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FROM THE HILL'S FLOOR ACTION BLOG

Durbin to GOP: Stop acting like 'squealing political pigs'

Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) told House Republicans to stop acting like "squealing political pigs."

"We need to act like adults, not like squealing political pigs," Durbin said on the Senate floor Wednesday.

Durbin's remarks were in reaction to a House Republican announcement that the party would advance a government spending bill that defunds ObamaCare, which Democrats say would lead to a government shutdown.

"If that is what the Tea Party Republicans think is leadership, God save the United States of America," Durbin said.

Unless Congress agrees on a continuing spending resolution by Oct. 1, the government will shut down.

Durbin said the situation was avoidable because it was a "self-imposed crisis" created by House Republicans.

Some Republicans have said the plan to tie government funding to an ObamaCare repeal is ill-conceived and will risk the economic recovery. But Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) needs Tea Party members to pass a spending resolution with solely GOP votes. Tea Party members have said this is the best chance Republicans have in repealing the law.

—Ramsey Cox

MURKOWSKI PLEADS WITH REID NOT TO 'THROW IN THE TOWEL' ON ENERGY BILL

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) pleaded with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) not to "throw in the towel" on an energy efficiency bill being debated on the Senate floor.

"Let's not throw in the towel," Murkowski said Wednesday. "This is too important."

Earlier Wednesday, Reid threatened to pull the Energy Savings and Industrial Competitiveness Act, S. 1392, which aims to improve energy efficiency building codes. There has been a stalemate on the bill for more than a week, partly because Republicans are demanding votes on amendments that delay implementation of ObamaCare.

"The latest we got from our floor staff is Republicans on the energy bill want five non-germane amendments and whatever other amendment are filed dealing with energy," Reid said. "Meaning we're not going to finish the legislation — and that's an understatement."

Lawmakers are continuing to work on an amendment agreement so that work can be completed on the bill possibly this week.

Murkowski said she wasn't ready to give up on the bill, which passed on a 19-3 vote in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, where she serves as the ranking member.

"If we can't finish legislation like an energy efficiency bill ... what are we going to be able to do on the really big stuff?" Murkowski said.

—Ramsey Cox

DEMS SLAM GOP FOOD STAMP BILL AS 'HEARTLESS' AND 'CRUEL'

House Democrats took to the House floor Wednesday morning to urge their colleagues to vote against a Republican bill aimed at requiring able-bodied adults to work to receive food stamp benefits for longer than three months.

Democrats were anticipating House consideration of the bill later this week. The legislation would cut \$40 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), in part by eliminating a waiver from current work requirements for states facing high unemployment or insufficient jobs.

Republicans have said this reform is needed to help reduce the quickly rising cost of the SNAP program. But Democrats said the bill would essentially starve people who need federal aid.

"It is cruel, it is immoral," said Rep. James McGovern (D-Mass.) of the bill. McGovern also dismissed the idea that the SNAP program is rife with fraud.

"This notion that fraud, waste and abuse are rampant in SNAP is a fallacy," he said. "It's a make-believe talking point designed to take away food from hungry people."

Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.) similarly accused Republicans of using the deficit as cover to take food away from the hungry.

"We're again catering to a fringe agenda brought up by partisans obsessed with the deficit boogeyman," he said. "That boogeyman has been roaming around here for four years."

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) said the bill is part of the GOP's "war on the poor." She said it would cut people off from food stamps after just three months of benefits.

"This is just heartless," she said. Republicans say the Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act, H.R. 3102, is needed because states were allowed to waive the requirement that able-bodied adults in childless households either work 20 hours a week, undergo job training or be looking for work under a state-run job program in order to receive SNAP benefits after three months.

The GOP has argued the Obama administration granted this waiver, which they see as an attempt to undermine the work requirement. But opponents of the bill say the waiver was granted under the same conditions that states received waivers under prior administrations.

—Pete Kasperowicz

Government must preserve national parks

By Todd Davidson

The world has an enduring love affair with America's national parks. Conceived nearly 100 years ago, national parks connect us with our shared heritage and tell our nation's stories. Who among us has stared into the deep blue caldera of Crater Lake, looked up at Half Dome as the special time of winter approaches in the Yosemite Valley, or witnessed the spectacular October fall colors of red maples, oaks and hickories in the forests of the Great Smoky Mountains and not been overcome by the incredible, almost magical grandeur that has been preserved for us and future generations?

Collectively, our national parks, monuments, seashores, recreation areas, historic sites, military parks, battlefields and heritage areas represent the very best our nation has to offer. Along with their intrepid and iconic Park Rangers, they embody the true spirit of our country, bringing our nation's history to life.

In addition to being stunning and educational, national parks are immensely affordable destinations for American families and are top U.S. tourist attractions. Each year, nearly 300 million people visit one or more of America's 401 national parks, ranging from educational Civil War battlefields to awe-inspiring places like Yellowstone, Acadia National Park and the Grand Canyon. These park visitors are a significant component of the U.S. tourism economy. They stay in nearby hotels, rent cars, dine at local restaurants, buy at retail shops and visit other neighboring attractions, generating more than \$30 billion in spending and supporting a quarter-million jobs. National parks are clearly a winning economic scenario for visitors, the economies of nearby towns and communities and ultimately our nation.

But now, these prolific economic engines are at risk. Over the last decade, national park budgets have seen a steady decline in funding, and currently suffer from an annual operations shortfall of more than \$500 million. The National Park Service budget for construction and maintenance is only half of the amount necessary to maintain park sewer systems, roofs, foundations and road surfaces.

The sequester cut another \$153 million to national park budgets. Before Congress left for recess, each chamber shared a funding proposal with completely opposite visions for our national parks: one that cuts even deeper, affecting rangers, visitor centers and campgrounds, and another that would get our parks on the road to recovery. Through the across-the-board sequester cuts, parks have fewer rangers to protect and maintain historic sites and greet visitors, minimized visitor center hours, closed campgrounds, restrooms and picnic areas and reduced road and trail maintenance that is essential for park accessibility and enjoyment.

There is an irony to all this, because national parks are one of the best investments this country has ever made. In ad-

dition to supporting the U.S. travel and tourism industry, which is a cornerstone of the U.S. economy that represents \$1.8 trillion in economic output and supports 14 million American jobs, every dollar invested in the National Park Service generates \$10 in economic activity. National parks are veritable economic engines critical to supporting the livelihood of businesses and communities across the country.

Last year, President Obama called for a national travel and tourism strategy to make the United States the world's top travel and tourism destination, as part of a comprehensive effort to spur job creation. The White House released the strategy just over a year ago — an important step that officially elevates the travel and tourism industry to what it should be: a national priority. It also recognizes the industry for its fundamental contribution to our economy, national security and public diplomacy.

Our national parks can play an important role in making the U.S. a top travel destination. As the National Park System approaches its centennial in 2016, there should be a robust national park centennial initiative to help attract international visitors and provide needed support for

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our national parks to flourish into the next century.

We in the travel and tourism industry want our national parks to remain a top travel destination for Americans and our international guests, and for visitors to return each year for the wonderful experiences they've come to know. Whether it be the incomparable geology of the Grand Canyon; our beacon of freedom, the Statue of Liberty; the sobering scene of the Gettysburg Battlefield or the vista of the 13,000-foot peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park, these places are a part of us, and we must take care of them for future generations to enjoy.

With Congress back on Capitol Hill this week, lawmakers must work with the administration to avoid additional cuts to park budgets and reach a realistic budget deal that restores funding for our country's most treasured places. Recent polling shows 9 in 10 voters — Republican, Democrat and independent — agree that park funding should not be cut further. We look to Congress and the administration to work together with this overwhelming majority of Americans to respond to the deep popularity that parks have with the travelling public.

Davidson is CEO of the Oregon Tourism Commission and chairman of the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board.