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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,
June 21, 2017.

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 3, 2017, 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. All time shall be equally allocated between the parties, and in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m. Each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, shall be limited to 5 minutes.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

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

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, yesterday was World Refugee Day, a day set aside by the United Nations to reflect upon those in crisis and dedicate ourselves to helping those we can help.

To mark this solemn occasion, today, the Judiciary Committee House Republicans will vote to slash refugee resettlement numbers, cut back aid to those fleeing violence and persecution for their religious or political beliefs, and

make it harder for children fleeing violence, especially those from Central America, from receiving asylum from the richest, most powerful Nation in the world.

Tell me, how does that make America great again, Mr. Speaker?

According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, there are more than 65 million people—a record number today—who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. More than 21 million are refugees. Eighty-six percent of the world's refugees are now finding refuge in the developing world, with only 14 percent finding refuge in developed countries like the U.S. or European nations.

Worldwide, more than half of all refugees are children. So when anti-immigrant leaders, websites, and TV networks paint those fleeing the Middle East, Africa, and Asia as hardened jihadists, or those fleeing Central America as gangbangers and drug dealers, remember, most of them are just kids—little kids. That is what we are talking about, fleeing their country for their lives.

Mr. Speaker, America has, throughout our history, been a beacon of hope to refugees fleeing religious attacks, facing government intolerance and persecution, ethnic strife, or unsustainable poverty.

Beginning in the 1840s, when the potato crop disappeared because of a blight in Ireland, the Irish people were left starving. Over 8 million people in Ireland, 3 to 4 million of them faced starvation. About 1 million died mostly of starvation and disease.

Another 2 million came where?

To America.

According to a recent article in The Irish Times: "Panic had set in by the winter of 1846/47. People risked winter voyages across the Atlantic on unsanitary, unsafe 'coffin ships.'"

The article continues: "People were placed in quarantine stations, or held onboard ships docked at ports."

"Refugees experienced violent and racist reactions. Liverpool, Glasgow" . . . "Montreal, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia sought unsuccessfully to restrict entry" of the Irish.

A lot of this sounds familiar to me today when we discuss the Muslim ban that the courts have blocked and which motivated thousands of Americans to go to airports to demand that the United States honor its visas and honor its commitment to refugees, or as the House Judiciary Committee meets today, to punish children for fleeing for their lives.

Roughly 32 million Americans trace their roots to Ireland. That is about 10 percent of the U.S. population. And let's be clear, the British rulers over Ireland were not sending what they consider their best people. They were poor, they were uneducated, and U.S. politicians at the time said that they were sending rapists, murderers, and drunks, even as some, they assumed, were good people.

They were from a religion that threatened the United States. They were Catholics who were as foreign to American Protestants, in some regards, as Muslims are today.

But who can imagine America without the Irish today?

You look down the list of generals, Presidents, Members of Congress, and every aspect of American society today, and we can all say, to some degree, we are Irish.

As House Republicans vote today to pass bills to keep out the wretched refuse of your teeming shores, as we pass laws to pull up the drawbridge and put a big "Do Not Enter" sign on the Statue of Liberty, I hope my Republican colleagues who can trace roots back to someone who came across the water and risked everything and bet their lives on the United States, I hope all of us will reflect on those ancestors as we deliberate laws and how we would have kept so many of them out.

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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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His Holiness Pope Francis, who we all remember just spoke steps away from where I am at right now, reminded us to always follow the Golden Rule in all our deliberations. Pope Francis said just this past Sunday that the nations of the world should continue to welcome refugees; and each of us, as individuals, can learn a lot by meeting with, speaking with, and breaking bread with refugees.

His Holiness said: “ . . . personal meetings with refugees can dissolve fears and distorted ideologies and become paths for growth in humanity.”

Mr. Speaker, I hope my Republican colleagues have been listening, as we have a Speaker who is both Catholic and Irish, but I fear they will not.

OPIOID AND HEROIN ADDICTION

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

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, prescription opioids and heroin addiction are ravaging our Nation, causing heartache and pain for millions of American families, and destroying our communities. This is no secret.

In my own home State of Illinois, opioids contribute to nearly 1,200 overdose deaths in 2016. Heroin played a role in those deaths of another 1,000 people, many of whom started with prescription drugs.

According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, more people die from opioid drug overdose than from homicide and motor vehicle accidents.

These aren't just numbers or statistics. The people battling addiction are moms and dads and neighbors and students. Addiction doesn't care about your race, your gender, your income, your political leanings. It is an issue that affects everyone because it impacts every community and every person we love.

Congress took an important step last year in passing the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. This bipartisan legislation, which was signed into law, created a coordinated and balanced strategy for communities to tackle issues regarding prescription and opioid abuse in their communities.

Just last month, Congress voted to fund programs designed to prevent and treat opioid and heroin use. But the real leaders of this effort will be citizens in our local community. Many local police departments now offer drug drop boxes. Parents, especially, are on the front line of this issue and are responsible to educate our children about the dangers of prescription medication.

If you see someone struggling with addiction, please encourage them to speak to their local drug and alcohol commissioners.

Completely ending addiction nationwide may not be possible, but together we can save lives and begin to put hope back in our communities.

DO THE RIGHT THING

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

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, when someone keeps something secret, it is often because it is embarrassing or negative or damaging or unsupportable.

Mr. Speaker, over in the Senate, Leader McCONNELL and some of these Republican Senators are doing just that: crafting a healthcare repeal bill in secret because they know what it contains would deeply embarrass anyone who supports it openly.

They know it is going to be a hard sell to convince even their own Republican colleagues, Mr. Speaker, to get behind a bill that even President Trump called mean. That was the House American Health Care Act to which he was referring. He called it mean for the harm it does to Americans.

They know it is going to be difficult in the Senate to convince Senators to support a bill that raises healthcare costs for working families and kicks millions of Americans off their coverage, including those who are covered by their employers; a bill that makes millions of individuals with preexisting conditions uninsurable and reinstates annual and lifetime limits; a bill that imposes an age tax on those between ages 50 and 64, increasing premium costs by as much as 800 percent; a bill that forces States to cut benefits and kick millions of people off Medicaid, whether it is next year, in 3 years, or in 7 years, those times that are to try to get by elections so that perhaps people will not be held accountable for voting for such draconian legislation.

Mr. Speaker, such a bill ought to be very embarrassing indeed, which is why Senator McCONNELL, I believe, and his allies don't want anyone to see it until they are asked to vote on it.

We have a similar problem, of course, in the House.

Whatever happened to transparency, to openness, to reading the bills, to posting it for all to see in advance? Where are all those people who wanted everybody to read the bills and see the bills? Where are they today in demanding that bills be fully and thoroughly vetted, read, heard, and voted on?

It is no wonder even Republican Senators who haven't seen the bill are getting angry with their leader and those drafting it in secrecy.

Republican Senator RON JOHNSON said last week, Mr. Speaker: “I want to know exactly what is going to be in the Senate bill. I don't know it yet.” And then he concluded: “It is not a good process.”

And Senator MARCO RUBIO said: “The Senate is not a place where you can just cook up something behind closed doors and rush it for a vote.”

But, Mr. Speaker, what we hear is exactly what is happening, cooking it up in secret and rushing it for a vote.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they are not the only ones who want to know what is in

this bill. Millions of Americans are deeply worried about its contents.

Last week, I sat down with two courageous Americans who shared their personal healthcare stories with me. I want to thank them for doing so, and I want to share their stories today. Their names are Ola Ojewumi and Megan Foley.

Ola lives with a preexisting condition. As a young child, she received a heart and kidney transplant. She is also a cancer survivor. She is a young woman. She told me about how the Affordable Care Act saved her life. She was able to access affordable coverage because of the ban on denying coverage to those with preexisting conditions. Ola also told me how frightened she is that these protections could be taken away for her under the Senate's secret TrumpCare bill.

If it is enacted, Ola and others with preexisting conditions may not be able to access the coverage needed to keep them alive and healthy, or they may simply not be able to afford it.

When I spoke with Megan Foley, she shared her courageous story of struggling with mental illness and addiction. She told me how she overcame her addiction. Despite her recovery, before the Affordable Care Act came into effect, she was denied coverage again and again because her addiction was considered a preexisting condition. Those were difficult months, cutting back on expenses and accruing debt just to pay for her medication until the Affordable Care Act kicked in and allowed for Megan to obtain coverage.

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But she made it, and now, the law protects Megan and millions and millions of others like her struggling with addiction who were given a second chance.

At a time when this country is plagued, Mr. Speaker, with an unprecedented opioid addiction crisis, the Republican repeal bill is an insult to courageous Americans for whom recovery is a lifelong process and access to care is essential. They, and so many Americans, are now living with uncertainty and fear for their future.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my interviews with Ola and Megan on social media, and I encourage all Members of this House to sit down with their constituents and listen to their stories and hear about their concerns.

Americans deserve to know what is in the Senate's secret TrumpCare bill and how it would impact them and their loved ones. Americans deserve to know. Senators who represent those Americans need to know, and they have not seen it yet, yet there is some discussion that they may have to consider the bill as early as next week. Senators and Members of this House deserve to know.

End the secrecy. Pull back the curtain. Let us see what is in that bill that these Senators think is so embarrassing that it must be hidden from us all.