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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. HARDY).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 15, 2016.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CRESENT HARDY 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.

NEW MEXICO'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. BEN RAY LUJÁN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BEN RAY LUJÁN of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, 3 years ago in my home State of New Mexico, our behavioral health system was thrown into crisis when the State froze payments to 15 New Mexico behavioral health providers, resulting in the eventual closure of some and replacement by 5 Arizona providers.

This transition and turmoil caused many New Mexicans to fall through the

cracks. As a result, too many families are hurting, too many people are suffering, and too many New Mexicans have been unable to access the care they need.

To date, 13 behavioral health providers have been exonerated of fraud, the charges leveled by the State of New Mexico as the reason to cut off funding. But the damage has been done. That is why, along with my colleagues, Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM in the House and Senators TOM UDALL and MARTIN HEINRICH, I have called for a Federal investigation into this unwarranted and reckless disruption of services to some of our most vulnerable citizens.

I am also working with the delegation on legislation to prevent something like this from ever happening again. I am working to strengthen a behavioral health system that is currently in shambles through legislation that will provide enhanced funding to States that prioritize behavioral health infrastructure, data, and access. If we want States to build and maintain strong behavioral health systems, then we must provide States with the necessary support.

During our many conversations with CMS on the crisis and its impact on New Mexicans, it has been clear there is a lack of meaningful data that is needed to hold policymakers accountable. It is unacceptable that after months and months of requesting State-provided data on the behavioral health system in New Mexico, CMS would simply determine this data to have "significant limitations."

A report from New Mexico's Legislative Finance Committee identified similar concerns. The report stated that the amount and quality of utilization data collected by the State of New Mexico had "deteriorated, leaving the question of whether enrollees are receiving more or less care."

Without access to meaningful data, we cannot determine how best to in-

vest to strengthen our behavioral health system, and we cannot possibly know if we are doing enough to ensure that the most vulnerable are being protected. What we do know is New Mexico's behavioral health system has been needlessly broken and that a full accounting is necessary to rebuild it and ensure that this will never happen again.

AMERICA MUST LEARN FROM VENEZUELA

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

Mr. BROOKS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, America has led the world culturally, scientifically, militarily, in freedom, and in many other ways, but if America does not stop its overspending and binge borrowing, then we are doomed to follow the footsteps of countries that chose to be financially irresponsible and are condemned to suffer the same dire consequences.

America need not speculate on our fate. Rather, America must learn from bad example countries, such as Venezuela, a socialist country that has already walked the financially irresponsible path America, unfortunately, is on.

Venezuela suffered the world's highest inflation rate, at 275 percent, in 2015. According to the International Monetary Fund, Venezuela's 2016 inflation rate will be 720 percent. Compare that to America, where 3 to 5 percent inflation causes concern.

To put Venezuela's inflation rate in everyday terms, let's apply it to things we buy. If a gallon of milk costs you \$3 today, it will cost you \$21 a year from now. If a pound of ground beef costs you \$4 today, it will cost you \$28 a year from now. A new car that costs you \$25,000 today will cost you \$175,000 a year from now.

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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But the damage and danger does not end with hyperinflation. The International Monetary Fund reports Venezuela is experiencing “widespread shortages of essential goods, including food, exacting a tragic toll.” Grocery stores have rows and rows of empty shelves. Venezuelans can’t find food to feed their families and form long lines outside of stores, hoping to buy whatever is in stock, from sugar to shampoo.

In response, Socialist President Maduro has ordered police to limit consumers to two shopping days per week at government-owned food stores. One frustrated Venezuelan shopper noted: “It is exasperating, but it is the only way to get food in Venezuela.”

Inflation and food shortages are only the tip of the iceberg. When supplies run out, when jobs can’t be found, violence erupts. In just 1 month in 2014, violent street riots killed 43 Venezuelans, blocking citizens from accessing food, transportation, and medical services. Occupied buildings were torched, injuring hundreds.

Venezuela is now one of the most violent countries in the world, with a chilling 82 homicides per 100,000 population, roughly 20 times worse than America’s homicide rate. Caracas, Venezuela’s capital, is the world’s most violent city, with a war-zone-like 120 murders per 100,000 citizens.

Venezuela’s insolvency has forced it to slash defense spending by 34 percent, putting Venezuelan citizens at even more heightened risk of loss of life.

Venezuela’s tragedy is not because it is a resource-poor country. To the contrary, Venezuela has more proven oil reserves than any country on Earth, even more than the entire oil-rich North American continent.

Venezuela’s collapse is because of two things. First, Venezuela decided to experiment with socialism, an economic model that has failed every country that has tried it. Second, Venezuela’s politicians were seduced by the lure of out-of-control spending financed by more borrowing and higher debt, the same temptation Washington politicians have succumbed to for decades.

America must learn from Venezuela and every other country that has been financially irresponsible. Mr. Speaker, time is running out. Washington must balance the budget before America’s debt burden spirals out of control. America cannot wait until our financial crisis is lost and 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. Mr. Speaker, America’s future depends on it.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS HURTS REAL PEOPLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New Mexico (Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM) for 5 minutes.

Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about a crisis in my home State of New Mexico, a crisis that has hurt real people who rely on the Medicaid program for lifesaving care.

Mr. Speaker, almost 3 years ago, the New Mexico Human Services Department, with the support of Governor Susana Martinez, claimed that it had credible allegations of fraud and suspended Medicaid payments to 15 behavioral health providers. This move wiped out the behavioral health system in a State where there are already significant provider shortages.

I want to take a minute to talk about what that really means. That means if you are a person who struggles with schizophrenia but manages it effectively with regular treatment, that regular treatment stops and you go back to square one. That means that if you are someone who has been diagnosed as bipolar, who has finally found a trusted provider, someone who has brought some stability and comfort to your care plan, you no longer have access to that person.

The loss of services is devastating, and I have seen it firsthand. There is a constituent who typically calls my office every day, multiple times a day. He calls my office. He calls other members of the delegation, the mayor’s office, and the chief of police. But from time to time the calls stop. They stop because this individual, who can be the most warm-hearted person I know, is in jail. He has a mental illness and a substance abuse problem and can be belligerent when he feels threatened, so he sometimes has run-ins with local law enforcement, and he ends up in jail because the system is failing him. He is not receiving the services he needs.

Our jails and sometimes our emergency rooms have become the de facto behavioral health system in our State because, when you don’t have the infrastructure to care for individuals with behavioral health issues, that is where people end up.

Mr. Speaker, I am, frankly, appalled that people in my home State are being treated in this way, but if you can believe it, it gets worse.

Last month, the New Mexico attorney general completed his review of the allegations and found that there did not appear to be a pattern of fraud. Thirteen of the 15 providers accused of fraud have now been cleared, and the people of New Mexico are left to wonder why, why a whole State’s behavioral health system was wiped out and a large population of vulnerable individuals left to fend for themselves. I think they deserve answers.

I have been working with my colleagues in the New Mexico delegation, pushing the Centers for Medicare and

Medicaid Services to exercise Federal oversight and ensure accountability since the payment suspension was announced. We have sent multiple letters, made phone calls, held in-person meetings with officials at every level at CMS and HHS, and I have to say I am extremely disappointed by their lack of engagement.

We sent another letter to CMS in February sharing the attorney general’s report and asking that they conduct a Federal investigation, and we are going to continue pushing for accountability and working to make sure this never happens again.

I plan to introduce legislation that would ensure network adequacy and continuity of care in a State’s Medicaid program, and I know my colleagues have legislation in the works as well.

Mr. Speaker, I have spent my entire career fighting for vulnerable New Mexicans, people who are voiceless in the political process. It would be easy to ignore them, as so many have done, because they are too busy struggling to survive to engage in the political process. It would be easy, but it would be wrong.

This is the most egregious abuse of power I have seen in my decades of government service, and I will not sit idly by while the most vulnerable among us suffer. We must have action. We must have accountability.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in calling for a long overdue Federal investigation of the behavioral health provider suspension in New Mexico.

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND THE FARC

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak against the ongoing negotiations in Havana between the Government of Colombia and the terrorist group known as the FARC.

This draft agreement contains alarming provisions that could empower the ringleaders of the world’s largest cocaine cartel and undermine America’s security interests in the region.

It would also make American taxpayers foot the bill, through their tax dollars, in support of this bad agreement that effectively whitewashes human rights abuses while the administration of President Obama seeks more than \$70 million to help implement this proposal.

This agreement diminishes the FARC’s responsibility for its role in drug trafficking as well as the thousands of murders and kidnappings and other innumerable crimes that the FARC has perpetrated against the Colombian people by allowing the soldiers and the leaders of the FARC to avoid any jail time for all of those crimes.

To make matters worse, this agreement creates an equivalency between