

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—Monday, October 25, 1999

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. MORELLA).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
October 25, 1999.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CONSTANCE A. MORELLA to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. McDevitt, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate had passed with an amendment in which the concurrence of the House is requested, a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 441. An act to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act with respect to the requirements for the admission of non-immigrant nurses who will practice in health professional shortage areas.

The message also announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 1692. An act to amend title 18, United States Code, to ban partial-birth abortions.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

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

URGING REJECTION OF H.R. 2260, PAIN RELIEF PROMOTION ACT

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, on Wednesday the House will consider H.R. 2260, called the Pain Relief Promotion Act. The legislation is seriously misnamed and is designed simply to undercut Oregon's death with dignity law. I find it ironic, because no-

body outside the Beltway is interested in criminalizing doctors' decisions that deal with some of the most profound and difficult that they will ever make. In fact, every day in America we see instances where life support is withdrawn; every day in America drugs are administered to alleviate pain which actually hasten the onset of death; every day in America some drugs are withheld which cause a shock to the system and in turn cause death; every day in America there are some very tragic incidents where people are driven to desperate acts because they cannot control their situation, often painful and traumatic for their families, occasionally involving actual suicide. Most of America looks the other way.

My State of Oregon has taken the lead to try and provide a framework for these end-of-life decisions. Oregon voters have not once but twice approved a thoughtful approach to give patients, their doctors and families more control under these most difficult of circumstances. Despite the dire predictions of a tidal wave of assisted suicide, the evidence suggests that when people actually have control in these difficult situations, the knowledge that they have such control means that they are less likely to use assisted suicide. In fact, last year it appears that there were only 15 cases in Oregon.

But with the legislation that is proposed under H.R. 2260, doctors are going to have to fear being second-guessed by prosecutors, police and non-medical drug enforcement bureaucrats on a case-by-case basis, for the very initial section of that bill points out that prescribing pain medication can often hasten death. But that is okay under this bill, as long as the intent is pure. In essence, it means that the doctors are going to be caught looking over their shoulders, having each and every one of their decisions subject to second-guessing and potentially subjected to life in prison if the intent appears in the judgment of others to be wrong.

This is another sad example of where politicians are out of step with Americans on key personal health issues. I find of great interest one other area that sort of indicates where we are going. The medical use of marijuana was approved by eight States before last year. Six other States had their voters approve it and the District of Columbia. Citizens are indicating that they want more freedom to have pain managed and have personal control. I think it would be sad if this Congress

decided to penalize the one State that is trying not to sweep it under the rug but provide a framework for making these decisions.

I strongly urge my colleagues to make a careful examination of H.R. 2260. They will find why the Oregon Medical Association, the associations of eight other States, the American Nurses Association and the American Academy of Family Physicians have all urged its rejection. If you want to outlaw assisted suicide, go ahead and do it if you must, but certainly we should not subject our physicians to criminalization of their basic medical decisions.

THE CLOCK IS TICKING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Madam Speaker, there are only 67 days left before we ring in the new year. Billions of people around the world will start to prepare to celebrate the first day of the year 2000 and, of course, I as many of my colleagues look forward to this day also. But this afternoon I am concerned about this next year with what all of us know as the Y2K problem, or millennium bug, the inability of many computer systems to process dates correctly beyond December 31, 1999. The problem results from computers programmed to process and use only the last two digits for the year field.

Madam Speaker, I am confident that Americans are well prepared and well ahead of the game when it comes to being ready for any possible glitches resulting from the Y2K. Congress has directed the Federal Government to go through billions and billions of lines of computer codes in order to make computers Y2K compliant. It is also Congress that has worked hand in hand with State and local governments to ensure that they have the necessary tools to function properly.

Congress, led by the majority here, is helping the private sector when it comes to the Y2K problem. We fought hard and have signed into law the Small Business Year 2000 Readiness Act, which directs the Small Business Administration to establish a loan guarantee program to address Y2K problems for small businesses. And it was, of course, this Republican Congress which successfully fought and

□ 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.

passed the Year 2000 Readiness and Responsibility Act, setting limits on lawsuits against businesses and individuals for Y2K failures. But, Madam Speaker, my concerns are whether the rest of the world is ready.

Hearings within the last several weeks held in both the House and the Senate have raised some serious concerns. Many nations have done little, if anything, to combat the Y2K bug. These nations lack both the expertise and the funds to upgrade and convert their computer systems. Take, for example, the government of Indonesia, which is preparing for the possible Y2K malfunctions. Their National Electricity Board strategy is to watch what happens at midnight on January 1 in Australia and New Zealand, to use those 6 hours to develop and implement suddenly their Y2K plans. Now, this would be comical if it were not so serious and disturbing.

The worldwide ramifications of Y2K disturbances, of course, can have a domino effect. It is just not enough that the United States is prepared. Potential disruptions abroad caused by Y2K problems would impact millions of Americans who are living abroad, or who are traveling overseas. Though the Central Intelligence Agency is confident that the Y2K computer failures overseas will not lead to accidental launch of ballistic missiles by any country, according to the testimony by the Central Intelligence Agency before the House Committee on International Affairs last week, nuclear power plants in nations such as Russia and the Ukraine could be susceptible to year 2000 malfunctions resulting from power grid failures.

Now, this is according to testimony presented by Lawrence Gershwin, National Intelligence Officer for Science and Technology for the CIA, and this is what he said, "In the worst case this could cause a meltdown and in some cases an accompanying release of radioactive fission gases." Furthermore, according to the CIA, Soviet power plants cannot even be tested for Y2K compliancy "given the age of the computer system and the fact that many of the original manufacturers have all gone out of business."

If the threat of another Chernobyl-like meltdown is not disturbing enough according to the CIA, there still remains the potential for Russia to misinterpret early warning data of ballistic missile launches resulting from the Y2K problem. That means during an international political crisis where tensions are already heightened, the Russians may misinterpret their missile data, leading them to believe and possibly to respond.

As a result, I am pleased to say the United States and Russia have set up a joint program to share information on their missile and space launches to prevent any misunderstanding resulting from any Y2K malfunctions.

I will not even begin in this short amount of time, Madam Speaker, to discuss all the possible problems with other countries not bringing their Y2K problem into compliance dealing with foreign energy and of course financial markets. I encourage other nations to expedite their conversions and look to the United States for leadership.

Madam Speaker, I encourage other nations to expedite their Y2K conversions before time runs out. Our Y2K compliance and success is not only contingent on the fact that this nation's computer and information systems function properly and smoothly, but also on the fact that we not feel side effects from disruptions in other countries.

REPUBLICAN CONGRESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER. Madam Speaker, I have the privilege of representing one of America's most diverse Congressional districts, representing the South Side of Chicago and the South Bushes, Cook and Will Counties, bedroom communities as well as farm towns and corn fields. When you represent such a diverse district as city and suburbs and country, you learn to listen. You listen to the common message. One common message that we are hearing from back home is that we should be working together to solve the challenges that we face. As I look back as one of those who was elected in 1994 to come to Washington to change how Washington works, I am proud to say we have listened to that message and we have held together and we have held firm even those who said that we should not be doing what we are doing, those who opposed our efforts to balance the budget and cut taxes for the middle class, to reform the welfare system and also to restructure the IRS.

I am proud to say in the last 4½ years, this Republican Congress has made a big difference. Balancing the budget for the first time in 28 years, cutting taxes for the middle class for the first time in 16 years, reforming our welfare system for the first time in a generation, and for the first time ever, taming the tax collector by restructuring the IRS. Those are big accomplishments and much appreciated by the folks back home in Illinois but they tell me that's history now, what are you going to do next? They ask us to respond to the questions, the common concerns that we are often asked.

While Republicans are committed to strengthening our schools and strengthening Medicare and Social Security and paying down the national debt and, of course, lowering the tax burden, we also want to respond to some of those big concerns and big

questions that I hear, whether at the union hall or the VFW, the Chamber of Commerce or down at a coffee shop on Main Street or a local grain elevator. That is one of those questions that the first question I often hear is a pretty basic one and, that is, when are you folks in Washington going to stop raiding the Social Security trust fund, when are you going to stop dipping into Social Security and spending Social Security on other things?

I am proud to say, Madam Speaker, that the Republicans in this Congress have made a commitment that for the first time since the 1960s when LBJ, President Johnson, began a bad habit that is hard to break in Washington, we are walling off the Social Security trust fund. This year is the first year that our budget has been balanced without dipping into Social Security. We want to continue that. That is why I am proud to say the Congressional Budget Office on September 30 of this year stated in a letter to Speaker HASTERT that the Republican balanced budget does not spend one dime of the Social Security trust fund. We are committed to stopping the raid on the Social Security trust fund.

I would also point out that with the Social Security Medicare lockbox that Republicans are proposing, we set aside \$200 billion more for Social Security and Medicare than the President's budget alone.

I would also point out, Madam Speaker, that we are responding to another important question that we hear from folks back home in the south side of Chicago and the south suburbs, and that is how come nobody ever talks about the national debt, how come no one ever talks about the need to pay down that national debt that ran up all those years that Washington had deficit spending? I am proud to say that last year we paid down \$50 billion of the national debt, this year we are going to pay down a hundred billion dollars, and under the Republican budget plan we paid down almost \$2.2 trillion of the national debt, over two-thirds of our national debt over the next 10 years.

Madam Speaker, the third question that I often hear back home is when are we going to do something about taxes. People tell me their taxes are too high, they are too complicated, they are unfair. They are frustrated that our tax burden on American today is at its highest level in peace time history. Forty percent of the average family's income goes to government. In fact, 21 percent of our gross domestic product, 21 percent of our economy, goes to Federal Government and taxes, and that is too high.

We passed earlier this year a measure to address the need to lower taxes, particularly for the middle class, and we had legislation which would have eliminated the marriage tax penalty