

shared in recent economic improvements and who face tough choices every day.

Families should not be forced to choose between good, safe child care and putting food on the table. That is a false choice; and, quite frankly, in this country, it is shameful that they have to make that choice.

I urge my colleagues to make a renewed commitment to end hunger now. We have the resources, we have the food, we have everything, but we lack the political will.

Hunger is a political condition. We can solve this problem in a bipartisan way if we choose to, if we make it a priority. There are millions and millions of our citizens who are depending on us to do more than we are doing now. I hope that we live up to that challenge. We can and we should do much better.

DEFAULT PREVENTION ACT

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

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, amidst all the controversies gripping Congress, certainly, we should all be able to agree that the full faith and credit of the United States should not hang in the balance every time there is a fiscal debate in Washington.

This Nation now staggers under \$18 trillion of debt, nearly \$7.5 trillion of it run up during this administration. The interest on that debt is one of the fastest growing components of the Federal budget.

If there is ever any doubt of the security or reliability of that debt owed by this government, interest rates would quickly rise, and our precarious budget situation could rapidly spin out of control.

Ernest Hemingway put it this way. He asked:

How do you go bankrupt? Two ways. First gradually, then suddenly.

So it is with nations.

The debt limit is how we regulate the Nation's debt. It is the national equivalent of a credit card limit. That limit has to be periodically adjusted. It is appropriate for Congress to take responsibility when it is raised. When it is raised, it is also appropriate for Congress to review and revise the policies that are driving that debt.

The fundamental problem under both Democratic and Republican Congresses is that this process is fraught with controversy—the bigger the debt, the bigger the controversy; the bigger the controversy, the more credit markets are likely to be spooked into demanding higher interest payments to meet their greater risk. Given the size of our debt, that could produce an interest tidal wave that could sink our budget and our Nation along with it.

I am, today, introducing the Default Prevention Act with 43 cosponsors to guarantee that the sovereign debt of

the United States Government will be paid in full and on time, under any circumstances, even total political gridlock.

It simply provides that if the debt limit is reached, the Treasury Secretary may continue to borrow above that limit for the sole purpose of paying interest and principal that is due. It is an absolute guarantee that the debt of the United States will be honored.

Most States have various laws to guarantee payment of their debts. Three years ago, in testimony to the Senate, Ben Bernanke praised these State provisions for maintaining confidence in their bonds.

This act passed the House in the 113th Congress, but it was never taken up by the Senate. Now, we are approaching the expiration of the government's current borrowing authority. We will soon have serious discussions over the level of our debt and the additional measures necessary to bring that debt under control. We all hope these discussions will go smoothly, but we all know that sometimes they don't.

The Default Prevention Act says loudly and clearly to the world that no matter how much we may differ and quarrel, the sovereign debt of this Nation is guaranteed, and their loans to this government are absolutely safe.

Last session, the Democrats opposed this measure, charging that it is an excuse not to pay our other bills. Do they actually suggest that all these other States—that have guaranteed their sovereign debts for generations, some for centuries—have ever used these guarantees as an excuse not to pay their other bills?

On the contrary—by providing clear and unambiguous mandates to protect their credit first, they actually support and maintain their ability to pay for all of their other obligations.

The most outrageous claim the Democrats made was that this measure paid China first. What nonsense. More than half of our debt is held by Americans, often in American pension funds. This act actually protects Americans far more than Chinese or other foreign investors.

Whether our loans come from China or Timbuktu, from Grandma's pension fund or Johnny's savings bond, without the Nation's credit, we cannot meet any of our other obligations.

Principled disputes over how the debt limit is addressed are going to happen from time to time. Just a few years ago, then-Senator Barack Obama vigorously opposed an increase in the debt limit sought by the Bush administration.

When these controversies erupt, as they inevitably do in a free society, it is imperative that credit markets are supremely confident that their loans to the United States are secure.

Providing such a guarantee could prevent a future debt crisis and give Congress the calm it needs to negotiate

the changes that must be made to bring our debt under control before Congress authorizes still more debt.

I urge its speedy consideration.

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S BUDGET

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, this is the week where the President submits his budget. We are seeing a great deal of conversation about many of the provisions. One area that I am pleased has been greeted with positive reaction is his emphasis on infrastructure, on rebuilding and renewing America.

This is a debate that is very important. It is long overdue to focus in on solutions. It is an area of potential agreement: the need to address the fact that America is falling apart while we are falling behind, somewhere on the order of 25th in the world rankings. Where once we had the finest infrastructure in the world, that is no longer the case.

The American Society of Civil Engineers gives us a grade of "D." It is going to cost \$2.2 trillion by 2020 to be able to bring us up to standard. The longer we wait, the worse the situation.

It is costing each American \$323 a year, on average, in damage to their cars because of inadequate infrastructure, to say nothing of thousands of lives lost because of unsafe road conditions and the potential disruption of business and commerce.

Americans are spending millions of hours a year trapped in traffic. America's highways—which are how we deliver products to stores, to factories—are increasingly congested, causing increased costs due to delay.

The President's proposal is a bit complicated. It deals with other tax provisions that virtually everybody thinks are a long shot, at best, to be enacted.

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This is part of the pattern the administration has had in the past: offering up things that, in theory, would make a difference but that are unlikely. Usually they are pronounced dead on arrival. Likewise, the proposals of some of my Republican friends for their approaches, wrapping it into their version of tax reform, have been consistently declared not possible.

We have one, simple, commonsense approach that should be taken—it was highlighted again today in an editorial in *The Washington Post*. It has also been written about in *The New York Times*, in the *LA Times*, in *USA Today*, in *Bloomberg View*, in papers large and small across the country—to raise the gas tax. It has not been raised in 22 years, and in that time, it has lost a significant portion of the purchasing power while America's needs grow.

For 60 years, the gas tax has formed the backbone of how we deal with

America's infrastructure finance. The user pays—people who benefit the most pay the most—and it served us well for over half a century.

But over the course of the last 10 years, it is no longer adequate. The fixed amount that hasn't been increased, the erosion due to inflation, increasing the fuel efficiency of vehicles all combine to mean that we are falling short of the mark. We have been required to transfer over \$60 billion from the general fund just to maintain our already inadequate levels of funding, and the current patch expires in May. The clock is ticking. There are opportunities to make a difference.

It is interesting. It is not just the newspaper editorial writers who focus on this as the simplest, most effective, commonsense approach. We are finding in the other body a number of Senators, including Republican Senators, who indicate that they are open to finally addressing and updating the gas tax.

My colleague on the Ways and Means Committee, JIM RENACCI from Ohio, wrote a very insightful article in a recent issue of Roll Call. He made the case for our moving forward with increasing the user fee to be able to maintain our roads and bridges, highlighting the costs and consequences.

Mr. Speaker, there is an opportunity for us to move forward. This does not have to be something that is complicated or partisan. This is something that Ronald Reagan in 1982 called upon the Congress to do, where he in his Thanksgiving Day address asked for the Congress to more than double the gas tax. Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan did it. We can do it today. I strongly urge my colleagues to address this simple, commonsense approach and help us rebuild and renew America.

THE VALUE OF VACCINATIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, this morning, I feel compelled to speak again about the necessity of increasing the knowledge and the notice given by the FDA—the Food and Drug Administration—and the Centers for Disease Control on what seems to be a surge in the getting of measles by many across this country. The numbers have gone past 100. It is clear that measles is a disease that quickly spreads, and it is also clear that medical science affirms the value of vaccines.

So I believe it is extremely important today to again ask the FDA and the CDC, as I did yesterday in a letter, to raise the level of warning and concern to parents, schools, counties, and States in the entire Nation on being able to provide information to encourage vaccination, if that is what is the ability to have—if you are the age or if your child is of the age to be able to receive that vaccination and to do so.

Over the last couple of weeks, we have seen measles spread to enormous

numbers. We have seen the numbers grow in California and then spread. We have heard of cases in which the measles started in an entertainment facility, and people moved around the country. One example, in particular, I think, is potent because the father of the children has been speaking out. He is a pediatrician, and he is calling upon families to vaccinate, particularly the MMR, which is the vaccination dealing with measles.

Unfortunately, an innocent visit to a clinic, which a child needs to do for pediatric services, exposed an 8-month-old to the possibility of measles and exposed his 3-year-old sister, who is suffering from leukemia. Now, as I understand it, they are in isolation. There is the thought of someone traveling on an airplane with measles. Unlike a number of other diseases, measles spreads extremely quickly. Stories have been told or examples have been given that if you have measles and if you are in a room and if you leave that room—and maybe you have coughed or done something—an hour later, someone comes in, and there is the possibility that you still may be exposed to it. When riding on an airplane, you may expose a whole number of persons to measles if you are, in fact, infected.

I think it is extremely important. Though we realize there are differences of opinion, I am glad to find in the political landscape that this is not a political football and that, in essence, we come together and recognize the importance of having this information and of encouraging vaccination.

I am asking for the State and city health departments and county health departments across the Nation to provide their own information to parents and schools. I wonder whether or not there is need to again reassess the importance of reinstating the obligation and the responsibility of all families who have children who are going into a public school system to have them vaccinated within the realm of their own health conditions and their own assessments by their pediatricians.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue. This is an issue of which we in a modern day, 21st century nation—and as an example of health care to those around the world—need to show the importance of preventative medicine and protecting our children. We have worked on these issues in many ways. We have fought for a vaccine for HIV. As has been said in the past, they are looking for a vaccine for Ebola because we understand how that can intervene and, in those instances, save lives. In this instance, in not knowing the condition of individuals, we know that this disease can be damaging.

It is important that we focus on educating the public. I believe an alert should go out that we have a problem and that we should be working with our local health facilities and disciplines and districts to be able to establish best practices and protocols, and that parents and others should be informed to make intelligent decisions.

More importantly, I think this is an issue that should be quickly assessed on behalf of the CDC and the FDA. Mr. Speaker, it is important for the children of America that we provide them the safety and security for their lives.

FIFTY YEARS FROM SELMA

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

Mr. CLYBURN. Mr. Speaker, in one of his great books, Martin Luther King, Jr., asked the question: Where do we go from here—chaos or community?

Mr. Speaker, today, 50 years after Selma, that question is still in need of an answer.

One area in need of aggressive action is persistent poverty, and I want to thank President Obama for sending us a budget that equalizes the Tax Code and that, if substantially enacted, will move us closer to what Dr. King often referred to as the “beloved community.”

Statistics show that there are nearly 500 counties and thousands of communities in the United States that are classified by the Census Bureau as “persistent-poverty areas.” They are certified because 20 percent of their populations have lived below the poverty line for the last 30 or more years. They are diverse communities, including Caucasian communities in States like West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee; Native American communities in States like South Dakota, Alaska, and Oklahoma; Latino communities in States like Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas; and African American communities in States like South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi. They are urban communities in States like New York and heartland communities in States like Missouri.

There are 139 of these counties that are represented in this House by Democrats, 331 by Republicans, and 18 are split between the two parties. Combating persistent poverty should matter to all of us regardless of party, geography, or race.

In early 2009, as we were putting together the Recovery Act, I proposed language to require at least 10 percent of funds in three rural development accounts to be directed to efforts in these persistent-poverty counties. This requirement was enacted into law. In light of the definition of “persistent-poverty counties” as having at least 20 percent poverty rates over 30 years, this provision became known as the “10-20-30 initiative.”

In using the 10-20-30 formula, the Recovery Act funded a total of 4,655 projects in persistent-poverty counties, totaling nearly \$1.7 billion. I saw firsthand the positive effects of these projects in my district. We were able to undertake projects and create jobs that would have otherwise languished. Among these investments were a \$5.8 million grant and a \$2 million loan to