

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.

□ 1010

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

of the most successful lobbying experiments I've ever seen.

But now that we are just a few months away from full implementation of the Affordable Care Act, the health industry is launching what The Washington Post calls "an all-out, last-ditch effort to shield themselves from the blame" for the rate increases that they will impose. Unless they are allowed to charge significantly more money, they tell us, the whole system will collapse.

Now, this is perplexing. We made every effort to address the concerns of the industry when we developed this landmark legislation. It's also deeply troubling that the industry that will gain so much from health reform is now engaging in a misleading PR campaign against it. Despite unprecedented profits and surplus cash reserves, it is deliberately undermining the law. It already succeeded in shaping its benefits.

So let's take a careful look at their claims. For years, companies have offered healthy young adults junk health insurance at cut-rate prices: plans with sky-high deductibles and lifetime limits that didn't cover much. For \$100 a month, you could get a plan that offered practically no useful coverage.

Meanwhile, older people with escalating health care costs were stuck with crippling bills or locked out of the market altogether. Across the board, plans dropped consumers, coverage changed without warning, and people of all ages went without care. ObamaCare will finally put a stop to these abuses.

With better plans with real benefits costs, more than the meager plans marketed by the industry to young people, the stability and affordability will win out in the long run. There are no more games. Instead of avoiding risk, the industry will have to manage it.

ObamaCare will financially help the large majority of healthy young consumers. In fact, 90 percent of the currently uninsured adults under 30 will be eligible for subsidized coverage. Additionally, increased transparency and competition will force rates to drop further, along with the growing pool of young participants who are cheaper to cover. We did all this in my home State of Washington years ago, so I know it can be done.

For the first time, average Americans not insured through a job will get health insurance without having insurance that won't drop you when you're sick, insurance that won't discriminate against women, insurance that won't waste your money on excessive marketing, and will actually cover needed care. These are the crucial consumer protections we fought and got.

Which is the heavier price: an extra \$20 a month for a young person with a healthy income to have reliable insurance or bankrupting an uninsured family? Meeting the needs of the Nation and preserving the well-being of our population is healthiest for all.

So I'm calling on the health insurance industry to be team players and to be good corporate citizens. They have a lot riding on this roll-out, at least as much as the Obama administration and the Congress. We need to work together, not against each other. We have to make this advance work.

We don't need to have a scare campaign on television telling people that if ObamaCare goes in, your premiums are going to go up, and it's his fault. They're the ones with the profits, they're the ones with the reserves, they're the ones that are raising the prices.

They have to be faced with that, Madam Speaker, because otherwise the public is going to be confused. They tried to confuse people all through the establishment of the Affordable Care Act. They didn't succeed. And, in fact, when they used it in the campaign, the people said, do you know what, we like Obama, we like what he did, we want it to happen. So the insurance companies had to go back to the trenches and figure out a way to confuse the American people. Stop it, insurance industry.

SEQUESTRATION

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

Mr. WILLIAMS. Madam Speaker, President Obama's sequester is bad for America. There's no getting around it. Good programs are going to be cut, good people are going to be furloughed; and bad leadership from President Obama is to blame. In the last four years, almost every important budget deadline has been met with impasse and little has been done to enact a responsible budget.

□ 1020

Systematic failure to perform the basic responsibilities of governing has led us to the catastrophic sequestration we see today.

President Obama came up with this idea for the sequester as a temporary solution for another fiscal crisis in 2011. As we've been saying for months, House Republicans are the only ones who have taken action to balance the budget. Last Congress, the House passed two bills, the Sequester Replacement Reconciliation Act and the Spending Reduction Act. However, in recent remarks at the White House, President Obama attempted to blame House Republicans—who control only one-half of one-third of the government—for the looming cuts.

If there's going to be a solution, President Obama is going to have to work with his own political party in the Senate and negotiate with the House. Yet all the President has done so far is call for higher taxes again. He got his higher taxes—\$600 billion from higher earners, with no corresponding spending cuts—at the end of 2012. It seems he will not stop until every single American has to hand over more of

their hard-earned money to the Federal Government—which, I might add, has a bad track record of spending it.

There is no denying that the government spends too much, but these blind cuts are irresponsible and will have a disastrous effect on our military. Yesterday, the Joint Chiefs of Staff testified at a hearing that our national security will be put at risk if they are forced to make deep reductions in spending for manpower, training, and equipment modernization programs.

This is no longer a debate between Congress and the White House to gain the upper hand. This is real, this is serious, and this is the time to take action. In fact, I sent a letter to the President this week urging him to act now to prevent the harmful fallout that the sequester will cause. I pray that he reads it.

While Friday does mark the sequester deadline, we have until March 27 to do the right thing on behalf of our men and women in uniform, as well as the hundreds of thousands of employees expected to be drastically impacted by the sequester.

If the President continues his unwillingness to stop campaigning and start helping the American people who elected him to lead, then at the very least we need to allow the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs to operate under a budget rather than a continuing resolution. This would give them greater flexibility and put them in the best possible position to absorb these across-the-board cuts. By letting the DOD and VA operate under a budget, these agencies can prevent permanent damage from the arbitrary sequester cuts.

Madam Speaker, I represent Texas' 25th Congressional District, which includes a large portion of Fort Hood—one of the largest military installations in the world. The United States Army estimates \$291 million in cuts for Fort Hood, including nearly 600 civilian jobs and nearly 30,000 jobs statewide.

This is preventable. And quite frankly, it's totally unacceptable. We shouldn't have to move a third bill in the House before the Senate finally acts. It's time for President Obama to drop the politics and campaign speeches and do something. Putting our public safety, national security and economy at risk by letting the sequester pass without preventative action is reckless and destructive. Our troops, our businesses, and our families deserve better. Americans expect our President to lead.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Washington, DC, February 25, 2013.

Hon. BARACK H. OBAMA,

The White House,
Washington, DC.

DEAR PRESIDENT OBAMA: I am writing to express my outrage over the proposed cuts to the Department of Defense as part of the sequestration phase of the Budget Control Act of 2011. As commander-in-chief of the U.S. military, your inaction to prevent these cuts from happening to our military and their families is unconscionable.