the period. In fact, as you know better than most, the Ottoman Empire’s campaign to annihilate the Armenian people was a prime example of what Raphael Lemkin was trying to describe when he coined the very term, “genocide.”

I know that, as you consider your words this year, you will hear the same voices as in the past who will tell you to hold your tongue and speak in euphemisms. They will say that the time is not right, or that Turkey is too strategically important, or that we should not risk their ire over something that happened a century ago. Mr. President, regardless of what you say on April 24, there can be little doubt that Turkey will do exactly as it has always done in its relations with the United States, and that is whatever Turkey believes to be in its self-interest.

Many of our European allies and world leaders, including Pope Francis, have recognized the genocide, yet they have continued

to work closely with Turkey because that has been in Turkey’s interest. The same will be true after U.S. recognition of the genocide.

I dearly hope, as do millions of Armenians descended from genocide survivors around the world, that you take this final opportunity to call the Armenian genocide what it was—genocide; to say that the Ottoman Empire committed this grotesque crime against the Armenians, but their campaign of extermination failed; and that, above all, we will never forget and we will never again be intimidated into silence. Let this be part of your legacy, and you will see future administrations follow your example.

When you spoke in Oslo more than 7 years ago, you closed your remarks by returning to the counsel of Dr. Martin Luther King and said: “I refuse to accept the idea that the ‘isness’ of man’s present condition makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal ‘oughtness’ that forever confronts him.”

Mr. President, confronting painful, difficult but vital questions “is” who you are. Help us be the America we “ought” to be, that beacon of freedom and dignity that shines its light on the darkness of human history and exposes the vile crime of genocide.

Sincerely, Adam Schiff.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to direct their remarks to the Chair and not to a perceived viewing audience.

CELEBRATING SOUTH FLORIDA’S NATIONAL PARKS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight south Florida’s wild and wonderful national parks—Biscayne, Dry Tortugas, and Everglades—during National Park Week and the National Park Service Centennial.

American Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and historian Wallace Stegner is quoted as having said that our national parks were “the best idea we have ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst.”

Indeed, south Florida is supremely fortunate to have Superintendent Pedro Ramos in charge of Dry Tortugas and Everglades National Parks. Superintendent Ramos understands and appreciates the importance of public access, the importance of the public’s experiences, and the importance of continuing to reconnect the people of south Florida with the natural lands and waters that surround and support our community.

Ultimately, enhancing public access and recreational opportunities in our national parks are vital to conserving America’s natural and cultural heritage. That is why I am so troubled, Mr. Speaker, by the fishing access restrictions included in the 2015 general management plan of another iconic south Florida park, Biscayne National Park.

The plan’s marine reserve zone imposes a permanent moratorium on fish-

ing across 10,500 acres of State waters, including 30 percent of the reef tract, denying fishing access to families and professional fishermen alike, without adequate scientific evidence to back it up.

My Preserving Public Access to Public Waters Act, which passed the House in February as part of the SHARE Act, and its newly introduced Senate counterpart, from Senators BILL CASSIDY and MARCO RUBIO, would help ensure that Federal bureaucrats and special interest groups do not overrule local community needs and concerns in this way anymore.

□ 1015

If our national parks are to remain absolutely American and absolutely democratic, then it is long since time for the National Park Service to consistently represent the Federal Government at its best rather than at its worst once again.

The Park Service’s stated mission is to preserve “unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations by cooperating with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resources conservation and outdoor recreation throughout the country and the world.”

Everglades National Park Superintendent Ramos has demonstrated that he is a true ambassador for this lofty and worthy mission. He represents the National Park Service and the Federal Government at its best: open and inclusive, seeking balanced solutions, and guided by a profound sense of service to the American people.

Meanwhile, Biscayne’s general management plan represents some of the worst aspects of the National Park Service and the Federal Government. It is focused so much on a narrow definition of preservation that it continually and completely fails the National Park Service’s mission and disregards a whole community of park users.

What is worse, with the varied threats facing south Florida’s coral reefs, from changing ocean conditions to water quality issues, today fishing is a relatively minor contributor to coral reef decline in Biscayne.

The real effect of Biscayne’s marine reserve zone plan will be to continue losing coral at a drastic pace while also undercutting the public support needed to develop and implement real solutions to what ails our reefs.

The National Park Service can, should, and must do better, and they should look to Superintendent Ramos and his leadership over similar issues at Everglades National Park for inspiration.

Everglades National Park’s own recently finalized general management plan, lauded by both fishermen and environmentalists, clearly represents what is possible when guided by a true sense of the Park’s mission.