

to defend democracy throughout the world, but we are not good enough to have the same rights, nor good enough to receive the same benefits as all other American citizens in the 50 States. Are our sacrifices worth any less by virtue of living in a territory?

The bottom line is, can the United States continue to support a policy of discrimination in the Federal programs that are designed to protect our Nation's most needed citizens, be it in health, housing and economic prosperity?

A superficial mention of the terrorist attack dated 45 years ago only detracts attention from the real issues and should not be allowed to take the place of the in-depth discussions that the Nation should now be engaged in, including how and when to eliminate discrimination.

I urge you, Mr. Speaker, and I urge all of my colleagues to take the necessary steps to ensure that American citizens of Puerto Rico and the territories be recognized as equals and that we be granted equal consideration in all Federal programs together with our fellow citizens in the 50 States. Not only have we earned that right, but not to do so violates the most basic tenets of our democratic system which is based on the principle of equal rights to all. We cannot focus our attention on what a terrorist chooses to do and ignore the responsibility of Congress to direct a stop to discrimination. We must focus in our commitment to and the defense of our cherished American values.

THE INDEPENDENT COUNSEL STATUTE

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

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, as Congress this week begins the debate on reinstating the independent counsel law, I think, as a student of history, it is interesting to review what has taken place regarding that law.

Regarding congressional action on that matter certain questions are raised:

Should an administration investigate itself?

Should the alleged wrongdoing of a major administration official be left to the attorney general or to a special counsel or an independent counsel?

Those are the questions that are now being asked as we face the expiration of the current independent counsel law.

Some say the problem is the law, some say the problem is the independent counsel. It is interesting to note, if we review history, what goes around comes around both in law and also in politics. A brief review of the independent counsel law, if folks would

just take a moment to do that, reveals that we are about to return to where we started if the independent counsel law is not renewed.

Mr. Speaker, even in 1972, President Nixon suggested the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate the Watergate scandal. As we know from history, President Nixon in 1973 also ordered the Attorney General to fire the Watergate special prosecutor. Those actions led Congress and President Carter to enact in 1973 an Ethics in Government Act. All totaled, the special prosecutor law was invoked 11 times from 1978 to 1982 with three appointments of special prosecutors.

In 1983, that law was revised and renewed for another 5 years. In 1987, with the Iran-Contra statute, when it came up for reauthorization, and although it gave great heartburn, President Reagan in December of 1987 signed the reimplementing bill into law. With three investigations during the Bush administration, President Bush let the statute expire in 1992.

With a new administration and new scandals, the Attorney General, Janet Reno, under the general law authority, appointed Robert Fisk as a special counsel, not an independent counsel, but under her general authority to investigate Whitewater, and she initiated that action on June 30, 1994.

Vowing to head up an administration with the highest ethical standards, President Bill Clinton took the step of being the first President since Carter to endorse the institution of an independent counsel law. On July 1, 1994, President Clinton signed the reauthorization bill and commented about the law, and let me quote from the President: "a foundation stone for trust between the government and our citizens." He dismissed charges that it had been, and I quote, "a tool of partisan attack and a waste of taxpayer funds." Instead, he said the statute was, and let me quote, "has been in the past and is today a force for government integrity and public confidence," end quote.

The Attorney General spoke before Congress, the same Attorney General who will be having the Department of Justice advocate the end of the independent counsel law, and stressed the government's and her own support for the bill, and let me quote what she said:

As a vehicle to further the public's perception of fairness and thoroughness, and to avert even the most subtle influence of what may appear in an investigation of highly-placed executive officials.

□ 1100

How interesting it is how the law comes around and goes around. How interesting it is that today the shoe is on the other foot. The administration is about to advocate the abolition of the Independent Counsel law. I think we just need to take a few minutes and

look at history and see how people have taken various stands, depending on whose ox is getting gored.

I like to reflect on history, and I think this is a little lesson in history, particularly as it deals with the appointment of an Independent Counsel.

MEDICARE REFORM: DO NOT TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT

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

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, the National Commission on the Future of Medicare will wrap up its work sometime this month. The Commission members were given the task of putting Medicare on solid financial footing. Unfortunately, they want to save Medicare by privatizing it.

Under the Commission proposal, Medicare would no longer pay directly for health care services. Instead, it would provide each senior with a voucher good for part of the premium for private coverage. Medicare beneficiaries could use this voucher to buy into the fee-for-service plan sponsored by the Federal Government, so-called traditional Medicare, or join a private plan.

The Commission proposal creates a system of health coverage, but it abandons the principles of comprehensiveness and egalitarianism that make Medicare such a valuable national program, an essential national service for America's elderly.

Today the Medicare program is income-blind. All seniors have access to this same level of care. The Commission proposal markets a class-based health care system of two-tiered health care: excellent care for the affluent, only barely adequate or worse health care for the less well off.

The idea that vouchers would empower seniors to choose a health plan that best suits their needs is a myth. The reality is that they will be forced to accept whatever health care plan that they can afford. Medicare beneficiaries have been able to enroll in private managed care plans for sometime now, and their experience, unfortunately, does not bode well for a full-fledged privatization effort.

Most managed care plans are for profit. The theory that they can sustain significantly lower costs than traditional Medicare simply is not panning out. Because managed care plans are profit-driven, they do not tough it out when those profits are not so forthcoming. We learned that the hard way last year, when 96 HMOs deserted more than 400,000 seniors because the business did not meet their profit objectives.

Before the Medicare program was launched in 1965, private insurance was