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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. MILLER of Florida].

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
September 18, 1995.

I hereby designate the Honorable DAN MILLER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NEWT GINGRICH,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING BUSINESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of May 12, 1995, 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 and minority leader limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida [Mr. GOSS] for 5 minutes.

MEDICARE REFORM

Mr. GOSS. Mr. Speaker, the rhetoric has gotten pretty thick and possibly even a little sick around here recently, even by Washington standards. That is why I thought it would be helpful to take a look at the bigger picture. Specifically, I would like to take a moment this morning to investigate the long-term ramifications if we heed the advice of House Democrats and ignore the pending bankruptcy of the Medicare reform situation.

This chart, compiled by the bipartisan Kerrey Commission on entitlements, which I served on last year,

states in no uncertain terms the dire consequences of inaction, of doing nothing. As you can see, in this area here, under current trends, by the year 2012, this year right here, which is only 17 years away, outlays for entitlement spending and interest on the national debt will consume all tax revenues. That is the green line. When this line is exceeded by any one of these columns, we are spending more than we are taking in. And in this case, entitlement spending and interest alone on the national debt will consume all the revenues we have collected by the Federal Government. There will be nothing left for anything else, law enforcement, military, or anything like that.

By the year 2030, entitlement spending alone will consume all tax revenues collected by the Federal Government. This is a major crisis, albeit it is a little hard to grasp and it threatens every Federal program, including the entitlement programs themselves, whether they are Medicare, Medicaid, veterans, even Social Security. You name it. We have to do something.

Mr. Speaker, what is driving this explosion in entitlement spending which we are seeing in this chart? There, in fact, are many factors, but primarily it is the out-of-control and gigantic increases in Medicare spending. We all know that the Medicare trustees' report states that the Medicare part A trust fund will be bankrupt in 7 years, in the year 2002. Ninety percent of Americans understand that according to the polls.

Mr. Speaker, essentially we have two options. We can reduce costs and reform the system now, which is what the Republicans are trying to do, or we can wait and raise taxes again later, which seems to be the plan of the Democrats.

A study conducted by John Berthoud of the Alexis de Toqueville Institute underscores the dire ramifications of raising taxes rather than addressing

the inefficiencies in the current system right now today.

His study backs up the Medicare trustees' own numbers showing the potential disaster for future beneficiaries and taxpayers. If we do not act until 2002, as the other side seems to advocate, the payroll tax would have to more than double, rising from the current 2.9 percent level to 6.81 percent just to bring the fund into long-term balance. A tax hike that steep would mean over \$1 trillion in taxes over the next 7 years alone on American taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, to bring that astounding number into human terms, a worker earning \$45,000 would have to pay an extra \$1,500 in nonrefundable payroll taxes annually. That would be \$4 a day more every day, Saturday and Sunday and holidays included, \$4 more in taxes every day just to cover the trust fund of Medicare if we do not act now. And that is just part A.

Assuming middle-of-the-road projections, the part B taxpayer subsidy will grow to \$147 billion by 2004 if allowed to remain in auto pilot, which is where it is now. That is four times what it is today.

Mr. Speaker, where are we going to get that kind of money, \$147 billion? You guessed it, from the taxpayers. The leadership on the other side of the aisle last week in the Washington Post accused Republicans of playing a shell game and disguising the real costs of Medicare reform. What they really should acknowledge is the tremendous cost of maintaining the status quo and the increasing cost of the future status quo they advocate.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents gave me a clear message over the August break: Go back to Washington and do what it takes to fix the problem. They have seen payroll taxes increase before, in fact, 23 of them in the past 27 years. Twenty-three payroll taxes and they know that isn't the answer.

□ 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.



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By expanding choice and utilizing reforms that have worked in the private sector, we cannot only save the Medicare program and strengthen it for our current and future beneficiaries, but we can also provide a brighter future for our children and grandchildren. We do have a program that will work and that is what we are going to do, hopefully with the bipartisan support and hopefully with constructive cooperation from the White House. Meanwhile, all the scare ads on TV, the class warfare stirred up by the liberals, and the generational debate hyped by the cynics does not solve the problem and does not make America a better place to live.

Mr. Speaker, the Republicans are trying to offer a positive solution to a real problem. Even if we do not get all the details exactly right the first time, we will get the details right and we will have made an important change for every American's quality of life and pocketbook.

SAVING THE NATIONAL PARKS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of May 12, 1995, the gentleman from New Mexico [Mr. RICHARDSON] is recognized during morning business for 5 minutes.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my disappointment at heavy-handed actions by the leadership of the Committee on Resources by placing H.R. 260 on the Suspension Calendar today, and I hope that everybody out there that is aware of this terrible transgression realizes what H.R. 260 would do. It would simply be a vehicle to close down national parks.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would create a park closure commission to recommend specific parks to Congress foreclosure, privatization, or sale to the highest bidder. But what is most heavy handed is the fact that this bill is on the Suspension Calendar despite the fact that many of us in the Committee on Resources were able to offer amendments to change this bill. This way we have on the Suspension Calendar no opportunity to offer amendments that are alternatives.

Mr. Speaker, I had asked for one amendment that would allow a new form of financing the parks, through fees, through concessions, and through other alternatives that recognize that we do have to improve the management of the parks. But there are some very heavy-handed tactics of preventing honest debate on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, the Clinton administration opposes this bill. The environmental community opposes this bill. The National Parks and Conservation Association opposes this bill, and I would simply ask my colleagues to vote no on this bill so that it can go back to a rule and allow logical and fair amendments. In fact, just one amendment.

So by voting no, you are not killing the bill; you are killing a process that is wrong and heavy handed. What we have here is a park closure commission that would close national parks.

Now, the bill does exempt 54 national park units from closure, but it leaves less visited, smaller budgeted parks, and important national monuments like Independence Hall, the Statue of Liberty, Mount Rushmore, the Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson Monuments, and the Martin Luther King historical site on the chopping block.

The Chair of the Subcommittee on National Parks, the gentleman from Utah [Mr. HANSEN], has said that he wants to close 150 parks. This is an agenda that I believe is wrong. Let us improve the management of these parks. Let us find ways to raise money to keep the parks as important components of this country.

Mr. Speaker, the national parks are not the playgrounds of the rich. They are the vacation destinations of millions of ordinary hard working Americans who want to see and enjoy the natural wonders they support with their tax dollars. They deserve to continue to have that opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, the national parks today are more popular than ever. This year 270 million visitors will visit our national parks, an increase of 5 million over last year. By the year 2000, 360 million visitors will visit the parks every year. That is if we still have some of them to visit in the year 2000. Recent nationwide polls show that this boom in parks visitation is matched by concern for the future of the parks.

A recent poll by Colorado State University found that 98 percent of those surveyed believed protection of the parks for future generations was important, editorial boards around the country, Salt Lake City Tribune, St. Louis Dispatch, the New York Times.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 260 strikes at the very heart of our national heritage, the 369 natural and cultural treasures which make up the National Park System, and by authorizing, which is what we would do by passing this bill, the creation of a park closure commission, like a military base closure commission, without any alternatives, H.R. 260 takes the decisions out of the hands of the Congress and turns it over to politics, to political appointees. Surely business as usual is not the message the voters sent the Congress in the 1994 elections.

Mr. Speaker, let me explain what my alternative does, and all I want is the ability to offer this alternative under a closed rule, under a modified rule. One amendment, that instead of creating a park closure commission, that we find other ways to raise funds for parks through increased, perhaps fees, through a trust fund, through the changes in concessions so the McDonald's and other concessionaires, the Marriotts, pay a fairer share of what it costs to maintain the parks.

This is something that is on a bipartisan basis. Mrs. MEYERS of Kansas has a very constructive proposal to change the concession system of the parks.

So I am not here asking for a rejection of this bill. I am saying, let us respect the process. By voting no on H.R. 260, which we should do, 143 votes are needed so that the two-thirds is not achieved, we would send the bill back to the Committee on Rules.

Mr. Speaker, watch this bill. H.R. 260, vote "no," send it back to the Committee on Rules. Let it come back under a fair rule.

I insert the following information for the RECORD:

[From the Salt Lake Tribune, May 6, 1995]

DON'T CLOSE THE PARKS

Generally, people want to enter a national park; they want to leave a military base. Indeed, there is little that the two have in common, other than that they are both federally owned. Yet there is inexplicable sentiment in Congress for providing a common element to both—a closure commission.

A bill known as H.R. 260, which has already passed Utah Rep. Jim Hansen's subcommittee and is due up before the full House Resources Committee this month, proposes the formation of a Park System Review Commission. It would do for national park units what the Base Realignment and Closure Commission has done for military bases: It would close them.

Closure is appropriate for some unneeded military bases, but not so for national park units, which presumably have an unchanging value. After all, national parks were created for purposes of preservation and posterity, not for the ever-shifting requirements of national defense. Existing park units simply should not be exposed to the whims of an independent commission.

The issue has surfaced because the National Park Service has been having problems adequately funding all 368 units in its system. One complaint is that the system is overloaded with units that don't belong, units that were designated at the behest of some congressman trying to bring home the pork for his district.

The problem can be addressed without the creation of a park closure commission. For starters, Congress can support the portion of H.R. 260 that calls for the Interior secretary to devise tighter criteria for additions to the NPS, thereby safeguarding the system from selfish lawmakers.

Then, if Congress still feels that undeserving units have crept into the system, it can simply deauthorize them itself, as it did last year with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. It does not need some new level of bureaucracy to do this.

The rationale behind a park closure commission is that it would save money for the NPS. Well, as the BRAC members can testify, it would cost a lot of up front money to close these units. And once closed, who would operate them—the states, or some other division of the federal government? How do the taxpayers save on that?

If the goal is to improve NPS finances, then start with passage of park concessions reform or entrance fee reform. Start funneling such fees back into the parks, instead of the national treasury. It makes little sense to set up a mechanism to close parks when proposed methods of increase park revenues have not been implemented first.