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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. VALADAO).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,

September 7, 2016.

I hereby appoint the Honorable DAVID G. VALADAO 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.

THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, to understand what is wrong with American politics, especially the dysfunctional Republican House of Representatives, look no further than the spectacle surrounding the IRS and the impeachment of its Commissioner.

The Internal Revenue Service impacts 150 million American taxpayers every year, virtually every family and all legal businesses. This is how we fi-

nance essential services, from Social Security to medical research, our national defense, national parks, veterans' services, and so much more. Everything that matters to Americans depends on the ability to finance government efficiently and fairly.

Look, Americans from the dawn of the Republic have chafed at paying taxes, continuing a tradition that dates back to Biblical times, and almost everybody says they hate the IRS, which is the cheapest, quickest political applause line for any politician. Yet, over the years, we have managed to collect money that allows us to win wars, struggle through depressions, and provide what used to be some of the finest public services on the face of the planet.

Yes, the Internal Revenue Service administers a hopelessly complex, convoluted, and unfair Tax Code because that is what the American Congress has given them to work with. Congress created this mess and then blames the people who try to administer it.

If we are ever to make the IRS better, more efficient, and fairer, it is going to require a degree of cooperation, candor, and hard work. The current spectacle of destroying the reputation of a distinguished public servant, an accomplished businessman, is going to make that task even harder.

Make no mistake. The treatment of John Koskinen, with the possibility of being the first Cabinet official impeached in nearly 140 years, is not just embarrassing for the people who are perpetrating it; it represents a threat to the ability to administer the IRS.

John Koskinen came to this position after a lifetime of success in business as a turnaround expert at the highest levels as well as in public service, holding senior positions in both Republican and Democratic administrations. The Bush administration turned to him to prevent the implosion of the housing finance giant, Freddie Mac, and he spent 3 years guiding and rebuilding it.

There is absolutely no evidence that he did anything wrong. The Republican inspector general, a former Republican staff member, found nothing wrong. This impeachment action is going nowhere in the Senate. It has got to be an embarrassment for the Speaker, committee chairmen, and Republicans everywhere. It only serves to highlight ideological divisions, lack of respect for due process, and the exaggerated power of the Republican echo chamber of rightwing talk radio.

But it does more than add to disdain for the political process. It is a cloud over public service. While people claim we don't need the IRS or that our tax filing can be reduced to a postcard and that we can generate all the money we need with reduced tax rates and more exemptions, it is a fantasy that any responsible Republican businessperson or independent economist will verify.

Going down this impeachment path will make it harder to recruit somebody for the hardest job in government and will only deepen the divides at a time when we need clear thinking and nonpartisan cooperation to fix a broken IRS, establish the trust and hard work to make the mechanics of revenue collection work, and avoid the breakdown of the system.

This is playing with fire and should be beneath America's elected officials. Tarnishing the stellar reputation of an outstanding citizen who is doing his country a favor by volunteering to take this thankless task is simply something that should not be tolerated.

THE TIME FOR WAITING IS OVER

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

Mr. MURPHY of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, this is Suicide Prevention Month, and we have a lot of work to do.

□ 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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In July the House passed H.R. 2646, our mental health reform act called the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act; but since September 1, the beginning of Suicide Prevention Month, 826 people have died by suicide. Since we passed the bill, 7,434 have died from suicide.

Let me tell you one quick story about a young man, a constituent by the name of Chuck Mahoney, who, while in college, suffered from depression. Despite his fraternity brothers going to the administrators and to his counselor, and despite Chuck telling his counselor that he thought he was going to die and there was no reason to live, no one spoke up. No one told the parents.

Sadly, young Chuck, who had been a student, who had been captain of his high school football team, a decorated student with great grades, took his own life, hanging himself with his dog's leash, a suicide that could have been prevented if he had seen people who really could treat suicide.

But so often what happens in this Nation, when someone cries out for suicide risk, there is no one there to help. Actually, as it turns out, mental illness is a contributing factor in 90 percent of suicides. When a person makes a decision, it usually happens in the first 5 minutes or, at the most, the first hour. There is no time for waiting lists.

We have a crisis shortage of psychiatrists and psychologists. We have too few hospital beds. We need something like 100,000 more crisis hospital beds. We have not reauthorized the Suicide Prevention Act in this Congress. We simply don't have enough to treat for a problem that is treatable.

When you add to this people who may do a drug overdose, 90 percent of people who are addicted do not get any treatment. Of the 100 out of 1,000 who try to get treatment, 37 can't find any treatment. Of those 63 left who get treatment, only 6 of them get treatment because we simply don't have enough people to treat. This is the mess we are in as a country, but we can do something about that—but it gets worse.

In addition to these suicide deaths, if you look at just the mental illness-related deaths in this country, since September 1, as of today, 6,713 have died of a mental illness-related death and 60,000 since we passed our bill in July.

The House did its job, but now the Senate needs to do their job. We hear rumors that the Senate is talking about passing the continuing resolution and then going home—going home while this sits on the table in the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that those millions of Americans who have a family member who has been lost to suicide or a chronic illness or a homicide or freezing on some park bench in some unknown part of America, that those families will speak up and let the Senate know: Do not go home and leave this unfinished business on the table. I

mean, after all, why campaign and say we could have done something but we didn't?

What we ought to be doing is looking at the passage in the Senate of H.R. 2646, which provides more psychiatric crisis hospital beds, more psychiatrists, more psychologists. It revises the HIPAA law that allows the compassionate communication between a doctor and a family member at very select times when someone is at high risk for their health or safety. It reauthorizes the Suicide Prevention Act. It does a host of other things, and all these things can happen only if it gets to the President's desk for a signature. But very little can happen if we maintain the status quo where people are left to die while Congress sits.

We did our job in the House. It took years, but when we passed this bill 422-2, Members of Congress, Members of the House of Representatives knew that they had passed a bill that could save lives, but only if we take action. If no action is taken, what do we do? What comfort is there to the families who are dying, who are suffering, saying we could have done something but we decided to wait?

The time for waiting is over. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that Members of the House and of the community at large will call their Senators and say the time for passage is now because where there is help there is hope.

THE PUERTO RICO CONTROL BOARD

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

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the beautiful, enchanted island of Puerto Rico, the birthplace of my father and mother and my wife.

Yes, the colony of the United States in the Caribbean Sea where, in case you forgot, everyone is born a citizen and now even more of a colony of the United States now that Washington has appointed a Financial Oversight and Management Board or, as most people call it, the Control Board, la Junta de Control.

Seven members—four put forward by Republicans, three put forward by Democrats—were announced last week, and I was not pleasantly surprised. I have made it clear in this Congress and elsewhere that I oppose the PROMESA legislation that created the board that Congress passed before we left.

Now I look at the board, and I see a mix of people, some with ties to the former Tea Party Governor's regime, some with close ties to Wall Street, and most with experience examining the legal and administrative aspects of bankruptcy, not in governing an island of 3.5 million actual living, breathing human beings.

I was not surprised to see political insiders or those who are close to the bondholders. I assumed as much and

still assume, until proven otherwise, that most everyone on the Control Board or who lobbies and influences or helps the Control Board is doing the bidding of the bondholders who profit from Puerto Rico's debt and economic hard times.

The fact that four of the seven members are Puerto Rican doesn't make me feel any more optimistic. If you look at recent history in Puerto Rico, just having a majority of Puerto Ricans shouldn't give you much comfort. Wasn't it Puerto Ricans who beat and pepper-sprayed demonstrators at the university and at the legislature, who have gone after journalists and unions and lawyers in politically motivated attacks, who have put the needs of investors, big Wall Street fat cats, and political insiders ahead of the people, the environment, and the future of the island?

The Control Board and its members, no matter who they are, start with a deep ocean of mistrust from the Puerto Rican people who question why a new layer of opaque, undemocratic, colonial oversight and control is being imposed in secrecy.

That is why I challenged the appointees to the board to go the extra mile to make their deliberations and meetings and decisions as transparent as possible. Do not meet in secret just because Congress allowed you to. When they are governing the people of Puerto Rico, will they do so in Spanish, the language of the Puerto Rican people? Will they even meet on the island of Puerto Rico? Will they make available the logs of who they meet with, who tries to exert influence over them, what Wall Street executives are spinning them or treating them to expensive meals and giving them gifts, as authorized under PROMESA? Yes, they can take gifts.

When this Control Board is making decisions that close schools or hospitals, that threaten the environment, public institutions, and every aspect of society in Puerto Rico, will the Puerto Rican people even be given a minimum amount of information in their own language about who is influencing the seven members of the Control Board?

The Junta de Control must take the extra effort to tell the Puerto Rican people what their decisions mean, why they are being made, and how decisions were determined.

As Members of Congress who have essentially grabbed the reins of self-termination from the Puerto Rican people and handed them to this Control Board, are we going to be afforded the level of transparency that we need to determine if what is happening is what we want to happen?

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that some of our colleagues do not like to be reminded of policy issues that were already voted on, especially complicated policy issues that don't seem to impact them directly or people in their district. They just want to vote on them and forget. Well, I am not going to let