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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. WEBSTER).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
June 19, 2012.

I hereby appoint the Honorable DANIEL WEBSTER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 17, 2012, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

HONORING HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS WHO PROVIDE HOSPICE CARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, today on Capitol Hill there are hundreds of nurses, chaplains and social workers, the people who deliver hospice care at the bedside, here to promote an honest discussion and careful analysis of how to help individuals and their families grapple with the final chapter of life. It may be the hardest issue in

health care, and the fear that it invokes can be a powerful weapon.

For most of us, the majority of health care we receive in our lifetime will be administered in those last few months. It's when we need the most doctors and nursing care, medical procedures and oftentimes in hospitals.

But we know from scientific studies that when patients are educated about their treatment options, they make decisions that are not only aligned with their personal preferences, but shared decision-making relieves stress and anxiety. Ironically, sometimes getting less intensive help, like in a hospice, not only improves the quality of life, these patients, many of them actually live longer.

From a public policy perspective, it's perverse that Medicare will pay for almost any medical procedure, yet not reimburse doctors to have a thoughtful conversation to prepare patients and their families for the delicate, complex, and emotionally demanding decisions surrounding the end of life.

That's why I sought to direct Medicare, in the Affordable Care Act, to cover a voluntary discussion with the doctor about living wills, power of attorney, and end-of-life preferences. Helping patients and their families clarify what they want and need should be an element of any rational, comprehensive health care system.

Despite our recent history, it's also a rare common denominator in health care politics because it's something that most people actually agree on. In fact, the majority of my Republican colleagues supported a similar provision for terminally ill elderly patients that was part of the 2003 prescription drug bill.

I had a friend of mine, a Republican cardiovascular surgeon here in the House, who told me he had many end-of-life conversations; but, unfortunately, they were often too late. He wished he could have spoken to pa-

tients and their families when they could have properly reflected, not just when the surgery was merely hours away.

During the early debates on the Affordable Care Act, I was confident that this was an area where we were making a contribution to improve the quality of health care, but it actually might be something that would bring us together because of the shared agreement. But, unfortunately, battle lines were drawn; and you know how the rest of that story went: death panels, rationing, forced consultation with government-appointed physicians.

In war, truth is the first casualty. The same goes for politics. As a country, we have a difficult time talking rationally and thoughtfully about end-of-life issues. That's why it's so important that we have these dedicated people on Capitol Hill today—the nurses, the hospice workers, the social workers—to have this thoughtful conversation from people who do it every day. Their work to help patients and families can help Congress understand that the work is not finished.

I urge my colleagues to take a look at the Personalize Your Health Care Act, H.R. 1589. Join me in making sure that the Federal Government is a better partner in helping families prepare for this difficult chapter.

HONORING THE LIFE OF SERGEANT TOM BAGOSY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, today, a number of us are rising to commemorate an individual out of the now more than 2,000 who have lost their lives during Operation Enduring Freedom. I would like to submit, for the RECORD, 11 names of brave servicemembers who were recently killed in Afghanistan.

□ 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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Today, I would like to recognize a man in particular who is not counted in the 2,000. Sergeant Tom Bagozy, a combat veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, took his own life on May 10, 2010, at Camp Lejeune marine base in North Carolina. Tom's wounds were mental, but he is no less a casualty of the war in Afghanistan.

That Tom is not counted in this 2,000 number speaks to the fact that our country does not fully understand the effect that a generation of war has had on those who've fought it. We do not understand the future cost of caring for over 300,000 returning veterans with mental wounds.

Tom's death, like those of the 154 Active Duty servicemembers who took their lives at a rate of one per day this year, was preventable.

Tom left behind a wife, Katie, and two children. Today, Katie is working towards becoming a mental health counselor so she can support the thousands of veterans coming home today with mental wounds. We should be inspired by her efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share with the House a letter that Katie wrote to her husband, Tom, who had died in May. And she wrote this letter August 23 of 2011. These are her words:

I wonder what life would be like if you didn't die that day. I wonder what we would be doing right now in this very moment instead. I hate playing the "what if" game, but I'm playing it anyway right now.

I could really use a hug and kiss from you. I love the way you kiss me. I wish your arms were around me right now. Guess wishing is all I can do.

Love always, Katie.

Mr. Speaker, it's time now that our Congress stands up and says let's bring our troops home now; let's start the process. If we brought them home now, it would still take months, maybe even years. But 2014 is the date that the President says we'll start bringing them home.

Then, there's also going to be a security agreement with Afghanistan; 10 years, spending about \$4 billion a month.

We need to be spending that money to take care of our wounded, both physically and mentally, veterans. We need to start spending that money here in America to build our streets and roads and bridges.

Mr. Speaker, it is time that the Congress does its job based on the Constitution. We have the authority based on the Constitution.

I don't know how many—this poster of Sergeant Bagozy and his wife, Katie, how many, how many are coming back from Afghanistan, and those who came back from Iraq, that are mentally wounded. It's time that this Congress starts thinking about the wounded and thinks about the families who lost loved ones in Afghanistan and Iraq. Let's not cheat them out of their benefits because we want to spend money in Afghanistan that we can't even account for by the Inspector General.

Mr. Speaker, I will, at this time, ask God to please bless our men and women

in uniform, to please bless the families of our men and women in uniform.

I ask God, in His loving arms, to hold the families who've given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq.

I ask God to bless the House and Senate, that we will do what is right in the eyes of God for God's people today.

I ask God to bless the President of the United States that he will do what is right in the eyes of God for God's people today and tomorrow.

And three times I will ask God, please, God, please, God, please, God, continue to bless America.

RECENT U.S. SERVICE MEMBER DEATHS

Spc. Kedith L. Jacobs
Pfc. Leroy Deronde III
Staff Sgt. Alexander G. Povilaitis
Staff Sgt. Roberto Loeza
Petty Officer 2nd Class Sean E. Brazas
Cpl. Nicholas H. Olivas
Lance Cpl. Steven G. Sutton
Capt. John R. Brainard
Chief Warrant Officer Five John C. Pratt
Spc. Tofiga J. Tautolo
Spc. Vilmar Galarza Hernandez

□ 1010

STAFFORD STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. COURTNEY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, unless Congress acts in the next 11 days, the interest rates for the subsidized Stafford student loan program are going to increase from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent. This is at a time when student loan debt now has topped the \$1 trillion number, which is according to the Federal Reserve Bank.

This is a program which will provide relief for over 7 million college students who literally today are already trying to budget for next fall's semester at colleges and universities—at 2-year colleges, at 4-year colleges. Yet this Congress left for 10 days, up until yesterday, for another recess—the ninth recess this year. This number, 11 days until the rate-hike increase, should probably be 6 days because that's all the number of days that the Speaker has scheduled between now and July 1.

How did we get to this point?

In 2007, when the Democrats controlled the Congress, we voted for the College Class Reduction Act, with Republican support, which cut the rate for the subsidized Stafford student loan program from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent. That has helped over 15 million college kids over the last 5 years. It was a sunset measure, like many other bills that pass in this Congress; and last July 25, on that podium, President Obama challenged this Congress to avoid allowing that rate to double on July 1.

For 3 solid months, we had absolutely no action in this Congress—no hearings, no markup, no bill. Luckily, external pressure was exercised on this

Chamber. We had 130,000 college students drop off petition signatures to the Speaker, demanding action. Finally, the Speaker rushed a bill to the floor, without a hearing, without a markup—a totally hyper-partisan bill—that did delay the rate hike for 1 year, yet was paid for with a measure that was so unacceptable: cutting programs and funding for cervical cancer screening, diabetes screening, cardiac screening. It was a measure which was dead on arrival, but at least it was some response. It was at least a flicker of acknowledgment that there was a real problem out there for middle class families around the country.

Now, on January 5, when the President announced his challenge to the Congress, I introduced legislation before midnight that night which would have locked in the lower rate at 3.4 percent. We have 152 cosponsors in the House for that measure, and in the Senate there is a back-and-forth going on right now about a 1-year extension. So, again, there actually are some hopeful signs. Leader REID, HARRY REID, introduced a measure with a payoff, which was not greeted with immediate criticism and denunciation, so there is actually a chance that between now and July 1 we can come together and do our jobs and actually be here to work on the people's business and to make sure that, again, 7 million college kids don't see their interest rates spike at a time when student loan debt has shattered all records.

The stakes could not be higher. U.S. graduation rates now have fallen to 12th in the world. We were No. 1 in the 1980s. There are a variety of reasons which explain that, but certainly the high cost of college is one of those reasons. We are seeing now an alarming trend of individuals who take on debt to go to college and then never get their degrees. Debt without a degree is almost a death sentence—a lifetime of struggling in terms of trying to get ahead. We as the Congress have the responsibility to make sure that that doesn't happen or at least that we don't add to the problem by allowing these rate hikes to go into effect on July 1.

Mr. Speaker, if you look historically at the Stafford student loan program, if you look historically at the Pell Grant program, if you look historically at the Land Grant College program instituted by President Abraham Lincoln, this is an issue on which we have always been able to put aside partisanship and move forward together in order to make sure that the real crown jewels of our country, which are our people—particularly our young people—are always protected. That test is now before us over the next 11 days.

Let's do the right thing; let's work together; let's compromise; let's come up with a plan to protect 7 million college kids, and for once send a signal to the people of this country that we are listening and that we are actually responding to the critical needs that face this Nation's future.