

## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—Tuesday, February 23, 1999

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

### DESIGNATION OF THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,  
February 23, 1999.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CLIFF STEARNS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

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

### 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 Puerto Rico (Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ) for 5 minutes.

### WHY ARE CITIZENS IN THE TERRITORIES DENIED WHAT ALL OTHER CITIZENS ARE GUARANTEED?

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand before you as we return from the district work session. The impeachment trial is officially behind us, and the Nation is ready for congressional action. The American people expect us all to work together in a spirit of cooperation and bipartisan so that we can renew national confidence for a strong and unified America. It is now time to set aside the differences that have divided us along party lines and work together for the good of the country.

Yesterday we commemorated George Washington's birthday, an everlasting model of leadership and achievement, 200 years ago, as our first President ably led the United States from revolution into democracy.

Today, there are many issues that claim congressional attention for immediate action, including specific improvements for Social Security, education, greater access to health care,

employment, taxes, the environment and economic opportunity and prosperity.

Our Nation faces many challenges on the eve of the millennium, but inherent in those challenges are a great many opportunities. Our Nation has flourished during this decade and right now, as we face the new millennium, the most appropriate message we can provide to all Americans is to express our commitment to the fundamental values of our democracy.

As new initiatives to benefit American citizens, immigrants and the children of undocumented immigrants in the country are developed and implemented, I do not see the same concern for the 3.8 million United States citizens in Puerto Rico. The Americans in the island continue to be neglected and discriminated against by being barred from equitable participation in the most fundamental rights of citizenship, the right to vote and the right to representation, not to mention participation in the safety net programs that provide basic relief to the neediest in the Nation, the disadvantaged, the aged, the handicapped and the children.

It is distressing to behold that, by virtue of living in a territory, some American citizens do not have the same rights and benefits as all other Americans in the Nation. Why are citizens in the territories denied what all other citizens are guaranteed? Are there two different kinds of citizenship in our Nation, the example of democracy?

What is even more discouraging is that not only the great expectations for future success and equal participation do not apply to Puerto Ricans in the islands but that residents in the island will continue to lag further and further behind as they are fenced out from the rest of the Nation.

Throughout my political life, I have fought to provide equality for the United States citizens in Puerto Rico and I wonder how our Nation can continue to maintain separate but equal policies similar to the discriminatory policies that were the force that brought about the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

I am compelled to provide a voice for the thousands of low income, disadvantaged, the handicapped, elderly and children who are deprived of the most basic safety net programs that all other Americans and immigrants can participate in the 50 States of the Union. It is terrible to consider that our Nation's commitment to equality

in health does not extend to the American citizens in Puerto Rico or in Guam or in the Virgin Islands and thus deprives us of the necessary medical care that may prove the difference between life and death by virtue of the fact that we reside in a territory. Health discrimination is an abomination.

This includes Medicaid, for which Puerto Rico, contrary to the policy for all other States, receives a block grant capped this year at \$171.5 million. I am also talking about our exclusion from supplemental security income, the supplemental income that ensures blind, disadvantaged and handicapped individuals have income protection. I am also talking about Medicare and how reimbursement for providers has been set at a lower rate despite the fact that costs are comparable to the provision of services in many States.

Unfortunately, as the Nation benefits from the tremendous budget surplus, the Americans in the territory will also be excluded from many of the most significant policy initiatives presented this session.

The \$500 billion Social Security enhancement proposed by the Universal Savings Accounts, commonly referred to as the USA accounts, will not apply to the citizens in the island, even though we contribute to Social Security equally as all other citizens. What is more, money from our contributions to the Social Security funds will be used to manage and administer the program which will be denied to us.

But this initiative is just one of the many new proposals that will not apply to the nearly 4 million U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico. Many other proposals, ranging from welfare to work, to building new schools, to providing incentives to workers and even the empowerment zones and the new market initiatives that aim to simulate the economic, will bypass us in the next century. We will not have the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the economy nor participate in the tax credits that are being proposed.

Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to bring these matters to your attention and to the attention of all my colleagues in Congress, because our Nation must do something to ensure that the American citizens in Puerto Rico are equal Americans. How can our Nation stand as a model for the world when it maintains a policy of discrimination, a policy of economic and political apartheid?

□ 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.