

I urge my colleagues to make a Federal commitment to help provide coverage for the 45 million Americans across the country who deserve a guaranteed health insurance system because one in three Americans without health insurance is one too many, and these are the families that are out there looking for leadership in the House of Representatives.

#### PRESIDENTIAL VOTE FOR RESIDENTS OF PUERTO RICO

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

Mr. FORTÚÑO. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit will hear the case of Gregorio Igartua-de la Rosa, et al., vs. United States of America. This landmark case deals with the right of U.S. citizens who reside in Puerto Rico to vote for the President and Vice President of the United States.

The right to vote for those who govern us is a hallmark of the democratic principles on which our Nation was founded. Universal and equal suffrage is not only a core value of this Nation's political system, but has been recognized by the international community as a fundamental civil right. Despite this broad consensus in favor of the right to vote, U.S. citizens who reside in Puerto Rico have for 88 years been denied the right to vote for the U.S. Government officials who make and administer the Federal laws to which they are subject.

Take special heed of the fact that this discriminatory and undemocratic state of affairs does not just apply to Puerto Ricans, who are U.S. citizens by virtue of having been born in a U.S. territory, but to any U.S. citizen who becomes a resident of Puerto Rico.

To clearly illustrate this point, if President George Herbert Bush, our 41st President, had chosen to retire in Puerto Rico instead of Texas, he would not have been able to vote for his son, our current President, George W. Bush. If any of my colleagues who are listening to me today and who are my colleagues in the 109th Congress elected to move to Puerto Rico after they retire from Congress, they would not be able to vote for the President of the United States.

This separate and less-than-equal class of U.S. citizenship for residents of Puerto Rico has placed the 4 million U.S. citizens who are residents of Puerto Rico in an indefinite denial of equal national citizenship, particularly at a time of national sacrifice in the cause of global democracy and freedom, where Puerto Ricans have contributed equally, many even making the ultimate sacrifice.

It is not my intention to dictate what the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit will decide. As a lawyer, I have always been respectful of the separation between the legislative and judi-

cial branches of government, but I trust that the court will do us justice.

I invite all of my fellow Members of this 109th Congress to monitor the court's decision because, in so doing, they will be exposed to the fact that the central problem facing the citizens of Puerto Rico is that they have been denied their most basic rights of self-determination, not by court decisions, but by congressional inaction.

In 1899, the United States first entered into a treaty which provided that the civil rights and political status of the residents of Puerto Rico shall be determined by the Congress. A full century has passed, but Congress still has not implemented any political resolution procedure that will enable residents of Puerto Rico to determine their form of self-government under a non-colonial, non-territorial alternative.

As most of my colleagues know, I am a firm believer in statehood for Puerto Rico, but I fully respect the right of my countrymen to freely choose the status choice of their preference, be it as a State of the Union, an independent Republic, or as a Republic associated with the United States.

The important element has to be that all viable alternatives be non-colonial and non-territorial in nature. Until this process of free self-determination is completed, Congress will not have fully discharged its responsibility.

#### HONORING CRAIG WASHINGTON

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

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I am going to rise tonight to talk about a pressing problem of health care, but before I do, I want to associate my remarks with the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE), my colleague and neighbor, on Craig Washington.

Congressman Washington replaced Mickey Leland, if anybody could replace Mickey Leland, in this House; and I served as a State house member and State senator with Craig. I can only say and echo what the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) said, who I know saw him across from his bench many times, as he was both a brilliant lawyer and statesman, but also one of the most intelligent people I have known.

Again, I want to associate myself with those remarks and thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for doing that for Craig.

#### COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to talk about one of the most pressing problems facing the health care system in our country, the growing number of uninsured. Every year since 2000, an additional million Americans have joined the ranks of the uninsured.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation recently reported that the number of individuals without any health in-

surance in our country rose to 45 million this year. This is a problem that we literally cannot afford not to address.

In my hometown of Houston, we are proud to have the world-famed, world-class Texas Medical Center. Some of the most innovative and life-saving research and treatment developments are being discovered in our own backyard. The problem is that too many of our neighbors cannot access these life-saving treatments because they lack health insurance.

My State of Texas ranks number one in uninsured adults, with 31 percent of adult Texans living without health insurance. The statistics for the Houston area are just as troubling with more than 31 percent of our Harris County residents living without health insurance.

When a third of the State and county's population is without health insurance, I think it is safe to say this problem has reached crisis proportions. The increase in the number of uninsured is due, in part, to the changing nature of health care in our country.

Gone are the days when we could count on our employers to provide comprehensive health insurance for us and our families. With health insurance costs reaching \$10,000 per year, low-wage workers cannot fend for themselves.

With full-time minimum-wage workers bringing home roughly that much each year, they cannot spend the bulk of their earnings on health insurance, and many small businesses are finding that they simply cannot afford to purchase health insurance for their employees.

As a sideline, not only small businesses, but some of our larger businesses, whether it be General Motors or Shell Oil, talk about the disparities and how much they pay in industrialized countries like Europe and Japan for health insurance, and Canada, as compared to how much more they pay in our country.

It is no little surprise that today 80 percent of the uninsured in this country are gainfully employed. Unfortunately, my State of Texas also ranks number one in the percentage of uninsured working adults, with 27 percent of working Texans currently without health insurance.

□ 2045

This is a problem for all Americans as the uninsured often use emergency rooms as their primary source of medical care. In fact, a study of emergency room use in Harris County found that 57 percent of the diagnoses made in safety net hospital emergency rooms could have been treated in a physician's office or clinic. This increases health care costs for all Americans.

The uninsured are less likely to seek preventive health care and only get care once their problems reach emergency proportions. In fact, nearly 50 percent of uninsured adults have postponed seeking health care because they