

two men face potentially fines, jail time, and loss of their retirement benefits for exercising a right guaranteed under the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, this is wrong. I stand with Principal Lay and Athletic Director Freeman to their right granted under our Constitution in Amendment 1 to freely exercise their religion and specifically to pray.

Mr. Speaker, I pray that we return to a time when our constitutional right to pray is honored, recognized, and, at the very least, not criminalized.

DANGEROUS WORDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, this body today has voted by a majority to disapprove of JOE WILSON's comment. It is important to always take things in context. And, in reviewing the context, we have to notice that we had a President of the United States for whom we pray as Christians. We're supposed to do that—and we do. And we respect the office. And he was not happy with the way things were going with regard to his health care proposal.

The American people seemed to have made pretty clear through August this was not something they wanted. So the President basically demanded to come into this House. Well, he can't come unless he's invited—an invited guest. So an invitation was issued because he wanted to come speak. And he did.

Now there are rules about proper decorum in here, whether you're an invited guest or whether you are a Member of Congress. But, as Members, this is where our voters voted to send us. So we're supposed to be here.

The President came in. And the truth is, I really had mixed emotions because I knew that on Monday the President had taken a shot and actually used the L word. He had said that—actually, his words were, "You've heard the lies. I've got a question for all those folks. What are you going to do? What's your answer? What's your solution? And, you know, what? They don't have one."

Well, it was not appropriate to say that we were lying about the proposal when we have taken the only proposal that we have, H.R. 3200, and read from it, and then we're told we're lying about the content and we have no solutions.

Well, I would never say the President was lying when he said no solutions because that would infer that he knew that what he said was not true. Whoever put that line in his teleprompter should know that it's not true, but I won't attach that to the President.

But you look at the speech. We heard the speech. He said, "Instead of honest debate, we've seen scare tactics." We're dishonest because we take the thousand-page bill and read from it, and that's dishonest? That's scare tactics?

We're told by the President in our House that we're trying to score short-

term political points, even if it robs the country. Now we're robbing the country, trying to score short-term points.

He goes on. That's not enough to come into somebody else's house as an invited guest, and he talks about all the misinformation. So we're spreading misinformation, he says.

He goes on, the very next paragraph, he's talking about our bogus claims spread by those who want to kill. Now we're robbers and killers. And then he laps at the prominent politicians for being cynical and irresponsible. And, yes, immediately before JOE WILSON spoke, he used the L word, said, It's a lie, plain and simple.

Those are dangerous words to be saying things like that and to come in and be poisoning this well. He had poisoned the American people, talking about lies on Monday. He comes in here and talked about a lie here. He goes on to say we're making wild claims. These were his words. And then talks about our demagoguery and our distortion, talks about our tall tales.

Then, a surprise. He says, When facts and reason are thrown overboard, we can no longer even engage in a civil conversation. He talks about acrimony. And that's the context of JOE WILSON's comments.

That's no way to act, Mr. Speaker, when you're invited into somebody else's house and you come in and use all these words to slander them. That wasn't being very nice.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. NEUGEBAUER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. NEUGEBAUER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

SANTA ROSA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT SCHOOL PRAYER CASE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. I want to add to the comments of my colleagues to briefly discuss a court case that may have ramifications for the constitutional rights of religious expression of all Americans.

On August 27, 2008, the ACLU filed a complaint against the Santa Rosa County School Board in Florida, seeking to enjoin the parties from endorsing and engaging in religious activities, including prayer.

The school district consented to an agreement prohibiting prayer at school-sponsored events. The school district then entered into a broader agreement prohibiting all employees from engaging in prayer or religious activities.

Michelle Winkler, a clerical assistant in the Santa Rosa County School District, attended a privately funded event

to honor non-instructional employees in the school district. She asked her husband, who's not an employee of the district, to read a prayer that she had written, and was charged with civil contempt of court.

Pace High School Principal Frank Lay and Athletic Director Robert Freeman were charged with criminal contempt for a prayer offered at a luncheon to honor private contributors to the school's athletic program. There were no students present at either of these two events.

In 2003, the Secretary of the Department of Education issued "Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public and Elementary and Secondary Schools." These guidelines state that public school officials must be neutral in their treatment of religion, showing neither favoritism nor hostility.

The Supreme Court held that "there is a crucial difference between government speech endorsing religion, which the establishment clause forbids, and private speech endorsing religion, which the free speech and free exercise clauses protect."

The court also held that "private religious speech, far from being a First Amendment orphan, is as fully protected under the free speech clause as secular private expression."

In its Santa Fe ruling, the court explained that not all religious speech that occurs in public schools or at school-sponsored events is speech attributable to the government. Additionally, the court held that "the proposition that schools do not endorse everything they fail to censor is not complicated."

Although schools may not direct or endorse religious activities, students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

Yes, teachers and administrators, while acting in their official capacity, may not encourage, discourage, or participate in prayer with students. However, teachers may take part in religious activities before or after school or during lunch, as the context makes clear they are not acting in an official capacity.

The circumstances involved in this case have unmasked the agenda of the ACLU. Students were not present in either event, yet contempt charges were brought against all parties. Mrs. Winkler was targeted for a prayer that her husband read, even though he was not an employee of the school district.

Mr. Lay and Mr. Freeman face penalties of 6 months in jail and loss of their retirement benefits for an innocent prayer said before a meal at which no students were present.

America was founded on the principle of religious liberty, and the constitutional protection of this right does not stop when they enter the doors of our public schools.

The ACLU is targeting small counties, towns, and school districts, not in an effort to protect against establishment clause violations, but to stifle religious expression.

As John F. Kennedy said during his inaugural address, “The trumpet summons us again to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle.” He spoke of foreign enemies who posed a threat to our Nation’s freedoms, but this case shows that this threat has become a reality here at home.

THE MAJORITY MAKERS: WHAT WE DID ON OUR SUMMER VACATIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. YARMUTH) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. YARMUTH. Mr. Speaker, it’s a great honor to be here tonight to join with at least one of my colleagues from the class of 2006, the Majority Makers, to discuss the theme: What we did on our summer vacations.

As everyone knows, it has been a very fascinating few months, as we in Congress and people throughout the country have talked about how we can solve one of the great problems that this country has been trying to deal with for generations, and that is a health care system that serves every one of its citizens.

I, like all of my colleagues in the House, have spent the greater part of August talking with my constituents. We have had town hall meetings, we have had telephone town hall meetings, we’ve met with groups, we’ve met with providers, we’ve met with individual citizens to talk about the problems facing Americans—the challenge of finding quality, affordable health care for every citizen.

I think what was most revealing to me as I spent all of this time talking about health care with my constituents is how receptive they were and are to comprehensive health care reform once they understand, first of all, the need for reform; secondly, the direct benefit to them and their families of the reform that we’re proposing in the House; and, third, the relevance of health care to our economic future.

□ 1845

President Obama, in this Chamber last Wednesday night, discussed those very themes, and he did it in a very compelling way. I think anyone who watched that speech would have to have left it feeling, one, we can wait no longer to make major reforms in our health care system, that the trajectory that we’re on now is an unsustainable one, that we are facing extraordinarily high costs for insurance, we are facing extraordinarily high deficits in Medicare, and that we have to act now in order to mitigate the disaster that we face if we don’t act.

Secondly, the absolute challenge—and I think the national shame—that we have that 18,000 Americans die every year because they don’t have health insurance or access to care, the

absolute shame in this country that almost 1 million people are forced to file bankruptcy every year because they either have no health insurance and are facing enormous medical bills or they have inadequate health insurance, that even though they had it, it was not sufficient to pay for the cost of their care.

I mean, this is not what should happen in the wealthiest country in the world, a country that has met every challenge it has faced in its 220-year history. I think the President clearly defined that challenge for us last Wednesday night.

And then there is the question of how this all relates to our economic challenges, the fact that employers who are now insuring, at least partially, 160 million of our citizens are going to be facing such high costs—they face them now, and even higher costs in the future—that their ability to compete in the global economy is severely impeded because of these high insurance costs. We have enormous challenges in this area. And again, once I met with citizens and was able to discuss with them their situations and their challenges and how what we’re proposing to do in the House would address them, they change their opinions almost instantaneously.

And I just have to relate one story which was extremely meaningful to me. I was at what’s called a “district dialogue” one of our metro council members in Louisville put on. And there were 35 or 40 citizens there to address issues with him. I was invited as a guest. And when I walked in the room, I would say that the body language that I saw was, to put it lightly, very cold. And they were very skeptical because they knew I was going to talk about health care.

Well, I spent 1 hour and 15 minutes there explaining the need for reform, the cost of doing nothing, the benefits to citizens with and without insurance, and answering all their questions about our legislation in the House and many of the myths that had developed around it. And I will never forget one couple sitting down to my left. At the beginning of the meeting, the husband asked me a very challenging question—wasn’t quite hostile, but it was very challenging, and you could tell that he was extremely skeptical about what we were trying to do here. And I answered the question very respectfully and factually.

About 10 minutes later his wife said, Congressman, let me tell you about our situation. We’re 55. Eight months ago, my husband lost his job and we lost our insurance. We finally got insurance; it cost us \$750 a month. So they’re paying \$8,000 a year, after-tax income, unemployed, \$8,000 a year. She said our deductibles, our copays are very high. And 2 weeks ago, my husband had to go to the emergency room, I had to take him. Our bill was several hundred dollars and our insurance policy wouldn’t pay for it.

And I said, Ma’am, you are exactly why we’re doing this reform measure.

You are one of the case studies about what’s important about what we’re doing, because there are so many people in your category, middle-aged individuals who lost their jobs who really can’t afford the insurance that’s available to them, if it’s available at all, in the individual private market. And while you’re paying \$8,000 now, under our proposal you would probably pay something like \$2,000 a year. You could never be denied coverage because of a preexisting condition. If, heaven forbid, you got a serious illness, the insurance company couldn’t take your benefits away.

And I went through the list of all these ways in which our plan would help this couple. And she looked at me and said, Wow, that sounds pretty good. And that’s what I found throughout our community when I talked about health care.

And it was very gratifying as we went through all of these meetings and we encountered hostility, we encountered passion, we encountered a lot of people who are frustrated at a lot of the things that are going on in the world. But when it boiled right down to it, when you talked about what this plan that we’re considering in the House would mean to them, their objections seemed to melt away. And I think they began to believe, for the first time probably, that we were truly working to help them and not to in any way harm them or take away what they have.

So I thought my summer vacation was terrific in that regard because I know I was reassured that we are on the right path, that the American people are receptive to the type of reform we’re trying to provide. And I’m energized and look forward to the next few months when we actually refine our legislation and bring a package to the floor and hopefully deliver one to the President that will accomplish what we’ve been trying to accomplish—again, for generations—and that is to provide security and stability in the health insurance lives of every American.

With that, I take great pleasure in introducing my colleague from the class of 2006 from Colorado, the great State of Colorado (Mr. PERLMUTTER).

Mr. PERLMUTTER. I thank my friend, Mr. YARMUTH.

And I want to follow up on that. The last few months, in Colorado as well as every place else in the Nation and other places in the world, we’ve been talking about how do we finance health care? How do we finance it in Colorado, in Kentucky, wherever it might be? But that subject really leads to so many other conversations because the health care system touches every life in America, 300 million plus people.

And I can tell you from the Perlmutter family, from my family, the passion really has been evident because there are some things in the system that are broken and we have to fix them. There are some things in the