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House of Representatives

The House met at 9 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,
December 31, 2012.

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 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 30 minutes 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 9:50 a.m.

THE FISCAL CLIFF

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, Congress is here on New Year's Eve with the people they love: themselves, the special interests, and the policies of the past.

The overhyped fiscal cliff may well be upon us, and we will find \$600 billion of deficit reduction with tax increases and spending cuts, and then there will be the howls that we are doing it too abruptly from some of the same people

who demanded this system of expiring cuts and sequestration in the first place.

Make no mistake. There will be some real damage. We will be squeezing some people who deserve far better, and then we'll be scrambling to refine the budget reductions in a way that makes sense. And some time in the hours, days, and weeks ahead, we will get a semibalanced small agreement, very likely, struggling throughout the new Congress with budget bluster, especially in the House, moving from crisis to deadline to showdown.

It's ironic because it doesn't need to be this hard. We could use the pressure and revenue from expiring temporary tax cuts to enact tax reform to provide the money that a growing and aging American population needs, but do it in a simpler, fairer way. We could actually reduce entitlement spending on Medicare by accelerating the health care reform, which is what, in Oregon, we've committed to do in exchange for some flexibility and some upfront funding. We have in place a program going forward that, if done on a national level, would save over \$1 trillion over the next 10 years.

We shouldn't be fooling around with patching an outmoded, unfair farm bill. Let's reform it to support family farmers and ranchers, beginning farmers, especially those who grow food, not large agribusiness producing heavily subsidized commodities. We can save money, protect the environment, enhance wildlife, the experience for hunters and fishermen, and have a healthier America.

The military is the greatest source of money. We can start with 135,000 soldiers scattered in over 1,000 bases across the globe. We have a nuclear arsenal where we are spending several hundred billion dollars on weapons we can't use, we don't need and can't afford.

Mr. Speaker, the good news is that the public would support us in these

steps. The good news is that, if we ever got the chance to consider them in a fair and open debate on the floor of the House, we would find bipartisan support for each of these real saving options. The good news is that, ultimately, we are going to take these steps, proving, once again, the wisdom of Winston Churchill when he observed that you could always count on the Americans to do the right thing after they have exhausted every other possibility.

GOING OFF THE FISCAL CLIFF WITH POCKETS FULL OF SOMEONE ELSE'S MONEY

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

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, "We don't have a trillion-dollar debt because we haven't taxed enough; we have a trillion-dollar debt because we spend too much." That was Ronald Reagan in 1982.

President Reagan went on to lead America out of a recession, but history has a way of repeating itself. Somehow, Washington never gets the message, and here we are, 30 years later on the brink of another crisis on New Year's Eve, still addicted to spending money. Now we are over \$16 trillion in debt. President Reagan's words and principles remain true today, and they were true when he said them: the problem is spending money.

Mr. Speaker, the American people know this. Why doesn't the Federal Government and Congress understand it? Why? Because Washington is obsessed with spending someone else's money. It's the arrogance of power that Congress spends the people's money without regard to how this obsession affects those very people.

When American families are in debt, they sacrifice and they cut spending, whether that means taking one less

□ 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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family vacation or fewer presents under the Christmas tree. Homes across the fruited plain are feeling the pain of the economic squeeze in their wallets, and they adjust accordingly, because that's what happens when times are tough. American families don't have a limited credit card like Congress does.

The people are angry because they wonder why reckless Washington can't do the same. I hear that message every day from southeast Texans. These citizens are wiser than the tax-and-spendocrats here in Washington, D.C. Let me share a few of those straight-talking Texans' words with you.

Michael says this:

You can't have the cookies without the milk. Tax reform and spending cuts, not one without the other.

Hubert from Baytown, Texas, says this:

Our children and grandchildren will have to recover from reckless spending. Washington has a spending problem, not a taxing problem.

Jeff says:

You don't become fiscally responsible by continued increases in your credit card spending limit. Folks in Congress need to quit running from the hard choices and stop burying our children and grandchildren in debt.

David from Humble, Texas, said this:

This isn't really rocket science. Stop spending money we don't have, cut back on what we do spend, and stop sending money to our enemies.

Now there's a novel idea.

Paul from Beaumont said this:

We do not have a revenue problem; instead, we have a spending problem.

And it's been a spending problem for a long time.

Larry said:

If I'm out of cash, I stop spending. Perhaps Congress should do the same thing that I do in my house. When I don't have enough money, I quit spending. But Congress has its own printing press backed by the Chinese.

Ashley says:

Spending must be stopped. Just taking more from Americans will not fix this problem. Even if my direct taxes are not affected here, my employer's are. So what will that mean for me in the long run? I'm afraid I'm going to find out.

Yes, Ashley, you're going to find out here on New Year's Eve.

Jimmy from Crosby, Texas, says:

I'm fed up with them never agreeing to a budget and spending like there is no tomorrow. This out-of-control action has got to stop.

And, finally, Renee from Crosby, Texas, said:

Please demand that spending be cut; fraud, waste, and abuse in government spending be addressed before any new taxes be forced upon hardworking Americans.

Mr. Speaker, the American people, they actually do get it—at least those people who work and pay taxes. The backbone of America—the workers of America—say stop the spending obsession.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is spending. We got here by spending too much,

not by taxing too little. We're going off the cliff with our pockets full of somebody else's money.

And that's just the way it is.

□ 0910

MIDNIGHT MAGIC

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

Mr. DEFAZIO. All but those in total denial—and there is a lot of that inside the D.C. Beltway—would admit that we need a combination of increased revenues, taxes—the gentleman before me disagrees—and spending cuts to restore fiscal stability. Especially with a still-weak economy, we don't need blanket tax increases that would hit the hard-working families of the middle class, and we don't need brain-dead, across-the-board spending cuts that mete out the same percentage cuts to wasteful and unneeded programs and high-functioning essential programs. We can do better, and the American people deserve better.

In that spirit, I offer the following ideas. Pick one of the numbers floating out there. Let's restore the Clinton-era tax rates on income over \$250,000, \$400,000, \$450,000. They are bargaining out there. Whatever. We are restoring the Clinton-era tax rates. We're not going back to Eisenhower. We're talking about Clinton-era tax rates for income above that level.

Restore the same Clinton-era tax rates on unearned income when there were a lot more productive investments out there, delay the across-the-board cuts for 30 days, give the new Congress a chance to make smarter, targeted cuts of equal value, and fix the Medicare reimbursement so that seniors aren't threatened in the middle of the month from not being able to get medical care, and extend unemployment. Come on, don't be cruel to people who can't find jobs and want to find them, although some on that side deny they're looking for work.

It's not the specifics really that I want to talk about here. It's the procedure. That's what will solve this because this is Washington. It's not about reality.

Now, here it is: the midnight magic plan. We begin debate at 10 p.m. For the first 2 hours, everybody can go to their usual corners. The Republicans could decry the increased taxes on job creators, on income over \$250,000 or \$400,000 or \$450,000. The Republicans could stay true to their pledge to Grover Norquist to never, ever raise taxes for any purpose, never. Democrats could say it's not enough; it doesn't restore tax fairness. We could have the usual debate for 2 hours. At midnight we stop, sing "Auld Lang Syne," come together a little bit, and then the midnight magic.

Now, the same bill is cutting taxes for 98 percent of the working people in the United States of America, the

Democrats would have protected Social Security and Medicare, and both sides get a chance over 30 days to legislate—God forbid we should legislate around here—targeted cuts instead of the meat-axe approach to cutting spending. I think that's the best we can do for the American people. We transmogrify this bill with the magic of midnight from one that increases taxes on the job creators—income over \$250,000 or \$450,000—to one that actually gives tax cuts to 98 percent of America, something both sides can go home and brag about.

No cliff.

THE SGR NEEDS TO BE PATCHED NOW

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

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, in the late 1990s, Congress came up with a new formula to determine how much to pay doctors for taking care of seniors in the Medicare program. It's called the "sustainable growth rate," or the SGR. And like so many Washington solutions, it doesn't work.

Before coming to Congress, I was a doctor. I took care of patients for over 20 years. I remember thinking at the time that the SGR program was put into place. Well, that won't work. It's a house of cards. It's destined to fail.

Mr. Speaker, here we are. America's seniors are on the verge of losing access to health care. Let me repeat that, Mr. Speaker. America's seniors are on the verge of losing access to health care. How? If Congress and President Obama don't act by January 1, tomorrow, Medicare payments to physicians will be reduced, will be cut by nearly 27 percent. You see, Mr. Speaker, the fiscal cliff is more than just the tax increases that President Obama so dearly wants.

The effect of the SGR formula means that physicians who treat Medicare patients will be forced to limit the number of seniors that they see, fewer patients being seen, doctors forced not to see patients because of foolish Washington policy. This jeopardizes health care for millions of folks. The sustainable growth rate, the formula used by Medicare to determine physician reimbursement, needs to be repealed. It doesn't work for patients, and it doesn't work for doctors. It's destructive to the very principles that we hold dear about health care. It violates accessibility, it violates quality, and it limits choices. It harms real people.

There are positive solutions that we're working on so that we may responsibly reform this broken system. But while we work to put in place a system that actually does make sense, we must provide certainty for patients and their doctors for the new year.

Mr. Speaker, slashing payments to doctors is a terrible idea, and it must be stopped. The SGR needs to be patched now so that seniors may continue to see their doctors, and then we