

PERMISSION FOR COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET TO FILE REPORT ON THE BUDGET RECONCILIATION ACT

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Budget may have until midnight tonight to file the report to accompany the Budget Reconciliation Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FOGLIETTA). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida? There was no objection.

□ 1745

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FOLEY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of May 12, 1995, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

INCREASE DEBT CEILING NOW

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. GIBBONS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I am talking to the regularly elected Speaker of the House of Representatives, who happens to be the head of the Republican Party here in this Congress.

Mr. Speaker, three times the Secretary of the Treasury has written you this year asking you to move on increasing the debt ceiling. Every Member of your party has already voted to increase the debt ceiling to \$5.5 trillion.

Why the delay, Mr. Speaker? Are you attempting to cause a Government wreck? You know, Mr. Speaker, that the Government runs out of borrowing authority. In fact, it is already out of borrowing authority, but it can only be stretched until the end of this month.

This is a serious matter. It is already costing the Federal taxpayers money. It already is acting as a tax increase to the tune of about \$15 billion over a 6-year period. And your refusal to allow the debt ceiling legislation to come to the floor so that it can be extended can only be classified, as far as I am concerned, as an attempt to perpetuate a government wreck upon the American people.

Today the Treasury had to suspend selling special obligations to States and local governments. This will prevent the States and local governments from refinancing the debt that they had planned to refinance to reduce interest payments of their own citizens on those local debts. Already a number of States, including my own State of Florida, have had to cancel their refinancing because the Treasury window is not open, because the Treasury can no longer issue these obligations. This is just the first of a series of cascading events that are already in process.

Mr. Speaker, you have done some remarkable things in your short career

around here, but you are the first person, Mr. Speaker, to remove and put the Federal obligations in the role of having a risk factor added to them. In 200 years the U.S. Government has never defaulted on an obligation.

Mr. Speaker, you said the other day that you did not care whether we defaulted on an obligation or not, you would keep the window closed on increasing the debt for as much as 60 days. I do not know who you are trying to bluff, but you ought to know, Mr. Speaker, that this is already costing the American taxpayers money, just like a tax would cost them money, this increase in interest rates.

A 10-point increase in basis points will cost the American taxpayers \$15 billion over a 6-year period. This increase in basis points will also reduce the value of American private pension funds. Let me repeat this: This 10-point basis-point increase in interest rates that has already occurred and is occurring at this very moment, and it can get worse, has already cost the private pension plans \$8 billion in assets.

Mr. Speaker, your actions are reckless. You need to bring up the debt ceiling legislation as rapidly as possible. Your obstinacy in doing this will prove nothing. Every Member of your party in both the House and the Senate have already voted to direct an increase in the debt ceiling until 1997, and the amount of money increase in the debt ceiling has already been fixed in legislation they are voting on.

I cannot think of anything you are doing, Mr. Speaker, except trying to blackmail the Government into a government wreck. This is irresponsible action. You should back off of that course of action immediately, Mr. Speaker.

CONGRESS SHOULD KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THEIR CONSTITUENTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. KINGSTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, you know, there are a lot of great statesmen that have walked through the halls of Congress for many years from both parties, people who have done so much with the budget, people who have done a lot with the Judiciary, people who have done a lot with the House rules and appropriations process. Fair men and women on both sides of the aisle have added so much to the institution. Sometimes people ask me, well, what is your identity? What great issue have you done?

I guess after thinking about this, oh, for a long time, Mr. Speaker, I would say, maybe I could be best described as the Congressman in the carpool line. Not really glamorous, but you know, I do, every Monday, drive the carpool. Then often after driving the carpool, I go over to the Piggly Wiggly, buy a little milk or whatever we happen to run

out of. Then if you see me on a Saturday, I am at the soccer field. Our daughter plays soccer.

Often I will go to other things. Last weekend, for example, I went to Midway, GA, for an opening of a school down there, actually not an opening, but a new building of a school in the community that was an African-American community in coastal Georgia over 100 years ago. We are trying to restore that area. There is a lot of good leadership on that.

After that meeting I went to the Farm Bureau meeting in Folkston, GA. Then the next day, Mr. Speaker, I went to Odom, GA, to the Odom homecoming. The population of Odom last year went from 692 to over 700 people this year.

During this period, all day long, whether I am in the carpool line or at the grocery store or at the Farm Bureau meeting or at the Odom homecoming, people are coming up to me and asking me about Medicare, asking me about the budget, asking me about the debt ceiling. They are giving me opinions on Bosnia, and all kinds of different things, the space station B-2. Sometimes the questions are from people that know more about the issue than I do. Other times they are general questions. Generally they just want me to listen to them. I try my best to do that, Mr. Speaker, as I know every other Member of Congress does.

I think we can be proud that so many of our Members are good listeners. They do return back home. They do listen. But now let us compare ourselves to the other body. In this House, in this great U.S. Capitol, we have two bodies. We have the lower House and then we have the other body, which decorum does not permit me using their name. When we refer to the folks on the other side of the Capitol as the other body, I did not know we were speaking of a corpse. But that is what we are. We are speaking of folks who are not coming home and are not listening and not going to the grocery store and are not going to the homecomings and listening to the man and woman on the street on their different views.

I think as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, our product of government is not as good as it should be, because I believe that one of the key things we have to do as representative government is always remember who sent us here, why they sent us here, and remember the promises and the representations that were made to these folks.

We are going into a very critical period, Mr. Speaker. We have passed 12 appropriations bills. They are now in that other body. Some of them have come back and we have had some conference committee meetings on them. But the bulk of our work is still yet to be done. The bulk of our work, including not just finalization of the appropriations process, but the reconciliation, where we amass all the bills, all the legislation into one monster bill that we have to pass on both sides.

Through this process, I believe House Members in both parties have paid close attention to the constituents back home. A lot of our constituents in Georgia, for example, are saying you all are not going far enough. You are backing off on your promises. You are not doing what you said you are going to do. Maybe in some areas you have gone too far too fast. But people want us to listen, and they want to be assured that what we are doing is in the interests of what is best for the Republican Party but for the American public.

I believe that that is the case, Mr. Speaker. But I must say I worry about our friends on the other side of the aisle, if they are listening to the degree that they need to be listened to. I would urge the folks back home, because of that, to continue writing Members of the House and the Senate and give opinions on how they feel, because I do not think the message in every case is getting through. As we go into the budget process, right now it is even more important than other times.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California [Mr. DORNAN], if he would like some time.

Mr. DORNAN. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to tell the gentleman, I want to associate myself with his remarks. I am going to ask for a 5-minute special order here myself to discuss the infamous O.J. Simpson trial. I wanted to let the Chair know that I was going to ask for that when the gentleman is through. I certainly appreciate the 5-minute special order.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from California is never without an opinion and never without truth and righteousness. It was refreshing to see the gentleman the other night spouting some of his views.

#### THE PROBLEM OF MEDICARE FRAUD AND ABUSE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Connecticut [Ms. DELAURO] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to kick off a series of 5-minute special orders this evening to address the growing problem of Medicare fraud and abuse. It is shameful that Members of Congress have been virtually denied the opportunity to discuss the leadership's proposal to cut Medicare by \$270 billion, and it is unprecedented its rollback of Medicare fraud law enforcement.

The Republican plan would devastate Medicare to pay for a tax giveaway for the wealthy, but it also misses a golden opportunity to fix a major problem with Medicare. In fact, it actually makes this serious problem worse. The GOP plan actually will make it easier for Medicare cheats to get away with their health care scams. This plan rips off American taxpayers and American seniors.

Many of us are genuinely concerned with strengthening the Medicare system, and we have urged a crackdown on Medicare fraud. I am happy that some of my colleagues have joined with me tonight to talk about this critical issue. I am proud to commend the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. LEVIN] for his commitment to combatting fraud and abuse in Medicare. The gentleman from Michigan plays a key role on the Committee on Ways and Means in the effort to toughen the punishments for fraud and strengthening our enforcement capabilities.

I would like to recognize the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. DURBIN], an original cosponsor of my legislation, the Health Care Prosecution Act, to combat fraud and abuse in our health care system. The gentleman has been a leader in the fight to defeat the GOP's Medicare cuts and to restore integrity to the Medicare program for our elderly.

□ 1800

I also would like to thank the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. FRANK PALLONE, and the gentleman from Ohio, Mr. SHERROD BROWN, for joining us tonight. Their work on the Committee on Commerce to remedy fraud and abuse in the Medicare system has been invaluable.

We are here tonight, Mr. Speaker, to let the American people know that the Republican bill does not, let me repeat, it does not toughen enforcement measures. It does not even defend the status quo. Far worse, the Republicans turn back the clock on Medicare fraud enforcement.

Just today, Mr. Speaker, the Inspector General of Health and Human Services and the Justice Department that monitors, the policemen, if you will, the fraud that occurs in the health care system said that the Republican proposal would make it harder for the government to obtain convictions under an anti-kickback statute, and, in fact, would cripple the Justice Department's ability to crack down on health care fraud.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that stopping the growing problem of fraud could save as much as \$80 billion. And despite this evidence, the GOP plan does nothing to crack down on waste, fraud and abuse. That is because the plan has nothing to do with fixing Medicare, it has everything to do with providing the Republicans' rich political supporters with a fat tax giveaway.

Mr. Speaker, while I am sadly disappointed, I am not surprised, as the Washington Times, not exactly a liberal publication, reported last week Speaker Gingrich dismissed the necessity of cracking down on Medicare cheats by suggesting that we have insufficient jail space to lock up all the crooks in the system. The GOP shows no hesitation to crack down on the elderly, the sick, the disabled, the poor, and the young in their plan. But when

it comes to targeting the real bad guys, the Republicans suddenly express concern about inadequate vacant correctional facility space.

The congressional leadership is not interested in correcting and punishing the criminal elements in the Medicare system. However, I have introduced legislation in this Congress, the Health Care Prosecution Act, to do just that. My bill stops health care cheats in their tracks. It retrieves the financial losses in restitution and fines and it puts the criminals behind bars so that they are unable to pull off more health care scams in the future.

Further, my legislation establishes a temporary health care fraud and abuse commission to study the nature and the extent of fraud in our system. This blue ribbon panel would make recommendations to Congress on innovative approaches to attack fraud.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of good ideas out there about how to attack Medicare fraud, waste and abuse. I am sorry that my Republican colleagues have chosen to pursue none of that.

Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be joined by additional colleagues tonight who will also address this issue of Medicare fraud and abuse and the way that we might address it, and that it is not addressed in the Republican proposal.

#### REPUBLICANS WEAKEN FRAUD AND ABUSE PROVISIONS IN THEIR BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. LEVIN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the gentlewoman from Connecticut [Ms. DELAURO] for talking about this issue, and I would like to say a few words as a Member of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Mr. Speaker, we worked on this issue. I was deeply disappointed with the product that came out of the committee: \$270 billion in Medicare cuts in order to pay for a tax break, mostly for wealthy families, is bad enough, doubling the monthly premium for seniors in part B, the physician and other provider part of Medicare, is bad enough, especially when we take into account, for example, looking at Michigan, that 85 percent of the seniors in Michigan have an income annually of less than \$25,000 and \$15,000 is the annual income of 70 percent of the seniors.

So doubling the premium is bad enough, Mr. Speaker, but the Republicans went further and they weakened the fraud and abuse provisions of Medicare. They weakened them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to a few documents. There are two sets of penalties involved: one is criminal, where there is intentional serious fraudulent action; and the other is monetary civil penalties, where the offense is less serious. Both of them are weakened.

The criminal is weakened by adding a provision requiring that the significant