



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2017

The Hon. Paul D. Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

At a time in our history when so many Americans have a diminished trust in the institutions of our government, it is critical that Republicans and Democrats work together to preserve the faith we have traditionally shared in the nonpartisan work of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

Two years ago, commenting on the appointment of Keith Hall as CBO Director, the Washington Post editorial board wrote: “[It] is a welcome indication that Republican leaders understand the value of intellectual honesty at the CBO. ...It remains to be seen how the CBO will function under Mr. Hall, given the GOP’s determination to cut taxes and abolish Obamacare – and the party’s undoubted wish for numbers to agree with its policies. We hope and expect the new director will stand up to partisan pressure.” How prescient those words were, Mr. Speaker.

Since its creation forty-three years ago, the CBO has offered both Democratic and Republican majorities its expert analysis with independence and professionalism. There are times, particularly in the heated debates surrounding major legislation, when it is understandable that Members of Congress may disagree with the results of its analyses. Such disagreements, however, must not undermine its role as an independent arbiter on the estimation of policies’ economic and fiscal impact.

That role is deeply rooted in the CBO’s origins in the Budget Act, which laid the foundation for the modern Congressional budget process. That process includes the role of the CBO and the appointment of its director by the Speaker and Senate Majority Leader in consultation with the respective chairs of the House and Senate Budget Committees. While the appointment of Director Hall occurred under unified Republican control of those four positions of leadership, I reaffirmed my confidence in the CBO’s continued ability to provide independent advice and analysis.

You yourself said of the CBO in 2011, during a critique of the Affordable Care Act: “To be clear, our dispute is not with the hard-working, non-partisan professionals at the Congressional Budget Office. CBO scores what is put in front of them...” It has become apparent in recent days, however,

DEMOCRATIC WHIP OFFICE:
H-148, THE CAPITOL
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3130
(202) 226-0663 (FAX)
<http://democraticwhip.house.gov>

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE:
1705 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4131
(202) 225-4300 (FAX)
<http://www.hoyer.house.gov>

GREENBELT DISTRICT OFFICE:
U.S. DISTRICT COURT HOUSE
6500 CHERRYWOOD LANE, SUITE 310
GREENBELT, MD 20770
(301) 474-0119
(301) 474-4697 (FAX)

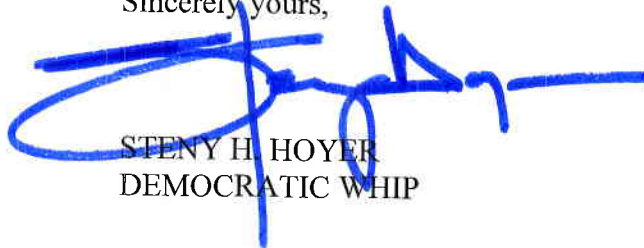
WALDORF DISTRICT OFFICE:
401 POST OFFICE ROAD, #202
WALDORF, MD 20602
(301) 843-1577
(301) 843-1331 (FAX)

that not every Member from your party shares your assessment, a development I find deeply distressing and with dangerous repercussions for the future of the CBO and its crucial role serving the Congress.

Without a recognized referee on the field, Members will be free to conjure their own set of facts, a dangerous scenario that cannot coexist with the normal, responsible functioning of a democratic legislature. The CBO must remain an acknowledged arbiter of what policies will cost and what their impact will be, for the purpose of informed decision-making by legislators on both sides of the aisle. Disputes ought to be over whether to bear certain costs, not whether we believe in the accuracy of their calculation.

As we consider the CBO's analysis of your party's proposals regarding health care in the coming days, your leadership will be critical in preventing an erosion of trust in the very "hardworking, non-partisan professionals" you praised in 2011. It is critical that Congress preserve, despite individual Members' disagreements, the CBO's role as independent arbiter. The alternative will be detrimental to both parties, to the Congress, and to the country.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steny Hoyer", is written over the typed name and title.

STENY H. HOYER
DEMOCRATIC WHIP