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House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. JOHNSON of Illinois).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
June 25, 2002.

I hereby appoint the Honorable TIMOTHY V. JOHNSON 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 23, 2002, 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 not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

TRIBUTE TO DAVID McLEAN WALTERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 1 minute.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to pay tribute to David McLean Walters, our former ambassador to the Vatican as he celebrates his 85th birthday.

As an ambassador, Mr. Walters served our country, but as patriarch of Miami Children's Hospital, he has impacted our Nation's future.

Ambassador Walter's vision of creating a facility that provides top pediatric care for the children of south Florida has blossomed and become a reality through his tireless efforts over the past 30 years. The tragic loss of the ambassador's granddaughter to leukemia served as his impetus for expanding a small local hospital. But what began as a humble idea has developed into one of the top children's medical facilities in the country, earning the title ''Pinnacle of Pediatrics.''

Today, Miami Children's Hospital diagnoses and treats thousands of suffering children, providing them with the best possible care.

Ambassador Walters' accomplishments have assured a brighter future for our children, and, indeed, our Nation.

MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, this morning once again, as I have so many times, I take to the floor to talk about the need for a Medicare prescription drug benefit, and I was hoping this week that I would be able to thank my Republican colleagues for finally bringing up some legislation that would at least make an attempt to address the prescription drug issue. I read, though, today in both Congress Daily as well as in The New York Times that there is a real possibility that there may be a delay in the House drug bill action until July.

Well, let me say once again, Mr. Speaker, how extremely disappointed I am to see that the Republicans, the Republican leadership in the House, continue to fiddle with this very important issue. They promised that they were going to bring up a prescription drug bill before the Memorial Day recess, then they promised they were going to bring up a prescription drug bill before the July 4th recess.

Now it seems there is a real possibility they are not going to bring it up. I hope they do, even though I think they have a terrible bill that will not accomplish anything for the American people or for America's seniors. At least if we have the opportunity to have a debate on the floor, it allows us as Democrats to bring up our substitute bill, which is a real Medicare prescription drug benefit that would lower prices for seniors.

Now, it is interesting to see why the Republicans may be having trouble bringing up their bill. I have said over and over again that the problem with the Republican proposal is it is not Medicare, it does not guarantee any benefits. What it does is throw money to private insurance companies in the hope that they will provide some sort of benefit for seniors that, unfortunately, does not have any guarantee about the scope of coverage or what the premium would be or whether there would be any benefit at all, because we know the private insurance companies say they probably will not offer this coverage.

The other problem that the Republicans have is that they do not address the issue of price at all. They have language in their bill that says that the administrator of the program cannot interfere with price in any way. Well, that seems to be the problem. That is why they are having trouble bringing up their bill.

If you look in Congress Daily today, it mentions the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT), who says that he wants to push for inclusion of language allowing fewer restrictions on bringing FDA-approved drugs back into the country, known as reimportation.

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Well, Democrats have been saying for a long time that we should allow reimportation of drugs, because that is the way of bringing costs down. But the Republicans do not want to do that. When I tried to offer an amendment that would accomplish that in the Committee on Energy and Commerce the other night, they voted against it. The gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) goes on to say, or his spokesman I should say, ''If we do not address the cost comparison, it is like building a house without a solid foundation,'' the spokeswoman said for Mr. GUTKNECHT. So that means they are concerned about costs.

Once again, some of the Republicans seem to be unwilling to vote for this Republican bill because it does not have any cost containment. It does not control price the way the Democratic bill, in fact, would.

In fact, further on in Congress Daily it says, ''Representative JACK KINGSTON and JO ANN EMERSON plan to discuss the issue of cost at a press conference today and announce a new congressional caucus to deal with drug costs.''

Once again, the problem the Republicans have, no Medicare benefit, no real benefit at all, and no effort to address the issue of cost. That is why they are running into problems.

Today's New York Times is about the Family USA study announced yesterday that talks about how the costs of prescription drugs are going up way out of proportion to the cost of inflation. It says in the article that one conservative Republican, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS), has indicated that he will vote against the Republican bill; and it goes on to say that one of the Republicans, the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. ISTOOK), has expressed concern about the effects on pharmacies, because, as we know, the chain drugstores and retail pharmacies oppose the Republican bill, and the reason they do so is because they do not think it is going to provide any benefit and will make it harder for them to operate and provide pharmacy benefits.

So let me say I understand full well why the Republicans are having a problem bringing up their bill, because it does not deal with price, it does not address the issue of price, it is forbidden to deal with the issue of price. That is why they have the noninterference language. It does not provide a benefit.

But they should still bring it up and allow the opportunity for us to debate the bill and bring up our Democratic substitute, which is a good bill and could be considered and passed here and go over to the Senate and become law. So the fact they are having problems with their legislation does not mean that they should postpone another week or two or three or a month or who knows how long between now and November before the end of this session, because we need to address this issue. And if there are faults in their legislation, bring it to the floor and we will expose those faults and come up with a better bill, rather than just saying we are going to delay and not have an opportunity to address this issue, which is what the Republican leadership has done so far.

AGRICULTURE SUBSIDY CONCERNS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, one challenge that we have in the U.S. House of Representatives, in Congress, is the overzealousness to spend more money. Of course, the money has to come from taxpayers throughout the United States that pay taxes into the Federal system.

What many politicians have discovered is that the more programs they start and the more money they spend, the more popular they are back home and the greater the likelihood they are going to be reelected. So members of congress take new pork-barrel projects home and end up on the front pages of the paper or on television: ''Congressman such-and-such is giving you more government services.'' I think we have to remind ourselves that all of this money comes from taxpayers.

I see a lot of young people, Mr. Speaker, in the gallery; and they are the generation at risk. As we increase spending, as we increase borrowing, what we are doing in effect is increasing the mortgage, the debt, that these young citizens are going to have to pay off some day, and probably increasing the likelihood that their taxes are going to have to continue to rise as the size of government gets larger and larger.

One concern that I have that has been in a lot of the media and newspapers is the generosity of the farm bill that was passed in terms of giving million-dollar payments to many of the very, very large farmers in the United States. I met with Senator GRASSLEY last week, and we are trying to strategize how we can change that farm bill so that we have some kind of a cap, some kind of a limit on those exceptionally large million-dollar-plus payments that are going to the superlarge landowners in this country. We are looking now at the appropriation bills and language we might put in the appropriation bills.

Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, this is somewhat complicated, so we have sort of hoodwinked a lot of the American people saying, there are limits on the price support that farmers can receive. But there is a loophole. That loophole is called ''generic certificates,'' and that means that when you reach the limit on monetary price supports, you can still forfeit the grain back to the government, and the government will give you a certificate that a farmer can exchange for money, because the limits are on cash payments to farmers and certificates are not considered a cash payment. That ends up being a loophole, allowing the very large farmers to get millions of dollars in price support benefits.

Mr. Speaker, we have a system in Congress where seniority tends to rise you to the top in terms of being a committee chairman. Right now agriculture is pretty much dominated in terms of leadership by members from Texas. We have the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture from Texas; we have the ranking member of that committee, that is the top ranking Democrat, from Texas. Also the chairman of the Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee for Agriculture is from Texas.

When it turns out that Texas is one of the top States in the Nation that uses this generic certificate, if you will, loophole, then we see great political pressure to continue that loophole provision. I am in hopes there can be a better understanding by the American people, by this Congress, of what the loophole is; and that it is reasonable to set limits on price support payments.

Our public policy should be to help and hopefully strengthen the traditional family farm in this country. That family farms might be 500 or 5,000 acres, but it is not the 80,000-acre farms.

Mr. Speaker, I would conclude by saying I am hopeful we can, in our appropriation bill, come up with some language to have an effective limitation on these exceptionally large payments that go to the exceptionally large farmers.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair must remind Members that references to persons in the gallery are prohibited by clause 7 of rule XVII.

MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG COVERAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to follow up on the comments of my friend, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE), about the prescription drug industry, the unwillingness of this Congress, which is so captured by corporate prescription drug company special interests and the Republican leadership ties to those large corporate drug company interests, and why this Congress will not move forward on providing a prescription drug benefit inside America for America's seniors and doing something about the outrageous price scheme that prescription drug companies inflict on this country.