

# AFL-CIO

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## LEGISLATIVE ALERT

March 18, 2026

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I am writing to express strong opposition to H.J. Res. 139, which is scheduled for floor consideration later this week on the suspension calendar. H.J. Res. 139 would amend the Constitution to prohibit yearly federal expenditures from exceeding the annual average of all revenue collected during the preceding three years. Under the guise of “balancing the budget,” this amendment amounts to an arbitrary restriction on investing in the American people - in their education, training, health, employment, and in all the research, services, and infrastructure that help make America great. It is designed to hamstring future Congresses from being responsive to the needs of this country’s working people.

While amending the Constitution to require Congress to balance the federal budget every year may sound great in theory, it would be disastrous in reality. Proponents of H.J. Res. 139 do not appear to be motivated by deficit concerns, or they would not have exploded the debt last summer. Rather, they are using a deficit they exacerbated to justify severe budget cuts that will initially harm the most vulnerable among us, especially seniors, children, veterans and people with disabilities, as well as slash funding for public health and safety, and education. Those cuts will harm all of us in time. Proposing a balanced budget amendment only after enacting the President’s “One Big Beautiful Bill” (Public Law No: 119-21), which cut taxes for the rich and increased the debt by more than \$4 trillion dollars, puts on full display a destructive, smash-and-grab fiscal policy.

Trying to cut our way to fiscal stability has always proven to be ill-advised and squarely against the public interest. If Congress wants to lower deficits it should pass tax and budget policies to lower deficits, not rely on an unworkable constitutional amendment. A balanced budget amendment would result in massive cuts to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and other essential programs. In testimony given before the House Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on the Constitution and Limited Government late last year, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities argued that, with Social Security, Medicare, long-term care in Medicaid, defense spending, and spending on veterans comprising two-thirds of federal program spending, there is simply no way to significantly flatten the debt trajectory while shielding these programs from cuts without additional revenue.

This legislation would make it impossible to make the kind of public investments we need to compete in a global economy. Requiring a balanced budget every year, regardless of the state of the economy, could push weak economies into recessions, make recessions longer and

deeper, cause very large job losses, and hurt long-term growth. Furthermore, because of the strict limits on spending and prohibition on borrowing contained within the amendment, the government would not have the flexibility to respond to natural disasters like the hurricanes, wildfires and floods we've seen in recent years. Even the wealthy beneficiaries of the One Big Beautiful Bill will invariably one day wish this amendment were not law. It is simply a very, very bad idea.

For the above reasons, the AFL-CIO urges you to vote no on H.J. Res. 139.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jody Calemine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "C".

Jody Calemine  
Director, Government Affairs