

floor and allowing them to be voted on, and then having a conference committee not on a law that is 3 years old, but on a pending item between the House and the Senate: the budget. Sooner or later, the system ought to be allowed to work.

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

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

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, this shutdown should not have happened. The Framers of our Constitution designed our system to have tension and differences between the two houses of Congress—that's a given. But after the House and Senate have exercised their best judgment, they are then supposed to sit down and negotiate out their differences. This is the way our bicameral system has worked for 225 years. It is the only way that it can work.

That hasn't happened this time. This time the House proposed a compromise nearly 2 weeks ago to keep the government open and to defund ObamaCare in order to address the epidemic of dropped health care policies, massive rate increases, and job cutbacks that we're now seeing as a result of its implementation. The Senate rejected that compromise by insisting on full funding with no reform. That is their prerogative. It represents the best judgment of that body.

At that point, the differences were supposed to have been negotiated. They weren't. The Senate's leaders refused even to discuss a compromise. So the House offered the second compromise of funding the entire government, including ObamaCare, but at least delaying its implementation for a year to address the rapidly growing complaints that we are all receiving. Instead of taking up the measure, the Senate instead chose to take the weekend off, come in at the leisurely hour of 2:00 in the afternoon on the day of the fiscal deadline, and then summarily reject the House offer, again refusing even to discuss a compromise.

With the clock running out, the House offered a third compromise: fund the entire government, fund ObamaCare, including the malfunctioning exchanges, but at least delay the mandate for individuals to obtain coverage for a year while these problems are addressed and rescind the illegal action of the President that shields Members of Congress from the costs of this law. It's a simple principle: equality under law.

Since the President has already exempted Big Business from the mandate to provide health care for employees, then those employees should also be relieved from the mandate to purchase it. And if Members of Congress can't afford the new costs of ObamaCare, how do we expect the average American to do so? Once again, the Senate summarily rejected the third compromise

by the House and once again refused even to discuss our differences. The clock ran out, and the government is now in a partial shutdown.

Ironically, House Republicans have been accused of a "my way or the highway" approach, yet the record is quite the opposite. House Republicans compromised and compromised and compromised, only to be met by absolute intransigence at the door of the Senate.

The House has now asked for a formal conference committee. This is the mechanism that has evolved over centuries to resolve even the most intractable differences between the two Houses. Yet once again, Senate leaders summarily rejected the offer even before it was formally made.

The only explanation for this conduct is that Senate leaders believe that a government shutdown inures to their political benefit because they can blame Republicans. If Mr. REID and his followers didn't want a shutdown, they would have been feverishly working through this weekend to avoid one as the House was doing. The fact is they didn't, and that speaks volumes.

Our system of governance was not designed to operate in this manner. It cannot operate in this manner. The essence of a bicameral legislature is for each House to act according to its best judgment, isolate the differences, and then work them out. This is the critical link in our deliberative process, and it is not happening. It's not because of any failure of design, but rather because of designing men.

In his 1862 address to the Congress, Abraham Lincoln set the only course that is open to us. He said, "We can succeed only by concert." It is not "Can any of us imagine better?" but "Can we all do better?" The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to this stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. We must disenthral ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

Mr. Speaker, I appeal to the Senate to set aside its dogmas, rise with the occasion, and accept the invitation of the House to sit down in conference. Let us reason together, and then let us save our country.

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

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

Mr. BERA of California. Mr. Speaker, last night, just after midnight, you allowed the government to shut down.

Enough with the gimmicks. I'm not up here to play the blame game, to blame Republicans, to blame the President, to blame the Senate, to blame Democrats. That isn't what the American people want to hear. They want us to do our work. They want us to come together.

Mr. Speaker, we need leadership at this juncture. You're the Speaker of

the House, and this is a House that has both Democrats in it and Republicans. We need your leadership at this moment to open the government and serve the American people. That's what they want to see.

Mr. Speaker, you must be willing to work with Democrats in this body. We are ready and waiting to work with you. My office is open. I'm a doctor, and I'm happy to work with you on the Affordable Care Act and make this about taking care of patients, make this about the American people. We stand ready to do the country's work, but we need your leadership and your willingness to work with Democrats.

The Senate has passed a bill that will keep the government open. Bring it to the floor. If the Republicans don't like it, they'll vote against it. But bring it to the floor and give us a chance to vote up or down. That's how government should work. Give us a chance, as a full body, to vote up or down. We're here to work with you, Mr. Speaker, but bring that clean bill to the floor. Don't attach gimmicks to it.

Keeping government open isn't about attaching a gimmick like access to birth control pills. That isn't what this is about. Stop attaching gimmicks. We are ready to work with you to strengthen and fix the Affordable Care Act and make it about the American patient, but this is about keeping government open. Do your job, Mr. Speaker. We need your leadership.

We've got to stop playing the blame game. This is surreal right now. This is not an episode of "The West Wing." This is real life. In fact, I'm going to read a letter from two constituents of mine, Matthew and Michelle. This is the real world.

Representative BERA, I realize you're not the cause of the looming shutdown, but I'm begging you to do everything you can in your power to keep the shutdown from happening. My wedding is literally going to be ruined if the shutdown happens as we are to marry in Glacier National Park on October 13 . . . It is messing up so many people's lives . . . because some elected people in Washington can't compromise.

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Here's what Matthew wrote:

The constant bickering and self-interest rather than the interests of the general public seem to be a common focus for many in Congress. Start working together and getting things done.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the time for bickering. We need to step up and do our job for all the Matthews and Michelles in America. They're watching, and they're the ones who are suffering. We need to put their interests ahead of political parties, ahead of individual interests.

We got elected to do a job and put the people's interests first. "We, the people." This is the United States of America. We have to start working together in a united way. Mr. Speaker, let's do our work. We stand ready to work and reopen the government. Bring the bill to the floor.

AMERICA'S DEBT TAX

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

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, today President Obama and Senate Leader REID got what they wanted—the Federal Government is shut down.

House Republicans made four attempts to avoid a shutdown; all were denied a straight up-and-down vote in the United States Senate. And now they won't even agree to a conference committee to work out the differences between the two bodies, per the Constitution.

Given this “my way or the highway” mentality, I want to briefly talk to the American people about what to expect in a bigger fiscal crisis, our impending default on the Federal Government's legal obligations by exceeding our debt limit. Without agreement between the President and Congress in a few weeks, America will default on its obligations for the first time in its history. And I fear that our President and congressional Democrats will play politics with our debt ceiling like they did with going with a government shutdown.

And here are the words of a key player in this debate on increasing our debt ceiling. This was a speech in Congress on March 16, 2006:

The fact that we are here today to debate raising America's debt limit is a sign of leadership failure. It is a sign that the U.S. Government can't pay its own bills. It is a sign that we now depend on ongoing financial assistance from foreign countries to finance our government's reckless fiscal policies. Over the past 5 years, our Federal debt has increased by \$3.5 trillion to \$8.6 trillion. That is ‘trillion’ with a ‘T.’ That is money that we have borrowed from the Social Security trust fund, borrowed from China and Japan, borrowed from the American taxpayers. And over the next 5 years, between now and 2011, the President's budget will increase the debt by another \$3.5 trillion.

And the cost of our debt is one of the fastest growing expenses in the Federal budget. This rising debt is a hidden domestic enemy, robbing our cities and States of critical investments in infrastructure.

Every dollar we pay in interest is a dollar that is not going to investment in America's priorities. Instead, interest payments are a significant tax on all Americans—a debt tax that Washington doesn't want to talk about. If Washington was serious about honest tax relief in this country, we would see an effort to reduce our national debt by returning to responsible fiscal policies.

Our debt also matters internationally. Now, there is nothing wrong with borrowing from foreign countries. But we must remember that the more we depend on foreign nations to lend us money, the more our economic security is tied to the whims of foreign leaders whose interests might not be aligned with ours.

And finally:

Increasing America's debt weakens us domestically and internationally. Leadership means that ‘the buck stops here.’ Instead, Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren. America has a debt problem and a failure of leadership. America deserves better.

I, therefore, intend to oppose the effort to increase America's debt limit.

Those words were the words of Senator Barack Obama. Senator Obama is now our President. Unfortunately, President Obama has forgotten his words as a Senator.

In his first 4 years in office, he added more to our national debt than all the Presidents combined in the history of America. And now, instead of working with Congress to fix this debt crisis and the drivers of this debt—the entitlement programs, our President is demanding a naked increase in our debt ceiling.

Mr. President, the government did not have to shut down today. Mr. President, America does not need to go into default. Work with us, please.

CELEBRATING THE OPENING OF THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. SCHAKOWSKY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, well, today is a historic day in our country. Despite a Republican-led government shutdown that was completely unnecessary, we are celebrating the opening of the Affordable Care Act or, as I affectionately call it, ObamaCare.

You know, after almost 100 years of fighting to expand universal access to health insurance coverage in the United States of America, in 2010, Congress finally passed, the President signed, and the Supreme Court upheld ObamaCare as the law of the land. And starting today, Americans will be able to learn about the health plan choices and the financial assistance that is going to be available to them. An army of in-person assisters have been trained and stand ready to help Americans understand their options and enroll in coverage that best meets their needs.

Americans can go to healthcare.gov, or in Illinois, where I'm from, getcoveredillinois.gov is up and running.

Now I have heard from colleagues on the other side, all these scare things about how terrible ObamaCare is going to be for the country and for individuals. Let me read to you some constituent letters that I have received.

This is from Gayle Weiss. She says:

I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis in 1997 and have consistently been denied affordable insurance since that time.

I am so excited that our President has taken steps to help all Americans with access to health care. It's so fitting that tomorrow is my 59th birthday, and what a fantastic birthday gift. Finally, I won't have to worry about losing everything I've worked so hard for if, God forbid, I suffer a catastrophic health issue. No one should have to risk their future for something they have no control over, like illness.

I heard from David Zoltan. He is 34 years old. This is what he writes:

One week before Lehman Brothers went under, I was laid off from my job at the time and spent the next 2 years without health insurance. As a diabetic, the scariest thing in the world is to go without health insurance.

Insulin averages around \$100 to \$120 per bottle, and I need approximately three bottles each of two kinds of insulin every month to live. I had to rely on my doctors to help me apply for any charity care program we could find or beg for the very medicines I needed to survive on a daily basis. Even so, I had to visit the hospital emergency room several times just to get insulin when my doctors couldn't get me free medication.

ObamaCare gave me the preexisting condition plan pools as a lifeline until better solutions were available.

ObamaCare has done so much for me, and I'm proud today to see the beginning of the largest expansion of health care in my lifetime. There will be problems to fix, but we are America. We will fix these problems. We will give the precious necessity of health security to our citizens. We will prevail.

And then I also heard from Eva Strobeck. She said:

I used to get insurance from my husband, who retires in January. I am one of those people for whom it is impossible to get insurance independently. I have three illnesses. ObamaCare makes it possible to get insurance at an affordable rate, which I cannot do without. My psychological medications alone cost about \$5,000 per month. I can't survive without ObamaCare. It must be funded by Congress.

So I want to say that this effort to defund something that will bring life-saving health care to millions of Americans, about 30 million Americans who either have to go bankrupt, who have to pay exorbitant prices, or simply have to do without health insurance, who would be against that? Are there going to be glitches in the program? Of course there are.

Medicare part D had news article after news article talking about the problems of this health benefit for the elderly. Let's get on with it and provide health care for all Americans starting today.

THE UNSUSTAINABLE PATH OF OUR BUDGET

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, we are here this morning. Many in the Nation have questions about how we arrived at this point. It's not that complex. Different people across the country elect people to represent their viewpoints. Even across my own State, the viewpoints vary widely. I probably represent five or six different demographics, different economic engines, different needs. We are sent here to make decisions, to make hard decisions.

One of the toughest things that the Nation faces right now is that we are on an unsustainable path in our United States budget. Those are not my words. They are the words of a specialist, the economist that we hired to tell us such things just last week, noting that what we're doing is not sustainable.

The one side, I recognized their viewpoints, that they should provide more for more people. Other viewpoints are