

AMERICANS *for* TAX REFORM

Statement of

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Water, Oceans and Wildlife

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Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member McClintock, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Grover Norquist and I am President and Founder of Americans for Tax Reform. Started at the behest of President Reagan in 1985, ATR advocates on behalf of taxpayers for simpler, flatter, more visible, and most importantly lower taxes than they are today.

Congress has a fiduciary responsibility to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars and to practice fiscal discipline when it comes to spending on federal programs. Whenever new programs are being considered, the impact and burden placed on American Taxpayers should be of principal concern to lawmakers.

Budgetary Concerns

At the end of January 2019, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released its annual Budget and Economic Outlook for 2019 to 2029 and unsurprisingly, the United States' fiscal outlook remains alarming.¹

In CBO's projections, the federal budget deficit will reach roughly \$900 billion in 2019 – an estimated \$118 billion increase from 2018. Beginning in 2022, the federal budget deficit is expected to top \$1 trillion each year.

Over the coming decade, deficits are expected to fluctuate between 4.1 percent and 4.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), well above the average over the past 50 years.

Due to persistently large deficits, federal debt held by the public is projected to grow steadily. Total deficits over the decade are anticipated to reach \$11.6 trillion. Debt held by the public will increase from 78 percent in 2018 to nearly 93 percent of GDP by 2029, higher than any level since the aftermath of World War II.

To no one's surprise, CBO found that the main cause of rising deficits was out of control spending.

The CBO's current baseline projections estimate that federal spending will total \$4.4 trillion in 2019 alone – a \$260 billion increase from 2018. Spending is expected to grow at an annual rate of 4.8 percent over the coming decade.

Spending over the next decade is expected to climb from 20.8 percent of GDP in 2019 to 23 percent in 2029.

There is widespread agreement from both sides of the political aisle that a debt crisis is on the horizon. These recent projections from CBO represent a clear cause for concern for American taxpayers and should stand as a clear warning to lawmakers to reign in our nation's out of control spending.

¹ See Congressional Budget Office, *The Budget and Economic Outlook: 2019 to 2029*, January 2019

Sadly, this has not been the case. In this hearing today, the subcommittee will consider new spending provisions which, if passed, would add hundreds of millions of dollars in spending programs to a growing deficit.

Rather than considering new and frivolous spending programs that ultimately add to the burden placed upon American taxpayers, our nation would be better served if Congress instead focused on Washington's chronic overspending and implemented meaningful budget reforms that cut, rather than increase spending. It is well past time Congress address our looming financial predicament.

Opposition to H.R. 1326 - ACCESS Act

Just last month, Congress passed a \$333 billion spending package laden with giveaways and wasteful spending in order to avoid the political implications of a partial government shutdown. Within this package, \$9.3 billion was allocated for the Environmental Protection Agency and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Shortly thereafter, Congress followed up this action by passing the Natural Resources Management Act (NRMA) which was signed into law by President Trump on March 12, 2019.

[Title III](#) of the NRMA provided for the permanent reauthorization of the deposit function of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which expired on September 30, 2018.

The NRMA bundled together over 100 individual lands bills and passed with overwhelming bipartisan support from the House of Representatives. Passage of the NRMA was years in the making. The individual provisions of the package underwent extensive public scrutiny in both the House and Senate.

During this time, it was decided by a strong bipartisan consensus that the provisions discussed in this hearing here today would be left out of the NRMA. Despite this consensus, these excluded provisions are being considered again here today and taxpayers will be asked to foot the bill.

H.R. 1326 encompasses a bundle of conservation provisions intentionally left out of NRMA. These programs would further increase spending at a time when our federal deficits will soon top \$1 trillion each year.

It would be irresponsible for Congress to continue to increase federal funding for programs outlined in H.R. 1326 at the direct expense of taxpayers; especially for programs like those in this legislation that have very targeted, regional impacts.

For these reasons, Americans for Tax Reform stands opposed to H.R. 1326.

Funding Local or Regional Programs Is Not a Federal Responsibility

State and local governments should debate and prioritize conservation programs in their own communities as well as the means to pay for them.

When the financing of these programs is not tied to the people who directly benefit from them, it becomes far easier to lose fiscal discipline and spend taxpayer dollars thoughtlessly. It is always easier to spend other people's money.

Congress must ensure taxpayer dollars are properly spent. It can do so by getting out of the way of local communities and allowing them to assess for themselves whether these programs are worthwhile.

Contrary to this mission, H.R. 1326 uses federal tax revenue to finance programs with specific, limited regional impacts.

For example, Title IX in H.R. 1326 would increase spending on the Chesapeake Bay Program at \$90 million for FY 2020-2024, more than doubling the current authorized amount for the program of \$40 million.

Taxpayers in Colorado should not be forced to subsidize local programs in Maryland. The people who stand to benefit the most from this project should be the ones to pay for it and decide if it is worthwhile.

Private Property Concerns

Title II of H.R. 1326 would give U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the authority to recoup costs for damages incurred to any "system resource" by an individual. "System Resource" is defined as: any living, nonliving, historical, cultural, or archeological resources located within the boundaries of a National Wildlife Refuge, National Fish Hatchery, or any other USFWS managed land.

My understanding is that looting is already illegal in most every instance, however USFWS currently does not have the authority to recoup costs or damages to facilities. This bill would allow USFWS to seize property – vehicles for example - without a formal legal process for property owners.

USFWS already has legal means to recover damages, it should not be in the business of making the determination itself and seizing property from owners.

What Congress Should Do

Americans for Tax Reform recommends that Congress reject H.R. 1326. There is simply no justification to increase federal outlays on these programs in the immediate aftermath of Congress passing a massive lands package deal in the form of the Natural Resources Management Act. It was determined for good reason that the provisions included in H.R. 1326 were not significant enough to justify increased spending from Congress.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and I look forward to your questions.