

**Wednesday, February 3, 2016**  
**Congressman Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11<sup>th</sup>)**  
**Statement on the FY2017 Budget Resolution -- House Budget Committee Member Day**

Chairman Price and Ranking Member Van Hollen

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on Fiscal Year 2017 budget priorities. I come from local government where we passed bipartisan budgets each year I served on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. While budgets are certainly values-based documents, they do not have to represent just one set of values. They can be inclusive, and should represent the diversity of the people they will ultimately affect.

The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 was a welcome demonstration of bipartisan resolve to relax the deep and indiscriminate cuts of sequestration. The temporary relief provided by the budget deal was equally split between defense and domestic spending programs. It rejected the Faustian bargain that would have funded one and not the other to the ultimate detriment of both. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 is a model of inclusivity we should hope to replicate going forward as we seek a more permanent alternative to the Budget Control Act.

The alternative we seek is one that appreciates the power of government investments to both spur growth and guard from costly triage spending when the bills come due for our neglected funding priorities.

Last year, Congress reached a long overdue 5-year authorization and funding bill for highway, transit, and rail programs. Chairman Price heralded the agreement and robust spending on a modern transportation system as “a vital component to a healthy and growing economy.” I could not agree more, and we must continue to meet our infrastructure funding obligations, including the federal government’s annual \$150 million commitment to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (Metrorail). Since 40% of rush hour riders are federal employees and the 16 million annual visitors to the nation’s capital rely on Metrorail, the federal government has a unique responsibility to help fund the operation of this vital transportation system.

We must not treat all government spending as the same, and we must reject a budget ideology that appreciates the cost of everything and value of nothing. That is not to say that we should not fight waste, fraud, and abuse in government spending – we should. However, viewing all government spending as a net negative on the national ledger ignores the history of government investment in the United States and the economic growth it has the power to unleash. That is the lesson of the interstate highway system. That is the lesson of ARPANET which later evolved into the internet. But unfortunately, it is a lesson some have still failed to learn.

The Flint Water Crisis is only the latest glaring example of such government funding neglect and misguided budget ideology. The tragedy in Flint is a byproduct of an ideological preconception in which more efficient government is conflated with smaller government in the form of cutting costs. Under this philosophy, government is a hindrance and cannot be counted on to safeguard the public. It was blind adherence to such a philosophy cast aside the will of the public, and, in this case, public health. It created a situation governed by thinly-veiled social Darwinism. You have to ask yourself, “What could go wrong

with that?” Sadly, we only have to look at the thousands of young children and their families in Flint who know their lives have been harmed irrevocably by those actions.

There are in fact investments we can make now that will save money, and potentially lives, in the long run. Earlier this year, I joined every Democratic Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in writing to the House Budget Committee advocating for a robust International Affairs budget. In our letter, we stated, “Function 150 spending is our first line of defense. If we are unable to prevent a crisis before it explodes, we often must turn to our military, at great cost in blood and treasure. At its most elemental level, underfunding diplomacy and foreign assistance is simply a way of telling America that we are going to have to send our young people into harm’s way once again, because we would not invest adequately in prevention.”

I hope we can appreciate the lives represented by the budget numbers some so cavalierly demand be slashed indiscriminately, and I hope we can recognize that budgeting is not a zero sum game. With these guiding principles, we can tackle both the fiscal challenges facing our country while making the investments that will continue to unlock the potential of the American people.