

Whether we like these people, whether we want to know them personally, or whether we want to share private lives with them, they are part of the "whole people" of America. They deserve a second chance to vote.

Consider these statistics:

An estimated 3,900,000 Americans, or one in fifty adults, currently cannot vote because of a felony conviction. Women represent about a half million of this total.

Three-fourths (73%) of the 3,900,000 disqualified voters are not in prison, but are on probation, parole or are ex-offenders.

Over the last decade alone, over 560,000 Americans served their entire sentence, stand free and clear of incarceration and parole and have paid their debt to society. An estimated 65,000 of these Americans are women. And, they cannot vote in some States.

Today, you will hear from fellow Members of Congress who believe firmly that those individuals who have committed crimes, paid their debt to society, and been released free and clear should be allowed to vote. This may seem like a radical proposition, but it is not. It is fundamentally consistent with the principles we live by in this country—when you pay your debt to society by spending time in prison, your punishment is complete. At that point, our society releases you back into society and expects you to be rehabilitated socially with family, friends, and community, and economically with jobs. It is time now to pay attention to your civic rehabilitation.

Minority and poor people are over-represented in these numbers. Tonight, you will hear from your colleagues why we need to enfranchise all these women and men. I have introduced H.R. 5158, the Second Chance Voting Rights Act of 2000, to do just that. Others like my friends and colleagues Representative JOHN CONYERS and Representative DANNY DAVIS also have introduced legislation to enfranchise these Americans. You will hear from them now.

Representative DANNY DAVIS; Representative JULIA CARSON; Representative STEPHANIE TUBBS JONES; Representative NANCY PELOSI (maybe); Representative BOBBY SCOTT; Representative SHEILA JACKSON-LEE; and Representative EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON; for unanimous consent.

The last day to register is coming up soon. Every person who is not registered should check with your county registrar of voters and make sure you get registered. I want to encourage all Americans of every political persuasion to register and vote on election day, November 7. I particularly want to encourage ex-offenders who live in States that have restored their voting rights automatically to register and vote. These States are: California; Colorado; District of Columbia; Hawaii; Idaho; Illinois; Indiana; Kansas; Maine; Massachusetts; Michigan; Montana; New York; North Dakota; Ohio; Oregon; and Pennsylvania.

In our great representative democracy, we must not deny anyone who is eligible to vote; even those who have paid their debts to society not be given this fundamental right.

Remember. Every vote counts and your vote can make a difference. Register to vote by October 8 and vote on November 7.

Mr. Speaker, again, thanks to all of the Members who have come tonight.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ISAKSON). Under a previous order of the

House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MASCARA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MASCARA. Mr. Speaker, my wife Dolores and I have spoken on many occasions about the need to pass a prescription drug bill.

Some of our friends back in southwest Pennsylvania are affected by the lack of coverage. I come to the floor to express my deep concern regarding the continued lack of prescription drug coverage for many of our Nation's seniors.

I recently received a letter from a constituent who worked his entire life in a blue collar job. He retired on a small nest egg and his monthly Social Security check. Although his health is relatively good, he still spends over 40 percent of his income on health care costs, including a monthly prescription drug bill that is over \$400 a month. Unfortunately, he does not have prescription drug insurance and every month he is forced to cut back on food and medicine.

I assure my colleagues he is not alone. The AARP estimates that the average out-of-pocket prescription cost for seniors is \$349 per month. Of the nearly 40 million people on Medicare, one-third have no prescription drug coverage and 20 percent have coverage that does not last the full year.

In other words, millions of seniors are suffering in ways that are morally wrong, especially for such a wealthy and caring Nation.

How can we turn our backs on our seniors?

To paraphrase the late Senator Hubert Humphrey, the true moral test of a government is how it treats those that are in the dawn of life, our children, those who are in the twilight of life, our elderly, and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the disabled, and the less fortunate.

The elderly and the sick and the disabled should not have to make the terrible choice between food and medicine.

In that vein, last year I introduced H. Con. Res. 152, which called upon Congress to pass meaningful legislation that would give all seniors prescription drug coverage.

I am sure my colleagues here in the House are aware of the enormity of this issue. I am sure they know that upwards of 13 million seniors in this Nation are without any kind of prescription drug benefit and that over one-third of those currently on Medicare have no outpatient drug benefit.

Seniors are asking for a real drug benefit package. We need a reordering of priorities. During a period in our history when we are experiencing unprecedented budget surpluses, we need to include a prescription drug plan that will cover all seniors and it should be through the Medicare program, not through HMOs or private insurance companies who have failed miserably in the delivery of health care in this country.

So let us get together, let us work together and pass a piece of legislation that will help our seniors.

RURAL AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PETERSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about rural America.

Sometimes I think it is the forgotten part of America. Having lived my entire life there, I think it is the heart and soul of America. In my view, it is the part of this country where basic values are still important, where people believe they work hard for a day's pay and they are willing to do their fair share, they do not want a free lunch.

But as we look at the history in the last 8 years, and we will start with agriculture, in the times of unparalleled prosperity, the finest economy America has ever had, agriculture is struggling to even exist.

Family farms are leaving all parts of America. In my part of Pennsylvania, we have been watching that and they grow up into rag weed and other weeds for a few years and then they become brush and then they grow back to forests.

How could agriculture not flourish when our economy is so strong? We have had a Clinton-Gore administration that has not kept their promise to American farmers. They promised to open world markets. We have unparalleled ability in this country to produce food and fiber. But without world markets, there is no place to sell their products.

Farm products have never been cheaper. Agriculture products have never been at a lower value. And it is almost impossible for so many of our farmers to pay the bills. So agriculture has had a bad 8 years during Clinton-Gore, and I do not think we can stand 8 more. We need a leader in this country that will open our markets and help agriculture to be profitable once again.

Energy, the issue that is in the pocketbooks of all Americans. We are going to have a winter this year where the poorest of Americans will pay in some places twice as much for their home heating fuel as they paid last year.

How did that happen? How did we go from \$10 oil to \$35 oil in less than 18 months? It is because this leadership of the Clinton-Gore administration had no energy policy. They were drunk on cheap oil. They paid no attention to the oil patches of this country and the other energy resources of this country, and they allowed them to slowly go out of business.

During this administration, our dependency has gone from 36 percent to 56 percent oil not from our friends, not from our neighbors in many cases, but from unstable parts of the world who