

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE TODD ROKITA (IN-04)  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RULES  
H.R. 152 – DISASTER RELIEF APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2013  
JANUARY 14, 2013  
H-313 THE CAPITOL

I would like to thank Chairman Pete Sessions (R-TX) and Ranking Member Louise Slaughter (D-NY) for holding this hearing on amendments to the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act. Additionally, I would like to thank the members of the Committee for considering my request to amend the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act in an effort to pay for the relief by cutting other, less-important spending. My desire is to prioritize the spending needed to assist with Sandy disaster relief by using money that has already been appropriated to other federal programs. Should the Committee find that my amendment is subject to a point of order, I would request that the Committee grant a waiver for the following reasons.

The House Budget Committee works each year to pass a budget that sets a responsible framework to fund our government. Under the Budget Control Act, Congress agreed to spending caps meant to force us to prioritize federal spending. Just like American families all over our country, we do not have unlimited resources. We must decide which needs require the most resources, and subsequently, which needs can get by with fewer resources. For a budget to truly work, we must establish a hierarchy of priorities.

The problem facing us today is how to pay for supplemental appropriations bills. The two amendments that I am proposing today would pay for very important Sandy disaster relief by cutting funding to other non-defense discretionary spending. This would make it possible to lend much needed support to a region hit by serious calamity, by prioritizing the funds needed for relief and without adding to our debt. By drawing on the accounts of less important programs across the federal government, we would avoid saddling the children of tomorrow with an even greater financial burden, while still meeting the very urgent and immediate needs of our fellow Americans.

Rather than adding to our debt with new deficit-raising disaster spending, we should make cuts that equal these additional expenses.

My amendments would fully offset the cost of the underlying bill by prioritizing Sandy disaster relief over some discretionary spending. I believe the victims of this natural disaster should be moved to the head of the line when it comes to receiving federal funds. My amendments would provide the necessary relief they deserve, while not increasing our deficit.

The House Parliamentarian has notified me that my amendments are subject to a point of order for violation of House Rule XXI, Clause 2(c), which provides that “an amendment to a general appropriation bill shall not be in order if changing existing law.” This rule expressly provides that appropriations to provide relief during times of emergency can only be paid for from within the respective appropriation bill. Put another way, in Washington, D.C. the only way to pay for emergency spending is to cut emergency spending.

This rule, in effect, creates a false dilemma by forcing Members of Congress to choose between whether they would prefer to vote for disaster relief or for fiscal responsibility. I believe that there is a

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE TODD ROKITA (IN-04)  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RULES  
H.R. 152 – DISASTER RELIEF APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2013  
JANUARY 14, 2013  
H-313 THE CAPITOL

third and better option: provide an opportunity to vote in favor of disaster relief and fiscal responsibility. Should the Committee raise a point of order regarding my amendments, I would request that a waiver be granted in order to allow a vote on whether disaster relief funding should be paid for out of the accounts of lower priority federal programs.

We must confront the question—will every dollar spent and, therefore, every dollar borrowed, make our country stronger and better for the children of tomorrow? I suggest not. The truly responsible course of action is to pay for our spending. I believe the victims of Hurricane Sandy should be prioritized; Congress should provide disaster relief. But to do so on the backs of future generations, when Washington is fully capable of reducing spending on lesser priorities, is immoral. I refuse to believe in the two choices before me: pass an unpaid-for disaster bill, further victimizing the children of tomorrow, or reject an unpaid-for relief bill, denying Hurricane Sandy victims the assistance they need.

For these reasons I urge the Committee to allow my amendments to be considered before the full House of Representatives.