
WASHINGTON, DC - House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (MD) spoke on the House Floor today in support of the budget conference report, which passed the House 233-193. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery:

"Today, the House has the rare opportunity to set America on a responsible course for the future, a course of lasting, broadly-shared prosperity. I urge my colleagues to seize this opportunity. Along with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, this budget is a key part of our response to this recession. We have the power to emerge from this recession a stronger nation, one with a future of clean energy and energy independence, a workforce ready to compete with the best in the world, and a reformed system of healthcare. We also have a chance to vote for the principles of fiscal responsibility and put ourselves on a truly sustainable course.

"On energy, the budget funds incentives for cutting-edge research and clean energy jobs, as well as an energy-efficient, money-saving national smart grid.

"On education, this budget builds upon the recovery plan with additional support for early childhood education, elementary and secondary school students, and efforts to help more Americans obtain a college degree. It expands access to education in the make-or-break years of early childhood, increases Pell Grants to help more students afford higher education, and promotes job-training and significant education reform.

"On healthcare, this budget responds to the skyrocketing costs that are straining families and businesses across America. Family premiums have more than doubled since 2000, and over the past five years, our total healthcare spending has increased at more than twice the rate of inflation, consuming more of our economy and our budget each year. This budget fights that trend by making a significant down-payment on reform, taking steps to lower healthcare costs, improve quality, and expand access. The budget also allows us to use reconciliation to provide for an up-or-down vote on reforming healthcare-not as an option of first resort, but as a fallback if partisanship blocks progress.

"As the bipartisan Concord Coalition points out, 'The budget reconciliation process was used in

1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2005 to reduce taxes (as opposed to deficit reduction). Moreover, a case can be made that health care reform-that includes spending restraints and squeezes inefficiencies out of the system-is integral to reining in the rapid growth of health care costs which is a major driver of deficits.' I want to stress that last point: It is essential that healthcare reform include difficult choices to cut costs, which will eventually result in a lower deficit.

"All of these investments are vital to our future economic health and competitiveness. As President Obama recently pointed out, 'A cash-strapped family may cut back on all kinds of luxuries, but will insist on spending money to get their children through college.' Our country is in the same position-these tough times are no excuse to cut back on investments that will pay off many times over down the road.

"Finally, this budget puts America back on the path of fiscal responsibility. It's no secret that past budgets have made easy choices and kicked the difficult ones down the road. This budget has to live with the legacy of those easy choices, on issues including the AMT and the Medicare doctor fix. But by passing this budget, we will be leaving a different legacy: one that makes clear that our government must pay for what it buys.

"This budget cuts the deficit from 10.5% of GDP in 2009 to 3% of GDP in 2014-in other words, by nearly two-thirds. Those savings come from spending restraint and oversight that saves taxpayer money. Most importantly, the House is strongly committed to statutory PAYGO. President Obama asked Congress 'to develop a PAYGO law that would help return the nation to a path of fiscal responsibility,' and that is what we intend to do. The House will not consider any bills on middle-income tax cuts, the estate tax, AMT relief, or the sustainable growth rate in the Medicare program unless they include statutory PAYGO, they are fully offset, or statutory PAYGO has already been enacted.

"I urge my colleagues to approve this conference report, pass this budget, and show our constituents that the priorities they voted for are ours, as well."

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