



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE JOHN FLEMING, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, OCEANS AND INSULAR AFFAIRS AT THE OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE FY'12 BUDGET REQUEST OF THE U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE AND THE OFFICE OF INSULAR AFFAIRS: MARCH 2, 2011.

Good morning and welcome to the first hearing of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs for the 112th Congress.

I am Dr. John Fleming, the newly appointed Chairman of this Subcommittee and I am proud to represent the citizens of the 4th Congressional District in Louisiana. By way of brief background, I served as a Medical Officer in the United States Navy for six years including a tour on the island of Guam and I have operated a family medical practice in Minden since 1982.

Prior to being elected to Congress, I held no state or federal office, yet, like many of my colleagues, I know what it takes to create and run a successful business and more importantly to make a payroll.

We are living in extraordinary times. Our national debt now exceeds 14 trillion and every man, woman and child in this country owes \$45,580. This debt is not only unsustainable but it is literally bankrupting this country. Just six years ago, the national debt was \$7.6 trillion. We have now nearly doubled that amount and the government is borrowing a staggering 41 cents for every dollar it spends.

Two years ago, President Obama told a town hall meeting in Rio Rancho, New Mexico that current deficit spending was “unsustainable” and that: “We are mortgaging our children’s future with more and more debt”. I agree with the President. It was, therefore, alarming to see the President recommend funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund 145 percent higher than when he came into office. 145 percent. We simply cannot afford this type of federal growth and the federal government should not be profiting from the misery of our constituents who have watched their land values fall. With the operations and maintenance backlog for the National Wildlife Refuge System approaching \$4 billion, this is not the time to further burden the Fish and Wildlife Service with additional land they will find difficult, if not impossible, to properly maintain in the future.

We must reduce spending. It is my hope that we can work together in a bipartisan way to examine those programs under the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee and to objectively ask whether our taxpayers are still getting a fair return on their investments, whether there are programs performing the same or similar functions, whether there is waste in a program, whether the federal government should even be performing certain jobs and whether a federal program has outlived its usefulness and should be terminated.

We will start this process today by examining the FY'12 budget requests for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Office of Insular Affairs. Later this month, we will conduct a similar analysis of the Obama Administration's request for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In my letter of invitation, I asked each witness to be prepared to answer specific questions about major aspects of their budget requests and to explain how they spent the taxpayer money provided to them by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. I am particularly interested in hearing how many full time, part-time or temporary jobs were created and whether these projects would have been built in the absence of this huge infusion of federal money.

I am now pleased to recognize our new Ranking Democratic Member, the gentle lady from the Virgin Islands, Congresswoman Donna Christensen who has the distinction of being the first female physician in the history of the U. S. Congress. Dr. Christensen welcome.