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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
February 27, 2013.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN 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.

SEQUESTRATION WORKDAYS

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

Mr. BROOKS of Alabama. Madam Speaker, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta states sequestration "would be a disaster in terms of the Defense Department. As far as our budget is concerned, as far as our ability to respond to the threats that are out there, it has a big impact."

Over time, sequestration's disproportionate cuts to national defense will reduce our military to its smallest number of uniformed personnel since before

World War II, its smallest number of operational naval vessels since World War I, and its smallest number of operational aircraft in the history of the United States Air Force.

But national security is not the only sequestration risk. In my home district in north Alabama, President Obama has ordered that roughly 14,000 highly skilled and irreplaceable Department of Defense civilian employees suffer 20 percent furloughs and 20 percent salary cuts.

Redstone Arsenal's engineers, scientists, and other civilian defense staff are critical to national security in a time of international instability. Their knowledge and skill sets are unique, virtually irreplaceable, and may be lost to national security forever if these workers are forced to find work elsewhere.

The damage I've just described to north Alabama's economy is before President Obama starts hammering defense and NASA contractors and many other Tennessee Valley Federal employees who provide worthwhile services to their country.

Nationwide, the economic impact is absolutely staggering. Sequestration risks 1.5 to 2 million job losses, with a resulting 1 percent worsening of America's unemployment rate. It is unwise to subject America's fragile economy to job losses of this magnitude.

For emphasis, and despite White House, Senate leadership, and House leadership efforts to the contrary, I voted against sequestration and the Budget Control Act of 2011, quite frankly, because the risk to America was simply unacceptable. Unfortunately, my vote was in the minority.

In 2012, and despite President Obama's veto threats, the House twice passed legislation to fix sequestration. In response, the Senate not only refused to vote on the House's sequestration solutions, the Senate irresponsibly refused to propose solutions of its own.

Hence, despite the Senate enjoying more than a year and a half to do its job, Senate inaction and delay have given America yet another short-term crisis.

So here we are. America faces three major crises: Sequestration, a continuing resolution to fund the government, and yet another debt ceiling crisis.

While I agree with the House leadership's view that, since the Senate has done nothing to solve this problem, it is appropriate for the Senate to act first on sequestration this time, I am troubled the House is scheduled to work only 24 days in March and April, combined. Conversely, there are 19 workdays in which the House is not in session. Stated differently, the House will only work 56 percent of workdays and be on recess from Washington 44 percent of the time.

The American people work on workdays. Congress should do no less. Actions speak louder than words. Under the circumstances America faces, a part-time Congress is simply unacceptable.

As sequestration unfolds, as national security, Federal Government functions, and the American economy slowly but surely deteriorate, the American people will intensify pressure on HARRY REID's Senate to finally do its job.

Americans are suffering. National defense is suffering. The suffering of Americans is not in recess during this crisis. Congress should not be in recess either.

We signed up to do a job, and that job is not done. The House must provide leadership and prove we are serious about doing the people's business, and Washington is where the people's business is done.

Given the magnitude of the risks and damage done by sequestration to America on a daily basis, I respectfully request that the House remain in session and do our jobs on each and every

□ 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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workday until sequestration is resolved.

The House has passed numerous sequestration solutions. It is long past time for the Senate to wake from its slumber, respond to the clarion call of the American people, and pass a sequestration solution.

CLIMATE CHANGE

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

Mr. BEN RAY LUJÁN of New Mexico. Madam Speaker, in recent years we've seen an increase in major weather events, especially in the continental United States. From record-setting superstorms to severe droughts and devastating wildfires, the recent impact of climate change cannot be ignored.

In my home State of New Mexico, ranchers and farmers are struggling to maintain their livelihoods in the face of drought conditions, while last year wildfires threatened communities that have still not fully recovered.

A rapidly changing climate affects everyone on the planet. Climate change impacts agriculture, water supplies, power and transportation systems, and even our health and public safety.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy and one of the worst wildfire seasons in the western United States that we've ever seen, it's time to work together on commonsense solutions that will allow us to use power in a smarter manner, produce clean and abundant renewable energy, and reduce emissions through energy efficiency. These are things we should be able to agree on and work together on in a bipartisan manner.

It is critical that we move forward with a sense of urgency and take meaningful action that addresses the very real threats of climate change that are already impacting our country.

Sequestration is devastating America today. Madam Speaker, we just heard from one of my colleagues. This week we're scheduled to go on recess on Friday. I hope that my colleague that spoke today, Madam Speaker, reaches out to Speaker BOEHNER and ERIC CANTOR and says, Keep us in session. Let's stop this sequestration from happening. And it's quite simple. The fix to this legislation could be put together in one sentence: Stop it. I guess even better, in two words.

Madam Speaker, we have a sense of urgency across the country when it comes to working on climate change legislation, but as we talk about the impacts to each and every one of our districts with what sequestration will bring with job losses, let's stand together and stop this. Let's ask our leadership to allow us to vote on a simple couple of words: Stop sequestration, and let's prevent it from happening.

SEQUESTRATION: THE LAST TOOL WE HAVE

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

Mr. McCLINTOCK. Madam Speaker, the decline and fall of the Roman Empire offers us a sobering warning of a great nation that became overextended and war-weary abroad while it became utterly profligate and decadent at home. Its economy in shambles and its treasury bankrupt, the mightiest military power on Earth fell prey for backward hordes that had previously existed only on the fringes of civilization.

Now, 3 years ago Admiral Mike Mullen warned our Nation that our national debt is our biggest national security threat. Now, that was 3 years ago when our debt stood at \$13.5 trillion. Today we owe over \$16.5 trillion. In other words, just since he issued this warning, we've added more to our country's debt than we did in our Nation's first 200 years of existence.

No nation has ever taxed and borrowed and spent its way to prosperity, but many nations have taxed and borrowed and spent their way to economic ruin and bankruptcy, and history today is screaming this warning at us, that bankrupt nations aren't around very long because before you can provide for the common defense, you have to be able to pay for it, and the ability of our Nation to do so is now coming into grave question.

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Now, just in the first 4 weeks of this year, Congress added more than a third of a trillion dollars of new spending to this already crushing burden. The fiscal cliff deal added \$300 billion and the Hurricane Sandy bill another \$50 billion, more than 90 percent of which had nothing to do with emergency relief for storm victims.

Earlier this month, Congress simply did away with the debt limit altogether until mid-May. Two years ago, Congress passed the Budget Control Act that authorized the biggest single expansion of debt in our Nation's history; but Congress at least also agreed to reduce the projected deficit by \$1.2 trillion over the next 10 years, either through the supercommittee or, failing that, through automatic budget reductions called "the sequester."

Now, the sequester doesn't actually cut spending in any conventional sense of the word. After a decade in which spending has grown 64 percent, or nearly twice the rate of inflation and population growth, the sequester merely limits the increase next year to about one-half of one percent.

I opposed that act, in part because the sequester was less than one-third of what officials at Standard & Poor's warned was the minimum deficit reduction necessary to preserve our Nation's AAA credit rating. I also objected to across-the-board cuts that treat our highest priorities the same as

our lowest priorities and to the disproportionate impact that it would have on our defense budget. Those warnings fell on deaf ears at the time.

But since then, twice the House has tried to correct these shortcomings with legislation to replace the worst of the defense cuts with long-term entitlement reform. Ultimately, that's the only way we're going to bring our fiscal crisis and its spiraling debt under control.

Both measures died in the Senate; and after the November election, the likelihood of entitlement reform over the next several years is exceedingly remote, which means that however imperfect the sequester may be, it is at this moment in our history the only tool currently available to us to begin to point our Nation back toward fiscal solvency and away from the perilous fiscal path that we are now upon.

We need to give administrators, especially the military command, the flexibility to set priorities and manage our money accordingly; but the overall sequester reductions must be maintained.

A few months ago, the chief of sovereign debt for Standard & Poor's made this point: that although the sequester was insufficient to justify maintaining our AAA credit rating, it was at least a step in the right direction. He said:

The sequester was an agreement that Congress made with itself, and we would view any step back from that agreement very negatively.

Madam Speaker, when the history of our era is written, let it not be said that ours was a generation of locusts that consumed not only the wealth we inherited from our fathers and mothers, but also stripped bare the futures of our sons and daughters. Let us instead begin a new direction for our Nation, stepping back from the fiscal precipice that threatens to destroy our Nation from within.

INSURANCE PREMIUM PRICE CHANGES

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

Mr. McDERMOTT. Madam Speaker, I rise to talk about the health insurance industry and its role in our greatest national achievement: full implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

In the last few weeks, insurance companies, companies that reported \$12.7 billion in profits, had been running a scare campaign arguing that premiums will increase later in the year. They tell us that when they roll out their 2014 health care coverage plans, they will increase premiums unless we weaken the Affordable Care Act's key consumer protections.

The insurance companies didn't get 100 percent of what they wanted, but they got a lot. They blocked the public option, secured an individual mandate guaranteeing that 30 million Americans soon will be customers. That's one