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IMMEDIATE PASSAGE OF D.C. APPROPRIATION BILL CRITICAL FOR DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this evening to make an urgent request of this body. This body may be about to go out until December 5. If it does so without passing the D.C. appropriation, we are putting the capital of the United States in mortal danger.

The District appropriation was passed 3 weeks ago. It is being held up now as a vehicle for the Commerce-Justice bill. I appreciate the conversations I have had with Members and their staffs and the way in which the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY) and the way in which apparently the Senate is willing to release the D.C. appropriation. We found a way for the D.C. appropriation to be freed, while leaving the status quo in place as if it continued to be a vehicle to carry over the Commerce-Justice bill. That is the only reason it is being held.

Mr. Speaker, the crisis we face now is not only that this is a living, breathing city that cannot start any new programs; there is a special crisis. We face the possible closing of our city hospital, D.C. General, and its public clinics. The reason is that although the District can move around money to form a new, smaller hospital, the money for the transition costs, including the costs of severance pursuant to layoffs mandated in the appropriation bill, cannot, in fact, take place until the appropriation bill is passed. If we wait until December 5, we will be approaching the date when the hospital must close because it has run out of money.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking this House, before we go home, to release the D.C. appropriation. Nothing would be lost in freeing the D.C. appropriation, because the D.C. appropriation could be passed as a CR by reference, and that would leave the D.C. appropriation as it is now, except, in effect, it would slide from under its present vehicle and be passed as a bill, while the present situation of a vetoable D.C.-Commerce-Justice bill would remain. I know that sounds like gobbledegook; but in fact that is the way it would occur. The status quo would remain; but in fact, the appropriation would pass, because the CR would remain there as if our appropriation had not passed.

I appreciate that there has been considerable movement by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY), by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS), and by Senator STEVENS to be helpful; and I have spoken with the gentleman from

Illinois (Mr. HASTERT), and he appears to believe that the Commerce-Justice-D.C. bill could be passed or, indeed, signed by the President. I have spoken with Jack Lew. Jack Lew informs me that surely the House must know that that bill will be vetoed. I do not know what it is that makes the Speaker believe that this is a nonvetoable bill, because that is what he has told me, that it contains at least some of what the President wants; but I am informed by the White House that most of the reason that this bill was vetoed remains, and it will continue to be vetoed.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking that the District be extracted from this mess. I recognize that if, in extracting us, some change that the House wanted not to make would be a sacrifice; but in fact, no such change is required on our part, because we found a technical way out for the District of Columbia, while leaving the situation as if the same vetoable bill was there.

There is lots to lose here for the District. Not only do we have all new programs, but also imagine trying to run a city 6 weeks into the appropriation year without being able to do urgent things like hire 175 new police officers, 88 new fire officers, without being able to hire social workers necessary for children in foster care. We have had a child killed this year in foster care because there were not enough social workers. Imagine not being able to give money to five new charter schools, charter schools that the Congress has asked us to pass; and finally, imagine what will happen if the hospital closes and we have no way to move money around to keep it open or to pay even for the transport of sick people so that they can be cared for in another hospital.

Mr. Speaker, a way has to be found; and I ask that this House not go home tomorrow before that way is found.

THE FLORIDA FIASCO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I am joined tonight in this 5-minute Special Order with the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) who, of course, has been very involved with this Florida situation. I wanted to just start out the evening to ask him, what is the gentleman's home county?

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I represent Volusia County, Orange County, and Seminole County, just above Orlando, in central Florida.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I think we are all learning where all the counties in Florida are located. Let me ask the gentleman this: Does the gentleman use the butterfly ballot in his county?

Mr. MICA. No, we do not.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, what kind does the gentleman use?

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, we use a simple ballot in which you have an arrow with a space in-between and you connect the lines.

Mr. KINGSTON. Now, the purpose of the butterfly ballot is what?

Mr. MICA. Well, the purpose of the ballot is the same as the ballot that we have; but let me tell the gentleman from Georgia, I sat in on the review of the ballots in Seminole County, Florida; and I have never in my life seen more ways to check a ballot in my life. It seems like a simple process to connect the lines, but people circle them, they X them, they cross from one to the other, and that is part of the problem we get into with some of these ballots. There are mistakes, and people submit improper completion of ballots, whether they are in my area or in Palm Beach County.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, we keep hearing about these 19,000 ballots that were thrown out. A point of clarification. Actually, those are only the number of ballots that were discarded, people who did do their ballot wrong to step out and say, I messed up, could you give me another one, that ballot gets thrown in this discarded bin and then they go back in there, and they could do that four or five times.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is correct. In fact, in Duval County, which is Jacksonville, they had over 20,000 ballots that were discarded, a higher number with a lower population and lower voting number.

Mr. KINGSTON. Okay. So Duval County, 26,000 were thrown out. Are the Gore people working Duval? I have not heard of the Reverend Jackson going down there.

Mr. MICA. No, but if we get into these court-ordered recounts, we can go on. We have 67 counties to choose from, and we can continue this for some time.

We see some of the problem, particularly this subjective evaluation of ballots after they have been counted several times.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to point out that in Palm Beach County, in 1996, 15,000 ballots were in the same situation.

Mr. MICA. The gentleman is correct.

Mr. KINGSTON. In 1996, 15,000, and this year, 19,000. Duval County, which leads Republican, actually 26,000.

We have, Mr. Speaker, a copy of the actual ballot that was used in Palm Beach County, Florida, and here it is. I will tell my colleagues, I know people get confused. However, when we think about Veteran's Day just passing and all of the people who have sacrificed their lives and died and been injured for the freedom of our country, one would think that the American electorate would at least take their time to fill out their ballot right and not do