

Statement of Senator Dean Heller

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Raising the Bar for Congress: Reform proposals for the 21st Century March 14, 2012

Thank you, Chairman Lieberman, for that generous introduction. Last September, I wrote to you and Ranking Member Collins to encourage this Committee to take a look at my legislation. I thank you both for this opportunity to talk about the No Budget, No Pay Act.

My home state of Nevada is currently enduring the highest unemployment rate in the country. In fact, Nevada has led the nation in unemployment for more than two years. As I travel the state, I hear from individuals who are laboring to make ends meet – families who stay up late working out a budget around their kitchen table.

But in Washington, D.C., it's business as usual. Our nation's capital remains a pain-free zone. Congress continually kicks the can down the road, leaving tough fiscal decisions for future Congresses, future Administrations, and the next generation.

Our failure to budget is one major example. President Obama's most recent State of the Union address marked one thousand days since the U.S. Senate passed a binding budget resolution. Since Congress last passed a budget, the federal government has spent \$9.4 trillion, adding \$4.1 trillion in debt. In fiscal year 2011 alone, Washington spent \$3.6 trillion. Compare that to the last time the budget was balanced, when \$1.8 trillion was spent.

I was particularly concerned by the tone set for the 2013 fiscal year, as Senate leadership announced there would not be a regular budget process before the President even submitted his budget.

As the budget has been ignored, the regular appropriations process has broken down. Huge omnibus spending measures and continuing resolutions have replaced the regular appropriations process. The regular appropriations process is a means through which Congress should be engaged in rigorous oversight of federal

spending, and Congress has proven delinquent in its duties through a dysfunctional addiction to short-term, short-sighted funding measures.

Members of Congress are willfully refusing to put our nation on a path to long-term fiscal responsibility. As long as this is the case, Americans will continue to be frustrated and angry with Washington's inability to produce real results.

In light of these facts, is it really any mystery why Congress is currently experiencing its worst approval ratings in history?

I crafted the No Budget, No Pay Act to force Congress to face reality and take responsibility for running this country. This legislation requires that the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives pass a budget and all appropriations bills by the beginning of each fiscal year. Failure to do so would result in the loss of pay until Congress takes its job seriously. If Congress does not complete its constitutional duties, then its Members should not be paid.

This concept resonates with the American people. I know because I asked Nevadans during a series of tele-town hall meetings last year whether they supported a bill that would withhold Members of Congress' pay if they failed to pass a budget. I include Nevadans of all political persuasions in these tele-town hall meetings – independents, Democrats, and Republicans. More than four thousand Nevadans participated in this poll, and 84 percent of them supported the No Budget, No Pay concept.

84 percent. I doubt Nevada is alone in this sentiment. Members of the Committee, I submit that if 84 percent of Americans across the political spectrum agree on something, Congress needs to stop what it's doing and pay attention.

If we spent more time talking about what the American people agree on, I guarantee you that Congress' would produce better results. More importantly, we would actually implement policies that would encourage the economic growth we need to ensure that workers can have good jobs to provide for their families.

I've had some people tell me that No Budget, No Pay is just a talking point. It isn't to me, and it isn't to the six bipartisan cosponsors who have joined this effort. No

Budget, No Pay would hold Congress accountable to the American people. It reflects the principle that an honest day's work will result in an honest day's pay.

Too many in Congress have come to expect an honest day's pay whether or not they've actually accomplished the work of the people. Members of Congress are indeed out of touch with the American people if they believe they should be rewarded for a job poorly done, or not done at all.

I've heard some of my colleagues scoff at the timeline established by this legislation. But Congress has been able to accomplish its regular budget and appropriations processes before the start of a new fiscal year in recent history. It happened under President Clinton and a Republican Congress in 1996. It happened under President Reagan with a Democrat Congress in 1988. There are a handful of other examples – not as many as there should be – but the fact remains that these deadlines have been met before, and now is the time to start meeting those deadlines again.

While the No Budget, No Pay Act will not solve every problem in Washington, I sincerely believe it would help restore regular order in the budget and appropriations processes. These essential functions of Congress are vital to fiscal responsibility and keeping our nation's fiscal house in order. We cannot hope to make progress in this Congress or this country until we take our constitutional responsibilities seriously.

My hope is that No Budget, No Pay will be adopted as part of a broader effort to change the way Congress does business and restore the confidence of the American people in their government.

I thank you, Chairman Lieberman and Ranking Member Collins, for holding this important hearing. I deeply appreciate the Committee's time and look forward to continuing this important discussion today.