



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 111th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 155

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2009

No. 32

House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2009, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN— PROGRESS FOR THE AVERAGE AMERICAN

The SPEAKER. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) for 5 minutes.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Madam Speaker, tonight, the President will address an expectant country in a joint session of Congress, and will give the American people a report on the progress that he has made and intends to make in the near future. The key word here is "progress."

In barely a month, President Obama has shown us that he can walk the talk. The stimulus package the President signed into law will take America down a road that we did not see in the last administration. It is one that governs from the center, focused on the average American—the average person who gets up in the morning, gets to work at 8 o'clock, works until 5 o'clock and goes home and takes care of his family, maybe coaches baseball, maybe is a single mother who goes home, picks her kids up at daycare and goes home and takes care of them for the evening, but it is focused on the average American.

Now, in the last 8 years, these people have either been left behind or have been thrown overboard by the last administration in its rush to open America's purse, wallet, whatever you want—bank vaults—to their friends. The economic disaster that President Obama is facing and will talk about to

the American people today and tonight was really there, waiting on the desk when he got to the Oval Office. He didn't bring it with him. He didn't have very much to do with creating it. He was only in the Senate a short time. It was presented to him by the last administration, and he has now, in just 1 month, given us a recovery plan that helps the American people. Above all, I believe the President strikes a very delicate balance and walks a very fine, thin tightrope between economic recovery and economic disaster.

How do you deal with it as it's going downhill? How do you arrest it? It's like being in the mountains. In western Washington, we have mountains. People are up, climbing mountains, and one of the first things you have to learn to do when climbing mountains where there is snow is learn how to do an arrest. You're sliding down a glacier. What do you do to stop yourself from falling? The first thing you've got to learn to do is put that ice ax in and hold. Now, the President is working on that sort of problem. We are sliding down—and have been since September—very abruptly, and he has got to bring this slide to a halt and then start the climb and get us back up on our feet and start back on the climb.

There are those who say we ought to throw the banking institutions overboard because of their unrestrained practices. Maybe we're going to have to nationalize banks. One doesn't know exactly what is going to be necessary, but the President has begun to show that he is willing to make the tough decisions that have to be done. There are some who say the average American does not benefit. I've had calls. I've had people come up to me and say, "I pay my bills. I do everything right. I didn't go out and borrow a lot of money, and it looks to me like the only people who are getting any benefit out of this are people who made wild, crazy decisions, like bankers. Why am I not getting something?"

But people do count in this administration—finally. The UI benefits will help those who have lost their jobs. There is a payroll deduction that goes into the average person's pocket, and there is going to be, finally, some oversight in governing on behalf of the American people, overall, returning America to the American people.

It took 96 months to destroy our economy. Remember where Mr. Bush came in. There was a burgeoning surplus. We argued in 2000 about whether we would pay down the national debt too fast. That's where we were. He had a plan. He didn't tell us what his plan was, but it was not only to not pay down the debt but to build it up dramatically in the period that followed. This President who has now come into office has said we're going to stop that, and we're going to change what's going on.

A New York Times editorial today reminds us that the other side of this body remains intent on working against American workers. The Governor of Mississippi and the Governor of Louisiana say, "We don't want that unemployment money for our part-time workers." There is clearly some rethinking that has got to be done on behalf of this body in terms of what is going on in this country. Part-time workers are entitled to the unemployment insurance they paid in.

The American people want a solution, and if the Republicans choose to ignore that, the American people have made it clear already that they can return to the voting booth and enforce their will.

[From the New York Times, Feb. 24, 2009]
WHAT PART OF 'STIMULUS' DON'T THEY GET?

Imagine yourself jobless and struggling to feed your family while the governor of your state threatens to reject tens of millions of dollars in federal aid earmarked for the unemployed. That is precisely what is happening in poverty-ridden states like Louisiana and Mississippi where Republican governors are threatening to turn away federal

□ 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.



Printed on recycled paper.

H2605

aid rather than expand access to unemployment insurance programs in ways that many other states did a long time ago.

What makes these bad decisions worse is that they are little more than political posturing by rising Republican stars, like Gov. Bobby Jindal of Louisiana and Gov. Mark Sanford of South Carolina. This behavior reinforces the disturbing conclusion that the Republican Party seems more interested in ideological warfare than in working on policies that get the country back on track.

Fortunately, as President Obama prepares for his first address to Congress on Tuesday evening, voters of both parties have noticed. About three-quarters of those polled in a recent New York Times/CBS News survey—including more than 60 percent of Republicans—said Mr. Obama has been trying to work with Republicans. And 63 percent said Republicans in Congress opposed the stimulus package primarily for political reasons, not because they thought it would be bad for the economy. It should be sobering news for Republicans that about 8 in 10 said the party should be working in a bipartisan way.

The Republican Party's attacks on the unemployment insurance portion of the stimulus package are a perfect example. States that accept the stimulus money aimed at the unemployed are required to abide by new federal rules that extend unemployment protections to low-income workers and others who were often shorted or shut out of compensation. This law did not just materialize out of nowhere. It codified positive changes that have already taken place in at least half the states.

To qualify for the first one-third of federal aid, the states need to fix arcane eligibility requirements that exclude far too many low-income workers. To qualify for the rest of the aid, states have to choose from a menu of options that include extending benefits to part-time workers or those who leave their jobs for urgent family reasons, like domestic violence or gravely ill children.

Data from the National Employment Law Project, a nonprofit group, show that 19 states qualify for some of the federal financing and that a dozen others would become eligible by making one or two policy changes. Unemployed workers are worst off in the Deep South, where relatively few people are eligible to receive payments. Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas stand out.

The governors are blowing smoke when they suggest that the federal unemployment aid would lead directly to new state taxes. No one knows what the economic climate will be when the federal aid has been used up several years from now. But by dumping billions of dollars into shrinking state unemployment funds, which puts money into the hands of people who spend it immediately on food and shelter, the stimulus could help the states through the recession and into a time when unemployment trust funds can be replenished. In other words, the stimulus could make a tax increase less likely.

But even if new taxes are required at some point, the new federal standards would protect more unemployed workers than ever before and bring states like Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas into the 21st century.

Governors like Mr. Jindal should be worrying about how to end this recession while helping constituents feed and house their families—not about finding ways to revive tired election-year arguments about big spending versus small government.

COMMISSION WITH TEETH: FORCING CONGRESS TO ADDRESS ENTITLEMENT ISSUE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas). The Chair rec-

ognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WOLF. Sometimes it takes a crisis to move Congress to action, and we are in a financial crisis today and have reached the point where Americans everywhere understand that our country is in serious trouble. We are sinking, and it is on this Congress' watch, and it is this Congress' obligation to fix it. Main Street USA is suffering. Businesses are closing. Wages and hours are being cut back. Restaurants that once bustled with customers are half empty, and the only waiting line starts at the unemployment office.

How did we get to these frightening times?

Look at the numbers. For years we've been spending and spending beyond our means, mortgaging the future for our children and grandchildren—over \$56 trillion in unfunded obligations through Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. The national debt is \$11 trillion. Standard & Poor's investment service predicts the loss of our triple-A bond rating as early as 2012. Imagine the headlines when that day comes.

China now holds the paper of 1 of every 10 American dollars, and we saw for the first time the Secretary of State punting when she was in Beijing, never raising the issue of human rights and religious freedom. Imagine how the Catholic bishops and Buddhist monks who are in prison felt when they heard that the Secretary, because of pandering to the Chinese in wanting them to buy our paper, never raised this issue. Yet this Congress has done nothing but spend, spend, spend and talk, talk, talk.

Congress is made up of parents and grandparents. Yet it seems that this Congress is prepared to push all of this onto our children and our grandchildren. Why won't Congress act? Why has Congress failed to act? What is Congress afraid of?

Over the weekend, President Obama said, ". . . we can't generate sustained growth without getting our deficits under control." I could not agree more, and time will tell if this administration and this Congress will embrace the process that leads to a solution.

The process that will lead to a solution is the bipartisan commission that Congressman JIM COOPER and I have proposed with every spending program on the table with tax policy. Congress would vote up or down on the commission's recommendations.

If any Member from either side, from my side who is not on this bill or from the Democratic side who is not on this bill, has a better idea that will work—a better idea rather than just a rotary speech, a better idea that works—put it forward. Don't hide behind the process.

There always seems to be an excuse. The American people are experiencing a crisis of confidence and expect this Congress to act. When we gain control of the reckless spending, we will be able to rebuild our economy. We will

have a renaissance in America, and we will see a brighter and a stronger America—stronger for us, stronger for our children and stronger for our grandchildren. As Ronald Reagan said, we will literally have a renaissance when we get control of this spending.

But I ask you, and every Member who serves here has to ask themselves: How will history judge the 111th Congress if it does not deal with this issue?

Your children and your grandchildren will come up and say, you know, "Grandpop or Grandmom or Dad or Mom, weren't you there during the 111th Congress when we had \$11 trillion of debt? When the Chinese had such influence on this country that this Secretary no longer spoke out on human rights and religious freedom when there were 30-some Catholic bishops in jail? When we saw all of this going on with unemployment? What did you do when you were there? Were you there?"

Yes, I think you were. What would you do?

This Congress will be a total failure, and it will be our children and our grandchildren who will pay the price, and history will judge it very, very poorly.

CAPTIVE PRIMATE SAFETY ACT (H.R. 80)

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Yesterday, the House engaged in a vigorous debate on the captive primate bill, H.R. 80, which would prohibit the interstate transport of chimpanzees and other monkeys across State borders. It was fascinating listening to the give-and-take on the floor of the House. The argument against the bill seemed to center on two points:

One was that this bill was not the most important thing that we could possibly be considering at the time. The second was that it would not stop the ability of some people to have a chimpanzee as a pet in their own homes.

I found it interesting because the notion that somehow this measure is not the most important issue is true. Congress deals with thousands of issues in a wide range of areas—from passing budgets, to dealing with the national debt, to recovering our economy, to naming post offices, to dealing with protections for the environment.

□ 1045

There are a wide range. One of the things why we have 435 of us here and 100 Senators is because we can do more than one thing at once.

But I will tell you, the woman who is in the hospital in Cleveland, who had her face ripped off by a chimpanzee last week, would probably think, along with her family and friends, that it might be important to deal with the safety of Americans, over 100 of whom