United States of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 159 WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2013 No. 147

House of Representatives

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

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
October 16, 2013.

I hereby appoint the Honorable GREGG HARPER 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 3, 2013, 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.

TIME TO DEAL WITH BUDGET MATTERS

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, now, after 16 days, one remembers the gleeful Republicans pouring out of the House Chamber on the early morning of October 1 so excited that they got the shutdown, the tool they would use to end the Affordable Care Act. Well, it has now collapsed in disarray on the eve of a far more serious deadline: flirting with the default on our national debt.

I am embarrassed for my Republican colleagues who cannot figure out what they want as they tie themselves into knots, refusing to put a simple, clean continuing resolution on the floor that would end this madness, I guess because they fear all the Democrats and many Republicans would approve it, ending this sad chapter.

It is fascinating what a destructive minority and rudderless Republican House leadership can do, inflicting damage in so many ways. This all would have been unimaginable in normal times. I tried to explain it on the air yesterday to a BBC reporter. I felt foolish and embarrassed. It is inexplicable.

It is time to stop negotiating the terms of the release of the American people and their economy. There is a simple answer, and it is not necessarily calling the Republican bluff on the shutdown and debt ceiling. The answer is to encourage the Republicans to try and pass their own spending bills. Don't insulate them any longer from the specifics.

With the Ryan budget, Republicans are on a glide path to 1962 spending levels; but for an America half a century later, with 150 million more people and three times the number of senior citizens, the math doesn't work for most of us, and it appears that it doesn't work for the Republicans either. Why else would they have stopped the consideration of their own spending bills not even halfway through the process? Remember, we still have pending the Transportation-HUD spending bill that was abruptly halted more than 2 months ago, last summer. It is still pending. It could be brought to the floor at any time.

Let us stop tolerating wildly unrealistic political antics, and dive into budget mechanics. Let them try and pass the Interior spending bill, which they were afraid to even take to the full committee, let alone pass the Health and Human Services bill. Let us get into specifics and stop the hostage-taking. No one should be allowed to weaponize the process of governance, especially people unwilling or unable to do their own job.

The President should use his bully pulpit to spotlight their refusal to act and his alternatives. By all means, let us look at the looming Social Security cut that is going to occur 20 years from now. How much do we want to cut of future benefits for people who are increasingly struggling in retirement and who already get less than most other rich countries?

Let us deal with the long-term costs of our military, with hugely expensive, outdated, unnecessary surplus nuclear weapons. Let us help the military deal with health and pension costs that greatly concern the military leadership because they know they are not sustainable.

My Republican colleagues cannot have it both ways: attacking the President for including the chained CPI in his own budget proposal as an assault on senior citizens, as alleged by my friend and colleague GREG WALDEN, the head of the Republican Campaign Committee in the House, when that is actually what many of my Republican friends want; attacking the President and Democrats for having obtained $700 billion in Medicare savings without cutting payments to seniors and then making that into a campaign issue in 2012, and then claiming the President and Democrats don't want to deal with entitlements. How hypocritical.

Let us stop the hostage-taking and deal with specifics. We can resolve these matters in, actually, a matter of months if the American public and the Congress are forced to confront the realities of fantasy budgets and political slogans. The American people deserve better. Now it is time to give that to them.

Printed on recycled paper.

REPUBLICAN SHUTDOWN HAS BEEN A DISASTER

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, the Republican government shutdown has been a disaster. A lot of people all across this country have been hurt. Hopefully, the press reports that I am reading this morning are true and that, by the end of the day, this House of Representatives will support a Senate compromise that will reopen our government and will avoid our defaulting on our debt. So, I hope that in a bipartisan way, before this day is out, we can come together and do that.

This shutdown and this threat of default has made this Chamber look ridiculous. People of every political persuasion are disappointed in the behavior, especially of some elements of this House that have driven us to this shutdown and threatened a default of our Nation for the first time in history.

END HUNGER NOW

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I just want to take a few minutes here to speak about another aspect of this shutdown and, indeed, some of the policies that we have approved of here in this House of Representatives, policies that have adversely impacted most, especially the poor and the hungry and the vulnerable.

We have 50 million people in the United States of America who are hungry; 17 million are children. This shutdown and this sequester and the farm bill that this House of Representatives approved goes after the very programs that provide so many of our needy people in this country food. That is it, nothing else but food.

We have a hunger problem in the United States of America, and we all should be ashamed of that. This shutdown, coupled with the sequester, has threatened programs like WIC—the Women, Infants, and Children program. It has gone after the SNAP program, which used to be known as food stamps, threatening the amount that people get to be able to put food on their tables. It has threatened funding for food banks. We have had food banks all across this country that have shut down because of the sequester and also because of what this shutdown has done.

We are a much better country than that. I know that the majority of people in this Chamber, deep down, care about the most vulnerable, but we haven't acted that way. There is a pattern in this House of Representatives and this Republican-led Congress that has diminished the plight of poor people, that has trivialized the need for people to be able to put food on their tables for their families and for their children.

We passed a farm bill in the Congress here that cuts food stamps by $40 billion. That would mean 3.8 million people who currently rely on this benefit would be thrown off the program. We would literally be taking food away from families who need it. It would throw hundreds of thousands of children off the free breakfast and lunch program at school. That cut would result in over 170,000 veterans being thrown off that program. Veterans—men and women who have served our country overseas in battle, who are having trouble finding a job, getting stability in their lives, who need this program to be able to put food on their tables for themselves and their families—we are going to throw them off the program. That is just not right. That is just not right.

The farm bill is going to go to conference, and my hope is that we can come to some sort of a bipartisan agreement to reverse kind of the negative aspects of what the House has done. We can do much better. We can do much better. We need to do much better.

Mr. Speaker, it is not fashionable in this House of Representatives to worry about the poor, I guess maybe because they don't have super PACs; they don't donate to our campaigns; they don't have big lobbies here in Washington. But if government stands for anything, we need to stand for those people. Donald Trump doesn't need us, doesn't need government; but some returning veteran who cannot find a job, or some single mother who is trying to raise her kids and doesn't have enough to put food on the table, or some unemployed man who has worked all of his life and all of a sudden because of this lousy economy has found himself without a job and is trying to support his family, they need us, and we need to be there for them. That should not be a controversial or radical idea; yet, in this House of Representatives, it has been. So, from the shutdown to the sequester to the farm bill, over and over and over again, we have targeted the most vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, we need to reverse this trend. When this is all over with, I hope we can come together in a bipartisan way and actually talk about hunger; and I hope that the White House will come forward and embrace a White House conference on food and nutrition so we can have some leadership at the national level to come up with a plan to end hunger and to end poverty in this country.

TIME TO END SHUTDOWN AND GO TO WORK ON LONG-TERM PROBLEMS

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

Mr. GARAMENDI. Mr. Speaker, it is a rather important day today. Sometime today or in the next 24 hours, the United States Treasury will run out of its ability to borrow money, that is, to roll over its debt, to pay all of the obligations that the United States Government has.

I guess, even this morning, we remain the world's biggest economy. We certainly remain the oldest democracy; although, that seems to be somewhat in doubt here on the floor of the House of Representatives where we don't operate as a democracy. We really operate more as a dictatorship, or at least as an oligarchy, in which one or two or a handful of people makes the decision for the majority of the House.

It is a very, very, very important moment that this Nation moves towards, the moment in which it, for the first time in its history, would default on its payments, default on its debt. We have already seen the effects of this. Banks all around the world are selling, that is, getting out of America's short-term obligations or those obligations, bonds, that are due now or in the next week or so. So they are shedding American debt. They are running away from the world's reserve currency.

Why?

Because this House, the House of Representatives, the people's House, is being jerked around, led around by a small contingent of folks who is not thinking clearly, who is not willing to understand the import, the importance, of the soundness of the American dollar, the importance of the full faith and credit of this Nation, of the 200-plus years of history where this House, where this government, where the people of America have always stood behind its obligations. But that group of individuals who is unwilling to be rational, who is the Tea Party faction of the Republican Party, seems to want to take this Nation into a new era, an era in which the world cannot count on the United States of America.

We are also in the 16th day of the shutdown of the United States Government in which the United States Government is only partially operating; in which the national parks, with the exception of just three, are not open; where the Fish and Wildlife Service's refuges are not available to the public, where much of the government is not operating. We are in the 16th day. Why? Why are we in this situation?

When it started 16 days ago, it was to end the Affordable Health Care Act, and then it was to modify it, and then it was to change it, and then it was to delay it, and now it is not even on the agenda.

So why are we still shut down?

There is no reason that is being presented other than what you might see in a preschool class with some kid who is too tired and is down on the floor, throwing a tantrum, screaming and yelling and trying to stop everything. Kid, get your blanket. Get your bottle and take a nap.

We don't need tantrums around here, but apparently that is the only reason the government continues to be shut down, because some 40 or 50 Members of the Tea Party caucus of the Republican Party are throwing a tantrum, led by Senator CRUZ.