

January 24, 2011
Testimony before the House Rules Committee
Subcommittee on the Legislative and Budget Process
U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield (KY-01)
H.R. 114, the Biennial Budgeting and Appropriations Act of 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Members of the Committee, for giving me the opportunity to be here to testify before you today.

As you know, we currently find ourselves in the midst of uncertain and difficult economic times.

Our challenged budget process, which led us to the brink of a government shutdown earlier this year, hampers our ability to effectively solve these economic problems.

While the White House says we are on the road to economic recovery, families in my District, the First Congressional District of Kentucky, are still struggling to hold onto their jobs, their home and their health care.

While the national unemployment rate has fallen to 8.5%, Kentucky's unemployment rate remains at an alarming 9.4%.

In fact, many counties in my District have an unemployment rate that is even higher than Kentucky's state average.

Adding to our economic troubles is the national debt, which has skyrocketed over the past few years, reaching almost \$15.3 trillion today.

In fact, Doug Elmendorf, the Director of the Congressional Budget Office, said that "U.S. fiscal policy is on an unsustainable path to an extent that it cannot be solved by minor tinkering."

So, in order to maintain our global competitiveness it is essential that we drastically reduce our federal spending.

One way to eliminate wasteful government spending is to reform and streamline our budget process

In 1974, Congress passed the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Act, which was intended to give the President and Congress a timeline on which to base a budget and appropriations bills.

As we well know, even when followed, the Budget Act has resulted in an annual rush which results NOT ONLY in a poor process, but also reduces the amount of time available for careful oversight and management of existing federal programs.

During the 38 year history of the Budget Act, Congress has met the deadline for completion of a budget resolution only six times.

Just last year, the House passed a Fiscal Year 2012 budget; however the Senate failed to act and Congress has gone for over 1,000 days without a federal budget.

With these procedural problems in mind, I joined Representative Dreier in introducing H.R. 114, the Biennial Budgeting and Appropriations Act of 2011.

I started working on biennial budgeting with my friend and colleague Chairman Drier back in the 106th Congress, when he offered a biennial budget proposal as an amendment to H.R. 853, the Comprehensive Budget Process Reform Act of 1999. The amendment vote was close, 201 to 217, and I haven't stopped supporting the idea since. I am very pleased that the issue is gaining momentum again.

Specifically, H.R. 114 will require the President to submit a two-year budget and Congress would consider a two-year budget resolution and a two- year appropriations cycle.

I believe that a biennial budget cycle will result in better scrutiny of federal spending and the elimination of wasteful and duplicative government programs because in one year the House can focus on making the programs better or eliminating them, and in the next year the House can focus on the spending levels for those programs.

Such oversight is badly needed. According to CBO, Congress provided \$290.8 billion in Fiscal Year 2010 appropriations for 250 statutes whose authorizations had expired.

That money should be scrutinized more thoroughly by Congress, especially if the authorizing committees allowed the authorizations to expire.

Streamlining the budget process will allow Congress more time to concentrate on other important legislative issues, such as reducing overall federal spending and spurring economic growth so that America will remain globally competitive and our economy will get back on track.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for permitting me to testify before you today.

At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.