

predictable. Puerto Rico has the lowest part B participation rate in the country—81 percent compared to the national average of 92 percent. There are at least 130,000 island residents enrolled in part A but not part B. Without this coverage, beneficiaries have limited access to doctors' services and outpatient hospital care. If these individuals do eventually enroll in part B, as most will, the 7-month window will have closed and they will be required to pay a lifetime penalty.

Moreover, there are at least 53,000 seniors or disabled individuals in Puerto Rico who are already paying a lifetime penalty for enrolling late in part B. Each year, in fact, island residents pay a total of over \$7 million in late fees. This is profoundly unfair. Through no fault of their own, my constituents are required to forfeit money to the Federal Government they should be using to meet their basic needs and support their families.

On the administrative front, I have worked hard with Senator SCHUMER to ensure that the relevant Federal agencies improve the educational materials provided to Puerto Rico beneficiaries, and I am pleased they have taken positive steps in response to our demands. But the only true solution to this problem is legislative.

My bill would do three things:

First, it would amend Federal law so that, going forward, beneficiaries in Puerto Rico are treated like their counterparts in every other jurisdiction, automatically enrolled in part B with the option to opt out of coverage;

Second, to ease the burden on those who enrolled late in part B, usually with no understanding of the consequences of that choice, the bill would reduce the monthly penalty they are required to pay by 85 percent;

Finally, to address those beneficiaries who are enrolled in part A but not B and who will pay a late penalty whenever they do enroll, the bill would authorize a special period during which those individuals could enroll in part B and pay a monthly surcharge that is 85 percent less than the penalty they would be subject to under current law.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in both the House and the Senate to enact this much-needed bill into law.

I should also mention that I was impressed with the State of the Union delivered by President Obama last evening, and I particularly support his call for democracy in America. But I remind, respectfully, both the President and all Americans that Puerto Rico has a status that is undemocratic. There are 3.7 million American citizens living in Puerto Rico who lack the most basic voting rights in a democracy. They cannot vote for the President, and they do not have voting representation in Congress. They have rejected this status, and the least that this Congress should do is give Puerto Rico the choice of joining the Union as a State or be treated as a sovereign nation.

IT'S TIME TO GET TO WORK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Oregon (Ms. BONAMICI) for 5 minutes.

Ms. BONAMICI. Mr. Speaker, today is February 13, but it feels like Groundhog Day. Here we are, back again, facing the prospect of devastating cuts from sequestration.

Families in Oregon don't understand why Members of Congress can't seem to set aside their differences and get things done; and, frankly, neither do I. We don't want to see these devastating cuts go into effect. We don't want to see a government shutdown. We don't want to tell the children that they have to have even more students in their already-crowded classrooms or explain to senior citizens that the Meals on Wheels they rely on might not be delivered. We don't want to see cuts to food safety or air traffic control or maritime and border security.

We're in the home stretch, racing towards yet another deadline, but instead of sitting at the bargaining table, we're headed out for recess.

In Oregon alone, sequestration would kick more than 900 kids out of Head Start programs that make a difference in their school readiness. It would trigger a 9 percent cut in Federal funding to Oregon's public university system, slashing student aid and ongoing research and development. Law enforcement agencies throughout the country would lose the equivalent of 1,000 Federal agents, 1,300 prison officers, and more than 5,000 Border Patrol personnel. Small businesses across the Nation would lose more than \$540 million in loan guarantees.

Despite the talk of uncertainty, our economy really is poised to take off, but it can't do that if Congress decides to take off from work. It's sad but true: The biggest obstacle to economic growth tomorrow is congressional foot-dragging today.

We've been governing by crisis for too long. It's time to rally around common sense. It's time to take a seat at the bargaining table. And most of all, it's time to get back to work.

No sequestration deal, no recess.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LANGEVIN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of Career and Technical Education Month. I'm proud to be joined by Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania, who I know spoke earlier this morning. Mr. THOMPSON is my good friend and fellow cochair of the bipartisan Congressional Career and Technical Education Caucus.

CTE is an investment in the future of our economy, our workforce, and our country. From skills training in high schools to community colleges and pro-

fessional programs, CTE plays a critical role for workers of every age. And I'm so proud that President Obama called for more support for CTE in his State of the Union message last evening.

The most important step I believe we can take this year to support CTE is to fully reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. Currently, the Perkins Act is authorized at a level set in 2010, which doesn't reflect the reality of a modern economy where more workers are looking at high-skilled fields.

More and more employers need highly skilled workers. I hear too often from Rhode Island employers with job openings that they can't fill because they can't find the workers with the right skills to fill the jobs that they do have available. Meanwhile, our unemployment rate remains unacceptably high.

Closing the skills gap is one important step we can take to ensure that workers can fit and fill the needs of expanding industries, both today and in the future. After all, how can we expect to help individuals start a company or businesses expand their company or to relocate jobs from overseas if we don't have the workers with the right skills to do the jobs that would be and are available?

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to a continuing partnership with my good friend, G.T. THOMPSON from Pennsylvania, in the 113th Congress, and I strongly urge my colleagues to join the Career and Technical Education Caucus and to support the full reauthorization of the Perkins Act.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 50 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

Archbishop Emeritus John Quinn, Diocese of San Francisco, San Francisco, California, offered the following prayer:

Lord, we give deep-felt thanks for the great providential blessing that makes us citizens of the United States of America.

The men and women of this House, in their service to our country, daily confront seemingly intractable public issues, a burden at times overwhelming; but You work even in the dark places of human history.