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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,
February 24, 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.

BROAD AND DIVERSE SEGMENT OF VOTERS

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

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, I am not here to give a political speech. This is not the right venue for that. But I would like to share some observations I have about visiting Nevada last week.

The first observation is that among a broad and diverse segment of voters, there is a great deal of excitement about the political process. It almost doesn't matter which candidate people prefer or even which party, there is so much enthusiasm to participate.

In Nevada, the form of participation is the caucus, and it requires a greater time commitment than simply punching a ballot at your local precinct. Yet, I witnessed thousands of people who were taking hours away from their jobs, at their own expense in many cases, to participate in that process.

You can't come away from that kind of activity and not be inspired that Americans are taking their right to vote, their opinions about who should be the next nominee of their party or the next President very seriously. It was really remarkable.

Still, there were some people I spoke with who could not afford to take hours away from their jobs, some because they couldn't get permission and others because they simply could not afford to give up a couple of hours of wages, clock out to vote, even when it means not having your vote count.

Las Vegas, where I was, is a 24/7 working city; and for many, Saturday is the busiest day of the week, especially for tips.

This election year, as we travel around our districts or campaign in other States, I hope my colleagues in both parties will really examine how local governments and States are facilitating or disenfranchising American citizens who are eligible to vote.

In Nevada, participation in a caucus at a set time of the day with little or no flexibility serves almost like a poll tax for hourly workers. Voters have to weigh the power of their vote against dollars that would not be in their pockets if they exercise that vote.

If you can vote, you should vote, and we should make sure that the laws of our Nation and our communities encourage rather than discourage the participation of every citizen.

Another striking observation I made over the weekend was the diversity of the American electorate: women and men, straight and gay, U.S.-born and naturalized, old and young, working

class, retired, students, military, executives. Nevada put on a display of how much progress our Nation has made in a few decades.

I saw the energy and the determination of young voters, new voters, newly 18, newly citizens, newly engaged in the political process. Everywhere I have traveled, including the high schools in my district in Illinois, I see 17- and 18-year-old Latinos anxious and eager to participate, and they are motivated to register and vote and inspired by their candidates and their parties.

Today, tomorrow, and every day for decades about 2,000 U.S.-born Latino citizens of the United States will turn 18 and be eligible to vote. Every day, 2,000 of them turn 18, and they are eager to get involved.

There is a similar energy in the people I meet who are applying for citizenship. There are over 8 million immigrants with green cards who are eligible to apply for citizenship right now. And with fee waivers for those with limited funds, many of them can apply for free. And they are applying in droves.

This coming Saturday, I will be at a workshop in Denver, Colorado, for people learning about the process and applying for citizenship.

A coalition of groups led by the National Partnership for New Americans but also encompassing Mi Familia Vota, a range of labor unions, and advocacy groups large and small across 30 States have invited me to participate in this nonpartisan activity to promote civic engagement and citizenship in immigrant communities across this country. Their goal is to help 1 million eligible immigrants become citizens so they can vote in primaries and general elections this year and make sure they are at America's table.

In communities like Denver and Chicago, there is a hunger for citizenship despite all the barriers, despite the

□ 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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costs, and despite the anti-immigrant tone coming from our TVs and candidates. In fact, it is the anti-immigrant tone that people tell me over and over is what is motivating them to apply, study for the tests, and better their English.

It is that energy that gives me great confidence in our Nation and in the direction our Nation is heading this year.

Immigrants are a part of a growing American coalition of working class voters: women, straight people and LGBT, environmentalists, Latino, Asians, Black, White, old and young, Muslim and Christians, Jewish and agnostic. They are coming together and mobilizing.

Together, even as some politicians push them away and try to divide up with suspicions of our fellow Americans, together, their diversity and dedication to democracy is a beautiful thing to witness.

AMERICA: LEARN FROM GREECE INSOLVENCY DAMAGE

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

Mr. BROOKS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office data reveals that America's financial condition has taken a sharp, ugly turn for the worse. America's estimated 2016 deficit is \$105 billion worse than 2015's already dangerous \$439 billion deficit.

America's debt has blown through the \$19 trillion mark and is projected to blow through the \$29 trillion mark in a decade.

America's Comptroller General and CBO warn that America's financial path is "unsustainable," meaning America faces a debilitating insolvency unless we get our financial house in order.

Mr. Speaker, those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

In that vein, America must learn from Greece, a country betrayed by decades of financially irresponsible leadership. In the past 5 years, Greece has repeatedly failed to meet its debt obligations and subsisted on three bailouts from the European Union.

The result?

The Greek economy is in a shambles. Greece has a 52 percent labor participation rate, 10 points worse than here in America. Greece's unemployment rate was recently 25 percent, approximating America's worse unemployment rate in the Great Depression. Worse yet, Greeks under the age of 25 suffer from a 48 percent unemployment rate.

Financial irresponsibility ultimately forces draconian austerity spending cuts. Greece has cut public health care spending from 6.8 percent of GDP in 2010 to roughly 5 percent today, thereby risking Greek lives. Cancer screening has been cut. HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria rates have surged as fewer Greeks receive proper treatment.

The public pensions Greek elderly citizens rely on for survival have been

cut an average of almost 50 percent since 2010 and are again on the chopping block.

Greek tax rates are exploding. Income taxes on farmers have doubled from 13 percent to 26 percent. Self-employed professionals and farmers say proposed social security and income tax increases will combine to consume as much as 75 percent of their incomes.

Greece's banking system is on the brink. In the summer of 2015, pre-European bailout, the Greek Government froze citizens' bank accounts, limiting cash withdrawals from ATMs to \$67 per day. Greeks could not even access their own money.

Post-bailout and as Greeks began fearing their savings accounts would be confiscated to pay for government debt, as occurred in nearby Cyprus—yet another insolvent country—Greeks withdrew cash from banks.

The run on banks caused the Greek Government to intervene and limit the right of Greek citizens to withdraw their own money, which caused citizens to cut deposits into Greek banks, which undermined the Greek banking system, which dried up the availability of loans for new business needed to create jobs in a rebounding economy.

Violent demonstrations are resulting. For example, on February 4, 2016, Athens, Greece, ABC News reported:

"Riot police have used tear gas in clashes with protesters during a mass rally in Athens as Greeks demonstrated against government pension reforms needed to meet demands of international creditors."

Mr. Speaker, there is an old adage that ignorance is bliss. I don't know about that, but I do know that ignorance is dangerous.

In 2009, Greece spent 3.2 percent of GDP on its national defense. Five years later, Greek defense spending was cut to 2.3 percent of GDP, a 28 percent cut.

Now, perhaps the world will not suffer from Greece's defense spending cuts, but what would be the effect on world peace if America's defense spending suffered a similar fate?

Mr. Speaker, time is running out. Washington must balance the budget before America's debt burden spirals out of control before it is too late to prevent the debilitating insolvency and bankruptcy that awaits us.

I pray the American people will be good stewards of our Republic in 2016 and elect Washington officials who both understand the threat posed by deficits and debt and have the backbone to fix it. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, America's future depends on it.

OPIOID ABUSE/MEDICAL MARIJUANA

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, last night Frontline on PBS had a com-

elling documentary on the opioid and heroin epidemic. We are now seeing politicians diving in. Governors across the country are sounding the alarm. It is being featured by Presidential candidates in both parties.

President Obama's budget has some very good suggestions highlighting tools to reduce drug overuse, overdose, evidence-based prevention programs, prescription drug monitoring, and prescription take-back events. There are a variety of things that are going in the right direction.

Yet, it is a little frustrating for me that the simplest, cheapest, safest solution to help these troubled people is not embraced: medical marijuana.

Actually, the public is largely there. For the last 20 years, the tide has been building for medical marijuana, even as the crisis on opioids has slowly started to take hold. It began with voter approval in California in 1996 and in Oregon 2 years later. Now 23 States have legalized medical marijuana, and two-thirds of Americans live in States where at least some form of medical marijuana is authorized.

There is a reason for this movement. A meta-analysis of 79 studies in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* found solid evidence that medical marijuana is effective in treating chronic pain. There is no evidence of serious side effects among medical marijuana users who are actually less likely to drink alcohol or take other painkillers. And those States with medical marijuana actually have fewer overdose deaths.

Isn't this worth exploring? Especially when there is evidence that availability of medical marijuana dispensaries is associated with a significant decrease in substance abuse admissions and a reduction in opioid overdose deaths.

Recently, we have even had former NFL players come out and describe how they used medical marijuana to self-medicate rather than being shot up with painkillers by team doctors and being prescribed opioid pills.

What is perhaps most frustrating for me is the wrong-headed approach that prohibits Veterans Administration doctors from even talking to their patients about medical marijuana in the States where it is legal. That is ironic because the VA has its own veterans health crisis because their patients are dying from prescription overdoses at rates twice the national average. Opioid prescriptions by VA doctors have surged 270 percent over the last 12 years. They are prescribing significantly more opioids to patients suffering from PTSD and depression than other veterans, even though those are the patients most at risk of overdose and suicide. Nearly 1 million veterans who receive treatment for pain continue to consume those pills beyond 90 days.

It is clear that most veterans would probably be better off if we more fully utilized medical marijuana to treat