

Prepared Testimony: Budget Committee Member Hearing

Steny H. Hoyer, House Majority Leader

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Thank you, Chairman Yarmuth and Ranking Member Womack. You have heard – and will be hearing – from a lot of Members today about priorities affecting individual districts. I want to speak to you about what ought to be an overarching budget priority for our country.

Those of you who have heard me testify here in the past know that I have consistently advocated for making the difficult decisions necessary not only to stop adding to the deficit, but to reverse the long-term fiscal trends that threaten our future economic prosperity.

Over the next several weeks, this Committee has an opportunity to start off the budget process for FY2020 on the right foot and allow appropriators to get to work on funding government on time. One of the most important functions of the budget resolution is the 302(a) allocation, giving the Appropriations Committee a topline budget for all twelve of its funding bills. That process has been somewhat hijacked in recent years by statutory spending caps for defense and nondefense appropriations put in place by the Budget Control Act in 2011, with frequent delays in the appropriations process as we negotiate deals to adjust the caps to meet our national needs. I believe it is critical that we achieve a bipartisan agreement on how to replace sequester-level spending caps for both defense and nondefense appropriations for the coming fiscal year as soon as possible.

It would be not only deeply unfortunate, in my view, if we missed an opportunity to do the job we were sent here to do, but it would increase the chance that our country could be headed for another disastrous government shutdown. This Committee can – and should – set the tone for that agreement as you consider the budget resolution and the appropriations 302(a). If done quickly, a new BCA caps deal can accelerate the work of passing appropriations bills on time, conferencing them with the Senate, and the President signing them into law. No more shutdowns, missed paychecks, or endless continuing resolutions leading to economic uncertainty for our markets and financial insecurity for our people.

I was disappointed to learn that the Trump Administration intends to send us a budget next week that rejects the existing bipartisan consensus, enshrined in the last three BCA cap agreements, by using the so-called “Overseas Contingency Operations” account as a backdoor for exempting nearly \$200 billion in additional defense spending from its BCA cap – while slashing nondefense spending well below the sequester level in the name of fiscal austerity. That is either gross malpractice, which does a disservice to the budget process and virtually assures another budget standoff at the end of the year, or a dangerous shortchanging of our military’s capacity to engage in long-term national security planning.

This Committee has the best platform to reject such an approach and work toward consensus on a budget that reflects adjusting the BCA caps to levels that accommodate our priorities on both the defense and non-defense sides of the ledger –while maintaining the principle of parity. I urge the Committee to serve as an example to the rest of us on how to work together, with the precedent of three prior BCA cap agreements as your guide, to reject to the kind of budget gimmickry and fiscal brinksmanship that led to the longest shutdown in our nation’s history earlier this year.

I want to thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of this Committee on both sides for their work as this process moves forward. And I look forward to working with all of you to ensure that, together, we fulfill our collective constitutional responsibility to exercise the power of the purse.