

BALTIMORE, MD – Democratic Whip Steny H. Hoyer (MD) delivered the keynote address this morning at the American Society for Public Administration Annual Conference – “Public Administration Without Borders.” Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery:

"I know what a challenging time this is for our governments, on the federal, state, and local levels. On each level, we're facing budget shortfalls and the prospect of deep debt—debt that threatens our opportunities today, and our children and grandchildren's opportunities tomorrow. Putting our fiscal house in order will take hard work and sacrifice from every one of us.

"But there is a sure sign of someone who does not take those problems seriously: disparaging and scapegoating public servants, instead of taking on the real challenges. How many of the people who do that rely on public servants and public administrators to keep their streets safe, to make sure their children are getting an education, to make sure that their food is safe and their air is clean? Disparaging that work is no shortcut to solving our fiscal problems. And I say that as someone who takes those problems extremely seriously.

"I believe that public servants and governments on all levels have to share in the work of getting out of debt. I know that they're sharing that work already. But when I see how these challenges are being tackled in Washington and in far too many of our state capitals, I see far too much scapegoating and far too little willingness to compromise.

"In Wisconsin, as we all know, public servants were willing to compromise to solve their state's budget problems—but instead, they found their right to collectively bargain stripped away, in the face of widespread public opposition.

"Here in Washington, Democrats have made it clear that we need to cut and compromise to get our budget under control. We've more than met Republicans halfway. But once again, Republicans aren't budging from an arbitrary, ideological target—one that frankly ignores the consequences to our nation's future.

"David Brooks was absolutely right when he recently wrote in the New York Times that

legislators 'are simply cutting on the basis of what's politically easy and what vaguely seems expendable.' The problem is that what vaguely seems expendable is concentrated in just 14% of our federal budget—'non-security discretionary spending.' And to reach the arbitrary goal of \$100 billion in cuts when you only allow yourself to cut from that 14% slice of the pie, you have to cut extraordinarily deep. You have to decimate that 14%.

"That's the reason why House Republicans passed a spending bill that would cut billions in research on medical cures and energy technology. That's why they would stop funding 20,000 scientists at the National Science Foundation. That's why they would kick 200,000 children out of Head Start. That's why they would put college further out of reach for our sons and daughters. That's why they would stop construction projects in 40 states.

"And that reckless approach to budgeting leaves America a weaker nation. Here's how columnist Fareed Zakaria explained the impact of those cuts earlier this month in Time magazine. It's easy to be complacent, he argued, about the size of America's economy and the standard of living that most of us enjoy, even in a time of economic downturn. But we didn't create the conditions for prosperity—we inherited them. 'What we see today,' he writes 'is an American economy that has boomed because of policies and developments of the 1950s and '60s: the interstate-highway system, massive funding for science and technology, a public-education system that was the envy of the world and generous immigration policies.'

"And those are exactly the policies so many want to undermine today. Zakaria continues: 'Reducing funds for things like education, scientific research, air-traffic control, NASA, infrastructure and alternative energy will not produce much in savings, and it will hurt the economy's long-term growth. It would happen at the very moment that countries from Germany to South Korea to China are making large investments in education, science, technology and infrastructure. We are cutting investments and subsidizing consumption—exactly the opposite of what are the main drivers of economic growth.'

"Or we can express the threat in numbers. There is a widespread and nonpartisan consensus that Republican plans will be disastrous for job creation and economic recovery. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, a Republican appointee, says that Republican plans will cost our country 'a couple hundred thousand jobs.' Macroeconomic Advisors estimates the damage at 450,000 jobs; Moody's Analytics chief economist Mark Zandi, who advised Sen. McCain's presidential campaign, estimates it at 700,000 jobs; the Economic Policy Institute at 800,000.

"Whichever estimate proves closest, what we have is the worst of both worlds: destroying investments in growth, while failing to actually take on the structural causes of our deficit. It's time to stop acting as if 'cutting non-security discretionary spending' is synonymous with 'being fiscally responsible.' It's not. Being fiscally responsible means taking on the parts of our budget that are politically difficult to address, not politically easy.

"As former Republican Congressman Joe Scarborough put it this week, 'The belief of some on the right that America can balance the budget by cutting education, infrastructure, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and home heating assistance to the poor is tantamount to budgetary witchcraft.'

"That's why I have been urging Congress: let's get down to the real work. Let's address the defense spending that takes up more than a quarter of our budget. Let's make the hard choices that can keep our entitlements strong for generations to come. Tax revenues are at a 60-year low—let's pass deficit-reducing tax reform. Let's close loopholes and lower rates, so that businesses and families can make more economic decisions out of common sense, not out of a need to maximize their tax refund.

"Above all: let's get our fiscal house in order without crippling our competitiveness but rather while enhancing it. We can do it without turning Americans against one another; we can do it by bringing them together to face this common challenge to our common future.

"And you—whether you are a public policy practitioner, a public policy academic, or a public policy student—are playing and will continue to play a critical role in ensuring that our country makes the sensible budget choices and does not forget the values that we expect our public sector on all levels of government to embody: compassion toward our least fortunate citizens, an expectation that top quality public schools should be available to all our children, and an appreciation for the long-term benefits that flow from smart, consensus-oriented public policy decisions."