

February 19th, 2011

Washington, DC- Ranking Member, Norm Dicks gave the following statement before voting on H.R. 1- The GOP Continuing Resolution that funds the federal government through FY2011:

"We are now at the end of the long debate over the legislation that continues funding for the current fiscal year through September 30, 2011. This is an exercise that began 10 days ago with the adoption in our Committee of an overall spending limit that was arbitrarily established by one member of the Republican majority and then applied to the 12 Appropriations Subcommittee accounts. With the exception of the Defense title of this bill, there was almost no consultation with the members of our side of the aisle and almost no recognition of the potential harm that the steep cuts contained therein would cause to our still-fragile economy. I expressed that view –my deep concern for our recovering economy-- as our 302(b) subcommittee spending ceilings were established on February 8th. I said at the time that I believed the Republican approach to deficit reduction was too narrow and too focused on non-security discretionary spending – the smallest segment of spending in the budget. Those spending levels would undoubtedly have been detrimental to our task of creating jobs and assuring our economic recovery. And I expressed my view that this specious concept of “cut and grow” had no basis in sound economic theory.

"But following that initial meeting of our Committee this year, the situation got even worse. After the Republican leadership presented this risky budget allocation proposal for the remainder of this fiscal year, the most conservative members of the Republican caucus objected and demanded that their leaders impose an additional \$26 billion in budget cuts simply in order to adhere to an arbitrary \$100 billion level that was pulled out of thin air and inserted into a campaign press release last fall. The result was that a bad bill became even worse, and on Tuesday we began what has been an exhaustive debate over this legislation that was open for amendment only to the extent that neither Democrats nor Republicans could propose adding one dollar to any account without an offsetting reduction from within that same appropriations account. That is, we were precluded from adding more funding to assure that 200,000 kids would not have been eliminated from the Head Start program by reducing administrative expenses in the Air Force budget that are no longer needed.

"So what we had before us was a bill that slashed a number of extremely important federal programs and terminated others in a way that ignored the advice of our Fed chairman and a host of prominent economists who have cautioned us to proceed more slowly and carefully with

budget reductions in the current fiscal year. We as Democrats are as concerned about reducing the deficit as I know the members of the Republican caucus are. But we believe that if you jam on the fiscal brakes so abruptly, it will be counterproductive. It will slow economic growth, increase unemployment, and thereby increase the deficit. We believe the President's approach is a better course to follow. It is a five-year freeze that will accomplish real savings – more than \$400 billion-- and it will do so gradually, making deeper cuts only as the economy grows stronger. It will bring non-security spending down to its lowest share of GDP since the Eisenhower Administration. We would have preferred to offer this budget freeze at the 2010 levels for the remainder of this fiscal year. But that was not an option that was allowed under the unusual rules we have adopted for the consideration of this appropriations bill.

"The result, after more than four days of debate over hundreds of amendments, is a bill that is regrettably even worse than when it was introduced, and it is now encumbered with an array of ideologically-driven provisions that will surely render it dead on arrival in the other body and virtually impossible for the President to sign it into law. While the debate has been a healthy debate, exposing the clear divisions in this body between our two parties over what we believe should be our budget priorities, the resulting product does not in any way represent a consensus view of this body and I believe it represents a prescription for further harm to our fragile economy and it imposes unfair cuts that will disproportionately affect many of our citizens who are least able to afford them. These are indiscriminate cuts, to be sure: they would cost jobs, delay economic recovery and hurt people all across America: Elimination of meat and poultry inspectors that will result in more people suffering from food-borne illness. Kicking 200,000 kids out of the Head Start program. Telling many college students that they won't have the same money in the Pell Grants they need to afford college next year. Termination of the one program that helps homeless veterans get off the streets and out of shelters. And the list goes on and on.

"In addition to these brutal cuts, the Republican leadership and many of its members have been intensely focused this week on taking away the initial advantages that American families have been enjoying since the health care reform legislation was signed into law last summer. They voted to take away the provisions that ban health plans from dropping people when they get sick. They voted to restore discrimination against kids with pre-existing conditions. To end the opportunity for parents to continue coverage for their sons and daughters up to age 26. And they voted to re-impose lifetime limits for insurance coverage as well as to stop the phase-out of annual limits. I cannot imagine how they are going to explain all of these votes when they go home to their constituents.

"My other concern here is timing. We are two weeks away from the day on which the current continuing appropriations bill expires on March 4th. The Republican leadership knows that there is zero chance for this legislation to pass in the other body, and most likely we will see a

completely different bill return to the House shortly before March 4th, presenting the prospect of a government shutdown if a compromise version cannot be achieved by then. While I believe it would be a serious mistake for the Republican leadership to let that happen, I worry that we are headed inexorably in that direction. I hope we can avoid that outcome, and I look forward to working with my friend, Chairman Hal Rogers, to assure that the essential operations and services of the federal government will not be interrupted before we come to an acceptable agreement.

"I would also like to thank Chairman Rogers for conducting what I believe has been an entirely civil debate over this contentious legislation. His limitless energy and calm demeanor have allowed the House to work its will over the past several days and it has been an honor for me to work with him in guiding our respective colleagues to their judgments on these important issues. I also appreciate the work that the staffs of both the majority and the minority have done over these many long hours to assure that our debate has been an informed and productive one."

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