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House of Representatives

The House met at noon and was called to order by the Speaker.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER. 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 1:50 p.m.

AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, this past Sunday when I turned 70 years of age, I read in the North Carolina paper, known as the News and Observer, the article that I would like to quote:

More than 100 family members, friends and uniformed servicemembers marched slowly and quietly Friday down a hill at Arlington National Cemetery following Army Sergeant Aaron X. Wittman's coffin, draped with an American flag and carried on a horse-drawn caisson.

Mr. Speaker, there are probably not many Members of Congress or Americans who know that Sergeant Wittman became the first American to lose his life in Afghanistan in 2013.

I do not know how many more Americans will have to die between now and the end of 2014. One American life is already one too many. We have done enough in Afghanistan. It will never change, as history has proven time and time again.

Obviously, there is nothing more important than an American life. But there is a second part of this sad situa-

tion, and that is the \$28 million a day we are spending to rebuild Afghanistan. We could use that \$28 million a day to fix our own roads and our own schools right here in America.

Yesterday on C-SPAN, I heard the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, John Sopko, speak about how much money we are spending in Afghanistan and the fact that it is impossible to give the American taxpayers an account of where the money is going. I think Mr. Sopko and his team are doing the best they can; but taxpayers are still being shortchanged, especially with the looming issue of sequestration and a pending continuing resolution.

I hope that my colleagues in the House can join in the effort to bring our troops home by the end of 2013 and to put an end to the wasteful spending in Afghanistan. Most importantly, above all else, put an end to the loss of American lives. I will quote from my friend, former commandant of the United States Marine Corps:

What do you say to the mother, father, wife of the last soldier or marine killed in Afghanistan?

My question is, Was it worth it? My answer is, No, not one life is worth it to be lost in Afghanistan. It is time to bring our troops home.

Mr. Speaker, this poster beside me shows a casket on top of a caisson getting ready to walk to the grave at Arlington National Cemetery.

May God continue to bless our troops, our men and women in uniform. May God continue to bless America. And please, God, touch the hearts of those in the House and let's bring our troops home in 2013.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER LEVEE

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, one of the few areas where Washington agrees with the general public is that our current path is not sustainable. It is not merely a case of spending too much or taxing too little, although we need to control spending and we must and will be raising revenue to meet the needs of an aging and growing population.

The key is to do business differently, to extract more value out of our programs. We need to have the courage to pivot, to do things better, to not follow the reflex of the usual economic and political groups fighting to continue to protect the status quo and the continuing trend lines.

In a world already impacted by climate change and global weather instability, these forces are going to intensify. One of the best examples of why we must change is how we deal with re-engineering nature as a response to natural disasters.

I salute Governor Cuomo for the use of some of the Hurricane Sandy money from the Federal Government to move people out of harm's way, not just throw good money after bad by relocating and rebuilding in exactly the same way, in exactly the same place, where nature repeatedly shows that people are not wanted.

I was before the Rules Committee arguing for greater reform in the Federal spending, but the Governor is pointing in the right direction.

This week we are watching another chapter in the same drama play out in the lower Mississippi, where there is an argument to continue the self-defeating effort to fortify the Mississippi River, closing a gap in the levee, spending hundreds of millions of dollars to prevent an area in the flood plain from flooding every now and then.

The Federal Government has already made periodic flooding in that area as part of its relief valve, to take the excess water and avoid more flooding

□ 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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elsewhere. Failing to allow nature to take its course invites a bigger disaster as more and more water is forced into the narrow fortified walls of the Mississippi.

Think about how we have shortened and narrowed that river. We haven't reduced the amount of water; we've just reduced the areas where it can go. It makes the inevitable flooding worse. Building a levee is simply going to move it a little further downstream.

The solution is to allow the river to go where nature wants it, not encourage farmers to cultivate even more land that will be vulnerable to crop loss, more disaster relief, more crop insurance loss, and to take away increasingly scarce wildlife habitat for the millions of Americans who would like to hunt and fish. Done right, this can be a virtuous cycle. It saves tax dollars, improves the environment, reduces the damage from flooding and all the attendant costs.

It is a classic example of where the Federal Government should learn from 200 years' experience of trying to engineer the Mississippi River and instead allow, in some cases, nature to take its course and avoid more expensive and worse damage.

This is what we need to do across the Federal Government. We don't have to spend twice as much money on health care as most of the developed countries for outcomes that are mediocre at best. We don't have to spend more money on defense than 12 or 13 of the remaining largest defense budgets and on weapons that in many cases, like our nuclear arsenal where we have far more than we need and can ever use and can afford, we can pare down, save tens of billions of dollars and still be the most powerful Nation in the world; or the outrageous crop insurance that encourages reckless and expensive behavior by paying farmers to plant crops on land that never should have been cultivated in the first place.

□ 1210

While we will control spending and increase revenues, the most important thing we can do is to change the way we do business, using common sense, proven technology, stretching our tax dollars, and making our communities more livable. We can start by not pressuring the Corps of Engineers to complete the levees, spending millions of dollars we don't have on a solution that will make the problem worse. Let's work, instead, to understand the impacts of global warming and extreme weather and then do something about it.

FEDERAL DEBT

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

Mr. WHITFIELD. Mr. Speaker, tonight, in this House Chamber, President Obama will give his State of the

Union address to a joint session of Congress.

Article II, Section 3 of the Constitution requires that the President, whoever it may be, shall, from time to time, give to Congress information on the State of the Union. George Washington, the first President, addressed the joint session of Congress, but Thomas Jefferson and each succeeding President up until 1913 presented a written statement of the State of the Union to the House and Senate. So from 1801 until 1913, Presidents submitted a written State of the Union, and on April 8, 1913, Woodrow Wilson, like George Washington, addressed a joint session of Congress, and that has been the manner of our State of the Union by every President since, with the exception of Herbert Hoover.

Today, I am asking for another little change in the State of the Union. I think that we should consider a requirement that the President, on a day that coincides with the State of the Union, also have the Federal Government make a formal declaration of national debt.

My purpose in calling for the declaration is twofold: First, while information about the debt can be found, it is spread throughout a vast array of budget submissions, trustee reports, and other documents that are nearly impossible to navigate or to understand when trying to determine the total national debt and unfunded liabilities our Nation must pay now and in the future. And then the second reason, of course, is to elevate the issue to remind the American public the significant dangers of large government debt.

As of today, our Nation's Federal debt exceeds our Nation's gross domestic product. What does that mean? Gross domestic product is used to determine the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced in America annually, and it includes all of the private and public consumption, all of the government outlays, all the investments and all the exports, less the imports.

Our debt is increasing so quickly that it really is difficult to give an exact figure of our national debt. Suffice it to say that it will, in the very near future, exceed \$17 trillion. When I looked at the so-called "clock" on my way over here, it was approaching \$16.6 trillion. Now, if you stacked \$16 trillion one-dollar bills one on top of the other, it would extend more than 1 million miles, which would reach to the Moon and back twice.

Now, former Speaker PELOSI said a few days ago that we do not have a spending problem. Now, I do not believe that most Americans would agree with that statement. Families throughout America must live within their means or suffer the consequences, and our government must live within its means or suffer the consequences. Many people say there are no real consequences, but all of us have seen the loss of jobs, the violence, the lack of

economic growth in countries like Greece and Spain and other parts of the European Union.

President Obama took office on January 20, 2009, and the Nation's total debt on that day was \$10.6 trillion. Today, it is over \$16.5 trillion. The President has drastically increased this country's debt in a mere 4-year span; in fact, it has increased by over 45 percent. However, it should be pointed out that he and he alone is not responsible for all this dramatic increase in debt. Every person that has served in the U.S. Congress in the recent past or today, House Members and Senate Members, are also responsible for the spending that we have approved. Also, those people who serve in the executive branch of government are also responsible.

Just to give you a few examples, 9 or 10 months ago, the Department of Energy built about 12 new buildings over here on The Mall, across from the Jefferson Memorial, for a solar exhibit. It stayed there for about 10 months, and then it was torn down. No one really knows how much the debt cost.

EPA, each year, gives grants to other countries, including China, to help them with their environmental problems at a time when we have to borrow money from China to meet our obligations. And then, as Mr. JONES mentioned earlier, in Afghanistan, we're spending \$28 million a day.

So I think it would be beneficial to the American people to prepare an annual declaration of the national debt to be made available to the Congress and the public. This would show the American people how much we owed last year, how much we owe this year, and what the projected debt is for the future.

THE BLAME GAME

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

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, tonight, the President will once again walk into this Chamber and lay out a vision for how to strengthen America in the years ahead. Properly, part of that vision will include the need to solve our deficit challenge and address the looming sequester. That dangerous set of automatic and indiscriminate spending cuts is due to take effect in just under 3 weeks. But instead of working with Democrats to avert the sequester through a big and balanced solution—or, frankly, even a short-term balanced proposal—a growing number of House Republicans are, instead, engaged in a dangerous blame game.

Majority Leader CANTOR joined in that this weekend, claiming that the President is the one who proposed the sequester in the first place. What he didn't say was, of course, the Republicans offered a piece of legislation called. The sequester was an integral part of their policy proposal. In fact, the sequester was part of a bipartisan