



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 161

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2015

No. 46

House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HARDY).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 18, 2015.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CRESENT HARDY 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 6, 2015, 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, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

GAZA'S WATER SHORTAGE

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, amidst the troubling picture coming out of the Israeli elections, there was some good news from the Middle East for a change. The Israeli Government announced that it would double the amount of water it sells to Gaza from 5 million to 10 million cubic meters annually. This is positive momentum we must build upon because, while it is an important step, the quantity is insuffi-

cient to prevent a humanitarian disaster looming for Gaza and the region.

The tunnels that were dug by Hamas from Gaza into Israel were not the only things underground that should generate public concern. Without rapid action, the drinking water beneath Gaza, or the lack thereof, poses a threat to the region that is as severe or worse than Hamas' tunnels. That is because the coastal aquifer, the only source of drinking water for 1.8 million Gazans, is near collapse, as soon as 2016.

Like the cities of Los Angeles or Tel Aviv, Gaza cannot currently meet its water needs from within its boundaries. That dynamic is compounded by the fact that Gaza's population is rapidly increasing and now consumes three times the amount of water that is naturally replenished from rainwater.

The massive amount of water withdrawn from the aquifer over the last several decades has allowed salty Mediterranean seawater to contaminate the drinking water at an ever-increasing rate. A 2012 United Nations report said that 90 percent of the coastal aquifer salinity levels were too great for drinking purposes. Today that figure is 95 percent. By the end of 2016, the entire aquifer will be unfit for human consumption. And unless action is taken, by 2020, that damage will be irreversible.

To make matters worse, Gaza does not have large and modern sewage treatment plants and operations. The sewage from 1.8 million Gazans further pollutes the groundwater and risks the outbreak of pandemic diseases like cholera and typhoid. Sewage remains untreated as 90,000 cubic meters of raw sewage, flows into the Mediterranean every day.

Israeli intelligence knew about and warned about Hamas' tunnels long before they were used, but Israeli politicians chose not to take their counsel.

Environmental and water experts have been warning for many years

about the imminent collapse of Gaza's coastal aquifer, but too many politicians everywhere have failed to respond.

While we don't want to minimize Israel's important move to authorize additional water into Gaza, we shouldn't overstate its impact in averting the region's looming water crisis.

What is going to happen if thousands of Gazans actually rush to the fences, trying to get to Egypt or Israel for water? What happens if the water crisis broadens the appeal of Hamas' malice in Gaza?

Look at the recent history in Syria, where the collapse of civil order and the civil war was precipitated by persistent drought that drove people from the countryside into the city. Such dire outcomes in Gaza could be avoided if additional and immediate long-term measures were employed.

Based on the existing infrastructure, Israel has the potential to double—overnight—the quantity of water supplied to Gaza. A wastewater treatment plant recently built under the management of the World Bank in Gaza could reduce by a third the amount of untreated wastewater that pollutes both the groundwater and the beaches of Israel and Gaza.

It is clearly in Israel's interest to facilitate the private-public partnerships that lead to greater energy independence and assist the Palestinian Water Authority.

Strengthening the Palestinian Authority by increasing the flow of water into Gaza and dealing with the sanitation crisis weakens Hamas and highlights their inability to provide public services.

Last night's election was deeply troubling for the future of Israeli politics and a two-state solution, long the policy of the United States and, until recently, the leadership of Israel.

But taking action on water and sanitation is a small, critical, important

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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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step that everyone can support and will benefit Israelis and Palestinians alike. I hope this will be an important focus for those of us in Congress as we look at our aid packages going forward.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF WYNONA HAYDON

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

Mr. HOLDING. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in remembrance of Wynona Haydon, a beloved woman who recently passed away into the loving arms of our Lord.

Wynona married Julian Woodrow Haydon after graduating from high school, and then she began her career as an assistant with the Department of Defense. Throughout her 36-year career, she held positions at the Pentagon and at Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point in North Carolina. There, she met General James Doolittle, General Omar Bradley, and General Dwight D. Eisenhower. She helped usher in the postwar era, alongside many other military officers and personnel.

Mr. Speaker, Wynona was proud to be an American, and she was equally proud of being a North Carolinian.

Someone once said of Wynona that she was “made of the stuff that makes life worth living.” Though known only by those lucky enough to come within her orbit, Wynona lived a life of honesty and hard work, and instilled those traits in her son, her grandson, and her many nieces and nephews.

She was a loving and successful mother and grandmother, a smiling joy and inspiration to her friends and those who came in contact with her. In short, Wynona Haydon lived a long and contributing life which brightened the lives of many others, including mine.

My thoughts and prayers are with her family and the members of Temple Baptist Church, who are mourning the loss of a beloved woman.

REPUBLICANS DECLARE WAR ON POOR WORKING FAMILIES

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

Mr. McGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, with the release of yesterday’s budget, it is official: Republicans have declared war on poor working families in this country. I am deeply disappointed, but I can’t say that I am all that surprised.

Yesterday’s House budget once again slashes safety net programs that provide critical assistance to low- and middle-income families while offering big tax breaks to the superwealthy. I have seen this movie before. I didn’t like it the first time, and I sure don’t like it now.

Following in the footsteps of the recent Ryan budgets, Chairman PRICE’s budget guts the Supplemental Nutri-

tion Assistance Program, or SNAP, the Nation’s premier antihunger program. Like Republican budgets of past years, this year’s budget converts SNAP into a block grant for States.

Mr. Speaker, this would end SNAP as we know it. Previous estimates of the impact of block granting SNAP show that it will result in about \$130 billion in cuts to the program. A cut of that magnitude to SNAP would have serious harmful consequences to the 46 million Americans who relied on SNAP last year to put food on their tables.

This is the same budget that includes a number of other devastating funding cuts to programs that support children, families, and seniors. The Republican budget would end the Medicare guarantees, block grant Medicaid, and repeal the Affordable Care Act, which has helped 16.4 million Americans gain affordable, high-quality health insurance.

The Republican budget also includes reconciliation instructions to the Agriculture Committee, requiring additional cuts to programs within the committee’s jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, I couldn’t support last year’s farm bill because it included an \$8.6 billion cut to SNAP, but the Agriculture Committee finished its work on a reauthorization bill. It is done. We should not be reopening the farm bill in this budget process.

It is bad enough that SNAP has been cut by nearly \$20 billion in recent years, with cuts coming in both the farm bill and with the expiration of the ARRA provisions that resulted in an across-the-board cut for all SNAP beneficiaries. Every single one of those who were on SNAP received a cut. We certainly should not be making hunger worse by cutting our premier antihunger program even further.

Mr. Speaker, Republicans’ fixation with attacking SNAP just doesn’t make sense. SNAP is one of the most effective and efficient of all Federal programs. Its error rate is at an all-time low, and that includes underpayments as well as overpayments. And in recent years, USDA has successfully cracked down on trafficking of SNAP benefits.

The purpose of SNAP is to feed hungry people, which it does. SNAP is a program that works. Without SNAP, hunger would be much worse in this country.

We know from recent CBO estimates that SNAP spending and caseloads have already begun to decline and will continue to do so as our economy continues to recover from the Great Recession. We also know that SNAP is not contributing to our long-term deficit. According to CBO, its share of the economy will continue to decline.

Mr. Speaker, we should not be balancing the Federal budget on the backs of the working poor, period. Cutting food assistance and making hunger worse in this country will not solve our fiscal challenges. SNAP is not the problem.

For Republicans, cuts to programs for low-income Americans might rally their base, but it won’t solve our budget challenges. Poor and working families did not cause our fiscal problems. But time and time again, programs that help them survive tough times and provide them with opportunities to get out of poverty are always targeted for drastic cuts.

And what is especially troubling to me is that the poorest and most vulnerable Americans continue to be the target of false and often mean-spirited rhetoric in this Chamber. It is time for that to stop.

Instead of cutting SNAP, we should be strengthening the program. We should be increasing the benefits so it enables struggling individuals and families to afford more healthy foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables. The current SNAP benefit is already woefully inadequate, about \$1.40 per person per meal, and many families run out of food 3 weeks into the month because the benefit level already is so low.

We also should be working to address one of the biggest flaws in our social safety net, the so-called food stamp cliff, where someone gets a job and loses their benefits but still earns so little that they end up worse off and are back to struggling to put food on their table.

Mr. Speaker, we know that budgets are not just about priorities. They are moral documents that represent a vision for this country.

The vision laid out by Republicans in yesterday’s budget is deeply troubling. We should be striving to make the lives of every American better. We should be striving to end hunger now. Unfortunately, the Republican budget does neither of those things. Instead, it makes hunger worse in this country. And that, to be blunt, is shameful.

UKRAINE

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

Mr. KINZINGER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to address Russia and its aggression in Ukraine.

Ukraine is ultimately a story of a ruler whose goal is to stifle opposition and turn away from a failing economy, corruption, and authoritarianism in his own country by creating the semblance of economic stability and popular support for his rule.

The United States and its allies must strive to ensure that the story of oppression and authoritarianism is not allowed to continue.

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Putin is aiming to distract the focus of the West from his regime and his failing economy in Russia by directing the Russian people to an external enemy which has the potential to become a model of Western democracy, and that country is Ukraine.

Just over a year ago, not even a week after the end of the Sochi Olympics