

**Statement of the Honorable John Conyers, Jr.,
Ranking Member of the House Committee on the Judiciary, for
the Forum on the Impact of Budget Proposals on Justice, Job
Creation, Public Safety, and Constitutional Rights**

**Thursday, February 24, 2011, at 10:00 a.m.
2237 Rayburn House Office Building**

Last week, the House passed H.R. 1, the most draconian package of spending cuts in recent memory.

Rather than funding programs that will lead to job creation and help get our Nation's economy back on track, the House-passed continuing budget resolution will not only accomplish the opposite, but hurt some of our most vulnerable and needy citizens.

In addition to defunding numerous essential programs, the bill is filled with mean-spirited riders intended to hamstring the federal government.

These include prohibitions that prevent the implementation of many provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Enacted last March, this landmark law makes many long-overdue reforms to the private health insurance industry, including better coverage for those with pre-existing conditions and improved prescription drug benefits for Americans. As a result of the House continuing resolution, however, these reforms will be delayed.

Likewise, the bill hamstringing the EPA's ability to protect the environment by restricting that agency's ability to issue rules intended to curtail air and water pollution.

In addition, H.R. 1 slashes or eliminates critical law enforcement and public safety programs as well as community programs that provide valuable services.

For example, H.R. 1 will defund close to 63% of Planned Parenthood service providers in communities across the United States.

Today's Forum will provide an important opportunity for us to learn just what these and other budget cuts will mean in reality and how they will impact virtually every American, particularly with respect to those programs and agencies within the Judiciary Committee's purview.

In conjunction with the Forum, I am releasing today an interim report entitled "America on the Brink: Impact of Budget Proposals on Justice, Job Creation, Public Safety, and Constitutional Rights."

This Report highlights the various adverse impacts that H.R. 1 will have on our Nation's economy and its ability to create jobs as well as on the public safety and well-being of our citizens.

For example –

- H.R. 1 could have an overall impact of destroying *800,000 jobs*, according to the Economic Policy Institute.
- H.R. 1 will force the Federal court system to layoff 2,400 staff, according to the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts.

This means that the federal courts would not be able to properly

supervise individuals under pretrial release and convicted felons released from federal prisons, which could compromise public safety in the community.

- H.R. 1 will cause payments to attorneys who represent indigent criminal defendants, including capital cases, to be suspended thereby threatening the government's constitutional obligation to provide such representation, according to the Administrative Office.

In light of the inability of criminal trials to proceed without defense counsel, and the time limits set by the Speedy Trial Act, this budget cutback could present unique legal issues.

It could also lead to the dismissal of complaints and indictments against alleged felons, particularly along the Southwest Border.

- H.R. 1 cuts nearly \$850 million of Migration and Refugee Assistance funding, which is used to protect refugees overseas and to settle them in the U.S.

According to Eric Schwartz, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, this cut “represents an American policy retreat of historic proportions, with unprecedented and really devastating effects on our leadership in saving lives and preventing conflict.”

- H.R. 1 harms public safety by severely hampering the ability of law enforcement officials to monitor multiple purchases of rifles and shotguns that are used in violent criminal activity along the Southwest Border.

- H.R. 1 eliminates all funding for the National Drug Intelligence Center, which plays a major role in the fight against illegal drug proliferation both on the domestic and international fronts.
- And, H.R. 1 cuts funding to the Patent and Trademark Office by \$400 million, which could undermine the ability of that agency to stimulate the economy and create American jobs, according to the Intellectual Property Owners Association.

I could go on and on. And, because H.R. 1 is so outrageous, there is little likelihood the issues it presents can be resolved in the near future, notwithstanding the fact that the current budget resolution expires on March 4th.

As a result, we are now faced with the possibility of a government shutdown.

Accordingly, I also want the Forum participants to share their thoughts about what a looming federal government shutdown means for Americans. A lot of us may no longer recall what it was like during the shutdowns back in 1995 and how self-defeating it was.

All federal agencies will have to severely curtail their operations. Under the Antideficiency Act, federal agencies and programs must cease operations when they lack appropriations or experience a gap in funding, except for certain critical services.

Here are some specific examples of the possible impacts of a government shutdown –

- With respect to law enforcement, the Congressional Research Service reports that during the last government shutdown “delays occurred in the processing of alcohol, tobacco, firearms, and explosives applications by the

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; work on more than 3,500 bankruptcy cases reportedly was suspended; cancellation of the recruitment and testing of federal law enforcement officials reportedly occurred, including the hiring of 400 border patrol agents; and delinquent child-support cases were delayed.”

- Also according to the Congressional Research Service, the processing of passports and visas effectively ceased during the last shutdown, interrupting the flow of international commerce, except in cases of extreme emergencies.

This means that approximately 20,000 to 30,000 applications by foreigners for visas and 200,000 U.S. applications for passports reportedly went unprocessed. As a result, U.S. airlines, hotels, and tourist industries sustained millions of dollars in losses.

- The Department of Homeland Security may need to cease worksite enforcement actions, including I-9 audits and other efforts designed to check whether workers are authorized to work in the United States.
- And, the DHS may also have to terminate its administration of the E-Verify System, the electronic employment eligibility verification system that more and more employers use to determine whether workers are authorized to work.

This means that delivered containers will just sit at ports of entry, disrupting international commerce and the functioning of many American businesses.

- A government shutdown could actually cost taxpayers money. According to

a study conducted by Government Accountability Office in 1991, a three-day government shutdown in 1990 could have cost between \$245 million and \$607 million as a result of lost revenues and payment of salaries for work not performed.

In 1995, the *New York Times* estimated that the five-day government shutdown which occurred that year “cost taxpayers \$700 million to \$800 million.”

And, as reported by *Slate* earlier this week, an OMB analysis of the subsequent 21-day shutdown that occurred between 1995 and 1996, cost the economy about \$1.4 billion.

Alice Rivlin, who headed OMB at the time, recalls that the “true costs were paid by citizens – people who lost out on services they had paid for in their taxes.”

Finally, I want the Forum participants to focus on what we in Congress should be doing to create jobs, to strengthen our nation’s economy, and to instill a greater quality of life for all of our citizens.

In my view, the solution is that the federal government should be doing more to promote our economic recovery by rebuilding our infrastructure, improving our schools, and training American workers to compete in the 21st Century.

And, we do not have to look far to find the necessary funding for this increased spending.

We simply need to close the numerous tax loopholes for the rich and Wall Street corporations.

And, most importantly, we need to end our Nation's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For example, the average cost of maintaining a *single American soldier in Afghanistan is \$1.2 million a year*, according to the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.

Multiply that amount by the number of troops currently stationed there and we're talking \$120 billion that otherwise could be used to fund our Nation's economic recovery.

Rather than focusing our efforts on short-sighted, ill-conceived budget cuts, we should using all of our resources to enact measures that facilitate our government's ability to promote job growth, that ensure the provision of justice is not jeopardized, and that protect public health and safety.