

DARRELL E. ISSA, CALIFORNIA
CHAIRMAN

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS, MARYLAND
RANKING MINORITY MEMBER

JOHN L. MICA, FLORIDA
MICHAEL R. TURNER, OHIO
JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR., TENNESSEE
PATRICK T. McHENRY, NORTH CAROLINA
JIM JORDAN, OHIO
JASON CHAFFETZ, UTAH
TIM WALBERG, MICHIGAN
JAMES LANKFORD, OKLAHOMA
JUSTIN AMASH, MICHIGAN
PAUL A. GOSAR, ARIZONA
PATRICK MEEHAN, PENNSYLVANIA
SCOTT DESJARLAIS, TENNESSEE
TREY GOWDY, SOUTH CAROLINA
BLAKE FARENTHOLD, TEXAS
DOC HASTINGS, WASHINGTON
CYNTHIA M. LUMMIS, WYOMING
ROB WOODALL, GEORGIA
THOMAS MASSIE, KENTUCKY
DOUG COLLINS, GEORGIA
MARK MEADOWS, NORTH CAROLINA
KERRY L. BENTIVOLIO, MICHIGAN
RON DESANTIS, FLORIDA

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

CAROLYN B. MALONEY, NEW YORK
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
JOHN F. TIERNEY, MASSACHUSETTS
WM. LACY CLAY, MISSOURI
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, MASSACHUSETTS
JIM COOPER, TENNESSEE
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, VIRGINIA
JACKIE SPEIER, CALIFORNIA
MATTHEW A. CARTWRIGHT, PENNSYLVANIA
MARK POCAN, WISCONSIN
L. TAMMY DUCKWORTH, ILLINOIS
ROBIN L. KELLY, ILLINOIS
DANNY K. DAVIS, ILLINOIS
PETER WELCH, VERMONT
TONY CARDENAS, CALIFORNIA
STEVEN A. HORSFORD, NEVADA
MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM, NEW MEXICO

LAWRENCE J. BRADY
STAFF DIRECTOR

Opening Statement Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

Hearing on "As Difficult as Possible: The National Park Service's Implementation of the Government Shutdown"

October 16, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will start today by asking an obvious question: what in the world are we doing here?

Today is the 16th day since House Speaker John Boehner shut down the United States government. He could end the shutdown this morning—right now—by simply allowing the House of Representatives to vote on legislation to reopen the government. This bill has already passed the Senate, and it has more than enough votes to pass the House.

But Speaker Boehner refuses to bring it to the House floor without the support of a majority of his own political party. In other words, if Speaker Boehner brought this bill to the House floor today, it would pass with about two dozen Republicans and most, if not all, Democrats. Since he does not have 51% of the Republican Party, Speaker Boehner refuses to allow any vote on this bill.

That is why we are still in this government shutdown. That is why people say Speaker Boehner is holding our country hostage. And that is why the American people correctly blame House Republicans for shutting down the government. Their approach puts the ideology of one political party ahead of the interests of our entire nation.

Even worse, if this issue is not resolved in the next 24 hours, we will begin defaulting on our debts—something our nation has never done before. As House Republicans drive our nation toward the fiscal cliff, credit rating agencies are warning that the full faith and credit of our nation is now at risk, and investors are dumping Treasury bills.

If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are truly concerned about the shutdown, allow us to end it. Stop this madness today. Let us bring the clean Senate bill to the House floor, and let us pass it. You can still vote against it, but don't bring down our entire government just because you do not want to allow a vote.

Rather than allowing us to take this reasonable course of action, House Republicans today want to focus on restricted access to the World War II Memorial in Washington, DC. So let me address this issue directly.

The World War II Memorial is a stunning and beautiful monument, but it is made out of marble and fountains. Do you know what a more significant tribute to our veterans is? Do you know what really honors our nation's heroes for their service and sacrifice? Providing them with the benefits they earned after suffering injuries in combat. Paying them the pensions they need to cover rent, utility bills, and food. And guaranteeing the assistance they rely on to stay off the streets and, in some cases, stay alive. That is how we make good on our promises to veterans—we take care of them like they took care of us.

Yesterday, a nonpartisan coalition of 33 veterans groups held a rally at the World War II Memorial, and Garry Augustine, the Executive Director of Disabled American Veterans, explained the importance of these benefits to veterans across the country. He said: "For many, those payments may be the primary or only source of income."

Also yesterday, Jon Soltz, an Army veteran who started VoteVets.org after serving two tours in Iraq, said "if you lost both your legs in Vietnam, and you're on prosthetics, and you're 100% service connected-disabled, you don't get a disability check because the Republicans have hijacked the government over Obamacare."

I will conclude by reading from a statement issued on October 3 by two of the most distinguished World War II veterans ever to serve in Congress, Republican Senator Bob Dole and Democratic Representative John Dingell, who were both instrumental in creating the World War II Memorial. This is what they said:

"As two proud World War II veterans blessed also to serve this great nation in Congress, we consider our bipartisan work together in helping to create a National World War II memorial to be among our greatest accomplishments and a true honor to our brothers-in-arms. If this Congress truly wishes to recognize the sacrifice and bravery of our World War II veterans and all who've come after, it will end this shutdown and re-open our government now. The current shutdown has slowed the rate at which the government can process veterans' disability claims and, as the VA has stated, it is negatively impacting other services to our nation's veterans. Piecemeal or partial spending plans do not adequately ensure that our veterans—and indeed all Americans—have access to the system of self-government established to serve and protect them."

Mr. Chairman, we are out of time. I understand that the Senate will make one more attempt this morning to resolve this issue on a bipartisan basis. I just hope and pray that Speaker Boehner will finally put our nation first, that he will put this bill on the House floor and allow us to vote so we can avert default and reopen our government before it's too late.

Contact: Jennifer Hoffman, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181.