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No. 10

## House of Representatives

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

### DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,  
January 18, 2024.

I hereby appoint the Honorable DERRICK VAN ORDEN to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

MIKE JOHNSON,  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

### MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 9, 2024, 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 time equally allocated between the parties 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.

### FATE OF SOCIAL SECURITY

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

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, as we sit here currently, the Budget Committee is undertaking a matter of grave concern.

I include in the RECORD letters from both the AFGE and the AFL-CIO with respect to the establishment of the so-called fiscal commission.

JANUARY 12, 2024.

### AFGE APPLAUDS LAWMAKERS' CALL TO REJECT FISCAL COMMISSION

WASHINGTON—The American Federation of Government Employees is echoing calls from nearly 120 lawmakers for Congress to reject a proposed fiscal commission that would bypass elected leadership and make recommendations to slash vital federal programs and government services.

"A fiscal commission would give a small group of lawmakers and non-elected individuals enormous power to recommend cuts to Social Security and other popular programs without any ability for the public to weigh in," AFGE National President Everett Kelley said.

"If Congress is serious about preserving Social Security, Medicare, and similar programs for future generations, then it needs to have an honest discussion about how to do that—not pawn off these decisions to a secret group behind closed doors."

On Jan. 11, Reps. John Larson of Connecticut and Jan Schakowsky of Illinois sent a letter to House Speaker Mike Johnson and Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries signed by 116 members of the U.S. House calling on them to exclude a fiscal commission from legislation funding the federal government for the remainder of fiscal 2024 or any other must-pass bills.

"It is Congress's responsibility to conduct the oversight and recommend enhancements to solvency or cuts, and it should be done in the open and not behind closed doors," the letter states. "We do not need a Commission to tell us what we must do, we need the political courage to take up these or any other proposals in regular order."

Congress, for example, has yet to advance Rep. John Larson's Social Security 2100 Act, which would modernize Social Security, increase benefits, and safeguard the trust fund—all without raising taxes on middle income Americans or raising the retirement age. Congress still hasn't agreed on full-year funding for federal agencies, which have been operating under continuing resolutions since the fiscal year began Oct. 1.

"With just a week before government funding runs out for various departments including Veterans Affairs, Agriculture, HUD, and Transportation, Congress should focus on passing full-year funding for these and other government programs instead of trying to pawn off its tough decisions to an exclusive commission," Kelley said.

AFL-CIO,  
LEGISLATIVE ALERT,

January 17, 2024.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE: On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I urge you to oppose the Fiscal Commission Act (H.R. 5779), the Debt-to-GDP Transparency and Stabilization Act (H.R. 6957), and the Fiscal State of the Nation Act (H.R. 6952), when they are considered by the House Budget Committee tomorrow. These bills would help set the stage for the kind of fiscal brinksmanship that demands cuts to workers' Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits as the price of preventing government shutdowns. Instead of perpetuating this dysfunction, we believe Congress should commit to deliberating fiscal issues through the committees charged to examine these issues with transparency and an open process.

The AFL-CIO strongly opposes the Fiscal Commission Act. Under this bill, closed-door drafting of provisions to reduce federal deficits through program cuts and revenue changes would produce a bill that cannot be amended. Fast track procedures would require expedited floor consideration in the House and in the Senate without filibuster. The lack of transparency and accountability in such a process raises significant doubts about the intentions behind the approach, such as substantial benefit cuts in Social Security and other federal programs. We share The White House's characterization of this commission as a potential "death panel" for Social Security.

The Debt-to-GDP Transparency and Stabilization Act would establish a reporting mechanism that could be incorporated in a debt enforcement trigger for social benefit cuts in subsequent legislation. Such a debt trigger would come into play in times of recession when GDP contracts—exactly the worst time to implement benefit cuts on working families and slow the economy. Congress can acquire this data for its deliberations without establishing this mechanism, and we ask you to oppose this bill.

We also oppose the Fiscal State of the Nation Act in its current form. The bill would require an annual joint session of Congress to review reports of the government's assets and liabilities audited by the Government Accountability Office. We believe this annual session would be used to fan the flames of fiscal brinksmanship.

The recent history of fiscal commissions and super committees has shown that they

□ 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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have failed to initiate salutary legislative efforts to reduce the deficit. Unfortunately, they were successful in paving the way for legislative efforts to cut federal worker's pay and benefits and in imposing budget caps that impacted appropriations for essential federal services. They did not lead to more equitable approaches to deficit reduction that balance program cuts with higher taxes for the wealthy.

We urge you to consider alternative legislation that can secure programs like Social Security and Medicare for the future while also improving affordability for seniors and working people. For instance, supporting legislation to extend Medicare's negotiation of lower drug prices for seniors and extending these savings to all working people. In addition, we encourage you to support Ranking Member Boyle's Medicare and Social Security Fair Share Act (H.R. 4535), which would ensure those earning more than \$400,000 pay their fair share in taxes to extend the sufficiency of the Social Security trust fund and Medicare.

In conclusion, I urge you to oppose the legislation that will be considered in tomorrow's mark up and to help advance the many bills already introduced that manage to simultaneously reduce the deficit and inequality.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM SAMUEL,  
*Director, Government Affairs.*

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I think it is vitally important that Members understand what is being proposed and how it totally relies on no Member of this body other than the select few, Mr. Speaker, who will be chosen.

The commission is comprised of 16 individuals, 4 who are outside experts and not part of this body. The Senate will have six Members that they choose, three Republicans, three Democrats; the House three Democrats, three Republicans.

In a body of 435 people here, 3 Democrats and 3 Republicans will decide the future and fate of Social Security and Medicare. It is interesting. They will do so behind closed doors, with no obligation to report in public. Interestingly enough, too, the bill calls for them to form the committee, but they don't have to report back until after the election during a lameduck session.

Imagine that, Mr. Speaker. The committees of cognizance here that deal with these issues will have no relevance.

The only thing that will matter is an up-or-down vote decided by these individuals behind closed doors that is unamendable and comes to this floor for an up-or-down vote. This is outrageous, and it is wrong.

There are several remedies and proposals that exist out there for Social Security. This is what is so vitally important.

Close to 70 million Americans depend on Social Security, and Social Security doesn't create one penny of debt. It is a program that is fully paid for that cannot be borrowed from and has to be actuarially sound. Yet it is thrown in here by a desire by some to use a clandestine, subterranean, double-secret probation committee to cut benefits from Americans.

Adding insult to injury, the last time Congress enhanced the benefits for Social Security, Richard Nixon was President. That is more than 53 years ago now that Congress took some action to enhance benefits for people.

Mr. Speaker, 10,000 baby boomers per day become eligible for Social Security. More than 5 million of our fellow Americans get below-poverty-level checks, having worked all their lives and paid into the system.

What we need is a vote on Social Security. Put both measures side by side: a proposal to do a double-secret probation study committee versus actual legislation to improve and enhance Social Security for the more than 70 million Americans who will be participating.

Every single Member of Congress has Social Security recipients. We have sent you the exact number for your district. Imagine not having any increases in more than 53 years, for 40 percent of all Americans. In a Nation of more than 300 million people, for minimally 28 million Americans, this is the only thing they have for retirement. As everyone in this body knows, it is not just simply retirement. It is also spousal and dependent coverage. For military veterans especially, it is also for disability. This body has not done anything, nor the Senate, in 53 years.

All this study is, is kicking the can down the road and creating further problems. Oppose this legislation.

#### CELEBRATING THE SERVICE OF CHRISTINE HILL

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

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the service of one of our staffers on the VA Committee.

Ms. Christine Hill has dedicated decades of her career to this Nation's servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

She got her start in Congress as a military legislative assistant for Elizabeth Dole before being appointed and confirmed by the Senate to serve as the VA Assistant Secretary for congressional and legislative affairs in the Bush administration.

Christine then went on to advocate for veterans in the VSO world until we were able to bring her here to the committee where she has served as the Subcommittee on Health staff director for over 10 years.

Christine has helped advance dozens of bills supporting veterans and their families, most notably: giving veterans greater control over the healthcare that works for them through the Choice and the VA MISSION Acts, expanding mental health care and support through the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, fighting for toxic-exposed veterans to get them the healthcare and benefits they have earned through the PACT Act, and so

many other landmark pieces of legislation.

It is important to note that she only began her impressive civilian career after a full 20-year career in the United States Air Force. Christine's entire life is marked by service, and she, without question, represents the best that America has to offer.

A graduate of the Air Force Academy, Christine held numerous positions as a KC-135 navigator, flying combat support during Desert Storm. Christine was handpicked to become the first woman assigned to fly the B-1B bomber and concluded her military career at the Pentagon, retiring as a lieutenant colonel.

You would never guess any of these things about Christine. She is one of the kindest, most humble people I have ever met, and she has been an absolute pleasure to work with during my time leading this committee. She is a dear friend of mine, and she will be sorely missed.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Christine. I want her to have a wonderful life in the things she pursues from here on out. This Nation thanks her for the job she has done both in the military and for this institution.

#### COMMEMORATING 103 DAYS SINCE THE OCTOBER 7 ATTACK BY HAMAS

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

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, last night, I joined Members on both sides of the aisle for a candlelight vigil to mark 103 days since October 7; 103 days since Hamas tore through Israeli communities leaving slaughter, rape, and destruction in their wake; 103 days since these terrorists took hundreds of Israelis and Americans hostage; and sadly, Mr. Speaker, 103 days of inaction by this Congress.

I believe the sentiments and prayers our Members shared at the vigil are genuine. Indeed, the vast majority of this Congress wants to aid Israel as well as Ukraine, but our actions—rather, I should say, inaction—believe our words.

The far right has prevented this Congress from delivering the resources necessary to give our rhetoric meaning and impact. Hollow words, empty threats, and unfulfilled promises are poor substitutes for military hardware, munitions, and humanitarian relief.

From partisan IRS cuts to a complete overhaul of our immigration system, Republican leadership has made supplemental aid to our allies contingent on completely unrelated issues.

Mr. Speaker, I should point out that the Speaker of this House, Mr. JOHNSON, sponsored a bill just a few years ago that said only one subject per bill because he didn't want to be forced to vote for something that he liked at the same time he voted for something he didn't like. From partisan IRS cuts to