

I want to first thank the Chairman, Senator Paul, for bringing us here to discuss the critical topic of the national debt, and the pressing matter of the debt ceiling.

I'd like to also give a sincere "thank you" to our distinguished panel of guests. Your perspectives of both the national debt and the debt ceiling are critical for us as policy makers.

Today we will consider what I see as two very significant, distinct, and most importantly, SOLVEABLE problems.

Perhaps I am an optimist, but finding sustainable solutions for our nation's debt, as well as finding a path forward on the debt ceiling, are both problems that can and should be solved in a responsible, bipartisan manner.

To me, working in a bipartisan manner on these issues is the only path forward – it is what I believe we were sent here to do – to find the solutions that put America on a path towards a sustainable fiscal future.

As 2017 progresses, we are going to hear many "School House Rocks" explanations of the debt limit, the statutory – and arbitrary – constraint on the amount of money the US Treasury can borrow.

Much of the conversation will be focused on questions like – when is the right time to talk about solutions for the long term debt and deficits?

We should be constantly working toward fiscal responsibility. This is not and should not be a seasonal debate. I'm sure the Chairman shares this sentiment.

But just as we should be constantly engaged in discussions about how to solve our long term issues, it is wholly irresponsible to turn this debate into one that threatens the full faith and credit of the United States.

The global economy relies on the fact that at the end of the day, no matter the chaos in the rest of the world, the United States Government will fulfill its obligations and pay its bills.

On March 16, 2017, under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, the previously suspended debt ceiling was reinstated at just over \$18 trillion.

Immediately on March 16, Treasury Secretary Mnuchin wrote to Congress to inform us that the United States Treasury was taking "extraordinary measures" to avoid a breach in the debt ceiling.

According to analysis of the debt limit conducted by both the Congressional Budget Office and the Bipartisan Policy Center, the Treasury Department's extraordinary measures may be able to extend the date to which the U.S. Government can fulfill its financial obligations into fall 2017, perhaps October or November.

However, Congress can, and should, immediately begin discussions to address our obligations. After having been through numerous debates on the debt limit since 2011, it would be the height of irresponsibility to let this debate slip into the midnight hour.

I remind my colleagues – while a breach of the debt ceiling would have unprecedented and potentially catastrophic impact on the global economy – brinksmanship alone has the potential to hurt everyday working families.

In 2011, as Congress struggled to reach an agreement at the last minute, the US debt was downgraded, consumer confidence fell sharply, and the stock market and credit markets took months to fully stabilize.

To some, the debate in Washington may seem abstract, but if we yet again engage in brinksmanship, we are jeopardizing the chance for a working-class family to purchase their first home, or to take out a loan to buy a much-needed car. And we are risking thousands of Americans' retirement savings that they have built up over a lifetime of hard work. This is not acceptable.

If there is to be a negotiation on the debt ceiling, I ask my colleagues, let it happen now. We cannot afford to let our differences risk the financial futures of American families.

Failure to act is also not an option when it comes to long term debt and deficit reduction.

Solving this challenge will take bipartisan cooperation – and it will require a comprehensive approach that addresses all three fundamental factors of deficit reduction: cutting spending, reforming taxes, and investing in economic growth.

Budget plans that shift the burden onto one group at the expense of another, or that ignore any of these basic factors, will not solve the problem.

We need to support economic growth, we need to find REAL solutions to curbing long term health care costs, we need to reform our tax code into one that promotes job creation and investment here at home in America, we need to make government more efficient, and we need to find RESPONSIBLE ways to cut spending.

I hope today serves as an open forum on these issues, both our long term debt as well as the debt limit. I know that each of our witnesses is well informed and highly respected on these topics.

Please use this forum to give us your honest assessment of these challenges. We may not agree on the proposals that we hear today, but it is only by engaging in a bipartisan, collaborative fashion that we are going to find the solutions that America deserves.

Thank you.