Washington, D.C. - Rep. David Price (D-NC) gave the following statement for the record today as the House of Representatives debated a Continuing Resolution funding the government for the remainder of the 2011 fiscal year. Rep. Price voted against the resolution, which passed by a vote of 260-167. The text of Rep. Price's statement is below.

Congressman David Price

Statement on the Department of Defense and Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act

April 14, 2011

MR. SPEAKER, I rise today in reluctant opposition to this measure. I do so with a keen awareness that it reflects a bipartisan agreement reached to avert a government shutdown, and I commend the President and congressional leadership for negotiating a deal that avoided the most extreme aspects of H.R. 1, the Republican continuing resolution passed by the House in February. I also commend Chairman Rogers and the Appropriations Committee majority staff for soliciting input from the minority as they finalized the details of this proposal.

But ultimately, I must judge this bill on its merits and not by the process that produced it. And I cannot in good conscience support a measure that will threaten our fragile economic recovery and undermine key investments in our future, while doing little to address our long-term fiscal challenges and requiring little in the way of shared sacrifice. It is simply not enough to observe that this bill could have been much worse.

As the Ranking Member of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, I have concerns about the cuts the bill would impose on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), but this is not the primary reason for my opposition. This area of the budget was spared the sort of drastic reductions the bill makes to investments in infrastructure, innovation and the health and well-being of the American people. I commend our Subcommittee Chairman, Robert Aderholt, for protecting the core operational functions of the Department – from Customs and Border Protection personnel to transportation security investments to the Coast Guard.

Chairman Aderholt was not operating without constraints, of course. Overall funding for DHS will drop by two percent from last year's funding level, and the majority's decision to increase the Disaster Relief Fund by $1 billion to cover a shortfall that has traditionally been met through emergency supplemental appropriations only exacerbates this reduced allocation. Unfortunately, state and local first responder grants received the brunt of this blow, taking a 25 percent reduction overall. Not only does this adversely impact the efforts of communities across the country to keep their people safe by preparing for natural disasters and terrorist attacks, but it does so at a time when state and local budgets are already contracting, making federal assistance all the more vital.

The bill also reverses course on a decision to fund the processing of asylum seekers and refugees out of general funds, rather than asking other immigrant petitioners to pay fees to fund a service they don't receive. A reduced allocation for the National Protection and Programs Directorate is likely to delay the critical effort to secure government cyberspace, and a cut to the flood hazard mapping program will make it difficult for FEMA to meet its legal obligation to update our nation's flood maps every five years.

The bill does avoid significant cuts to most of the core DHS components, including the Coast Guard, TSA, ICE, Secret Service, and Customs and Border Protection. Importantly, the bill maintains level funding for firefighter equipment and staffing grants, which are critical to mitigate the impacts of widespread local budget cuts to public safety personnel. And because of the dire fiscal straits that local fire chiefs are facing, the bill maintains flexibility Congress has given FEMA in recent years to waive certain restrictions on SAFER grants that are difficult for most fire departments to achieve right now.

Unfortunately, these homeland security provisions offer little consolation when we turn to other areas of the bill. The strength and security of our country are about much more than how much we spend on weapons systems or how thoroughly we police the border. They are about the investments we make in our people – in our nation's ability to recover from the current economic downturn, compete in the global economy, and build a future of greater prosperity for our children and grandchildren. The bill before us risks pulling the rug out from under the current recovery and compromising our future competitiveness.

To be sure, it could have been worse. Some of the most reckless cuts included in H.R. 1 – such as a 17 percent cut to Pell Grants, a $1.6 billion cut to NIH, and an $800 million cut to the National Science Foundation – have been avoided, while the measure contains modest

increases for programs such as Head Start and homeless assistance grants. Most of the extreme, ideologically driven policy riders being pushed by my Republican colleagues have been dropped.

But the bill still cuts nutrition assistance to Women, Infants and Children (WIC) by over $500 million, Community Health Centers by $600 million, and public housing programs by $700 million – leading to more hungry children, reduced access to health care, and fewer families with a roof over their heads at a time when many are still struggling to make ends meet. It cuts Career Education programs, Dislocated Worker Assistance programs, and a range of highway and infrastructure projects – making it harder for out-of-work Americans to find jobs at a time when our economic recovery is still fragile. And it includes drastic cuts to high-speed rail ($2.9 billion), the EPA ($1.6 billion), energy efficiency and renewable energy research ($438 million), and other key investments in our long-term economic competitiveness. The federal budget is a statement of our priorities and values. These cuts will slow economic growth, as economists across the spectrum have warned, and cost hundreds of thousands of jobs. They will inflict pain on the most vulnerable and restrict opportunities for the middle class.

Make no mistake: in order to preserve our economic competitiveness in the future, we must also put our country back on a path toward fiscal balance. As a veteran of the balanced budget agreements of the 1990s, I take a backseat to no one in my conviction that we must rein in our current deficits and put our long-term obligations on a more sustainable trajectory. And while some may claim that this bill is a necessary first step on this path, this view ignores the fact that by threatening the recovery, this bill could perversely exacerbate our fiscal troubles, all the while failing to address our the real budget crisis – the massive imbalance in projected revenues and government obligations in the long-term.

Addressing this much more vexing challenge will require making targeted reductions in spending, but it should phase these adjustments in at a pace that does not jeopardize the fragile economic recovery. I have supported a series of measures in recent months that included real cuts to programs I care about. I helped draft an omnibus bill last fall that would have cut over $20 billion below the President's request, and when that wasn't enough to satisfy my Republican colleagues, I helped draft a yearlong Continuing Resolution (CR) that would have cut nearly $40 billion below the request (and $10 billion below last year's enacted level). Senate Republicans blocked both measures, choosing instead to threaten a March government shutdown. In recent weeks I supported three short-term continuing resolutions to give leaders time to negotiate our way out of this mess. These bills cut another $12 billion off of last year's level.

But we will never balance the budget through cuts to domestic discretionary spending alone. What is needed is a comprehensive approach that includes reforms to entitlements and revenue, as well as targeted spending cuts–the kind of serious approach outlined by President Obama yesterday–instead of focusing myopically on just 12 percent of the budget, as the bill before us does. Twelve percent of the budget—programs that invest in our people and our future—is not 100 percent of the problem. A real budget solution requires shared sacrifice from all Americans, instead of seeking to balance the budget on the backs of lower- and middle-income Americans while cutting taxes for the wealthy.

And so I cannot in good conscience support a measure that would threaten our economic recovery and undermine our long-term competitiveness while doing next to nothing to address our long-term fiscal challenges. This bill may have been a necessary step to avert the irresponsible shutdown of the government, but that does not make it a step in the right direction. I urge my colleagues to oppose this measure.

# # #