

increase Medicare premiums was one of the reasons he alleged for the veto that has shut down the government—and never mind that he himself, in his own budget, would countenance a similar increase.

We've said some of this before; it gets more serious. If the Democrats play the Medicare card and win, they will have set back for years, for the worst of political reasons, the very cause of rational government in behalf of which they profess to be behaving. Politically, they will have helped to lock in place the enormous financial pressure that they themselves are first to deplore on so many other federal programs, not least the programs for the poor. That's the real default that could occur this year. In the end, the Treasury will meet its financial obligations. You can be pretty sure of that. The question is whether the president and the Democrats will meet or flee their obligations of a different kind. On the strength of the record so far, you'd have to be on flight.

You'll hear the argument from some that this is a phony issue; they contend that the deficit isn't that great a problem. The people who make this argument are whistling past a graveyard that they themselves most likely helped to dig. The national debt in 1980 was less than \$1 trillion. That was the sum of all the deficits the government had previously incurred—the whole two centuries' worth. The debt now, a fun-filled 15 years later, is five times that and rising at a rate approaching \$1 trillion a presidential term. Interest costs are a seventh of the budget, by themselves now a quarter of a trillion dollars a year and rising; we are paying not just for the government we have but for the government we had and didn't pay for earlier.

The blamesters, or some of them, will tell you Ronald Reagan did it, and his low-tax, credit-card philosophy of government surely played its part. The Democratic Congresses that ratified his budgets and often went him one better on tax cuts and spending increases played their part as well. Various sections of the budget are also favorite punching bags, depending who is doing the punching. You will hear it said that someone's taxes ought to be higher (generally someone else's), or that defense should be cut, or welfare, or farm price supports or the cost of the bureaucracy. But even Draconian cuts in any or all of these areas would be insufficient to the problem and, because dwelling on them is a way of pretending the real deficit-generating costs don't exist, beside the point as well.

What you don't hear said in all this talk of which programs should take the hit, since the subject is so much harder politically to confront, is that the principal business of the federal government has become elder-care. Aid to the elderly, principally through Social Security and Medicare, is now a third of all spending and half of all for other than interest on the debt and defense. That aid is one of the major social accomplishments of the past 30 years; the poverty rate for the elderly is now, famously, well below the rate for the society as a whole. It is also an enormous and perhaps unsustainable cost that can only become more so as the baby-boomers shortly begin to retire. How does the society deal with it?

The Republicans stepped up to this as part of their proposal to balance the budget. About a fourth of their spending cuts would come from Medicare. It took guts to propose that. You may remember the time, not that many months ago, when the village wisdom was that, whatever else they proposed, they'd never take on Medicare this way. There were too many votes at stake. We don't mean to suggest by this that their proposal with regard to Medicare is perfect—it most emphatically is not, as we ourselves

have said as much at some length is this space. So they ought to be argued with, and ways should be found to take the good of their ideas while rejecting the bad.

But that's not what the president and congressional Democrats have done. They've trashed the whole proposal as destructive, taken to the air waves with a slick scare program about it, championing themselves as noble defenders of those about to be victimized. They—the Republicans—want to take away your Medicare; that's the insistent PR message that Democrats have been drumming into the elderly and the children of the elderly all year. The Democrats used to complain that the Republicans used wedge issues; this is the super wedge. And it's wrong. In the long run, if it succeeds, the tactic will make it harder to achieve not just the right fiscal result but the right social result. The lesson to future politicians will be that you reach out to restructure Medicare at your peril. The result will be to crowd out of the budget other programs for less popular or powerful constituencies—we have in mind the poor—that the Democrats claim they are committed to protect.

There's a way to get the deficit down without doing enormous social harm. It isn't rocket science. You spread the burden as widely as possible. Among much else, that means including the broad and, in some respects, inflated middle-class entitlements in the cuts. That's the direction in which the president ought to be leading and the congressional Democrats following. To do otherwise is to hide, to lull the public and to perpetuate the budget problem they profess to be trying to solve. Let us say it again: If that's what happens, it will be the real default.

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SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FOX of Pennsylvania). Under the Speaker's announced policy of May 12, 1995, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. SCARBOROUGH] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. SCARBOROUGH addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio [Ms. KAPTUR] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

A TURNING POINT IN THE NATION'S HISTORY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. DUNCAN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, I do not believe I will take the full 5 minutes, but I want to rise tonight to say that I believe that most people across this

country realize that we are at a real turning point in the history of this Nation. I believe that most people realize that, if we do not bring Federal spending under control and put our fiscal house in order now, that we are going to face very severe economic problems in the near future. If we do not do this now, we will never do it unless probably it is too later to make any real difference.

Mr. Speaker, in that regard we often hear speakers say that we are doing this for our children and grandchildren and certainly that is true, but I think it is also accurate to say that we are doing it for the people who are in the prime of their lives right now because we are going to have extremely difficult economic problems and financial problems in the next 6, or 8, or 10 years, if not sooner, if we do not act now.

Mr. Speaker, already the President's own Medicare trustees have said that Medicare will be broke in about 6 years if we do not make major changes now., so that is why we passed a bill a few weeks ago allowing or giving huge increases in Medicare spending but which does slow the growth of Medicare to about twice the rate of inflation, instead of three or four times the rate, in which it does more to fight waste, fraud, and abuse. Even President Clinton said in his meeting with Speaker GINGRICH in New Hampshire, one of the first things he said was that we have to slow the rate of growth in Medicare.

One of the most fascinating things though, Mr. Speaker, that I saw, and I wanted to call this to the attention of my colleagues tonight, appeared in the Washington Post today. Now all of us know that the Washington Post at times acts or seems to act as the house organ for the Democratic Party, and so that is what made it so, I think, amazing, even that they wrote the lead editorial that they had today, and in that editorial the Washington Post said this. The budget deficit is the central problem of the Federal Government and one from which many of the country's other most difficult problems flow, and then the Post went on to say this:

Bill Clinton and the congressional Democrats were handed an unusual chance this year to deal constructively with the effect of Medicare on the deficit, and they blew it. The chance came in the form of the congressional Republican plan to balance the budget over seven years. Some other aspects of that plan deserved to be resisted, but the Republican proposal to get at the deficit partly by confronting the cost of Medicare deserved support. The Democrats, led by the president, chose instead to present themselves as Medicare's great protectors. They have shamelessly used the issue, demagogued on it, because they think that's where the votes are and the way to derail the Republican proposals generally. The president was still doing it this week.

In addition I have a couple of other things I would like to call some attention to that also appeared today. Dan Thomasson, who is the vice president for Scripps-Howard, an editor of the Scripps-Howard news service, wrote

this, and I think this is very accurate, and once again Mr. Thomasson is not known as any conservative or Republican columnist. In fact he is considered, I think, very moderate, and he said that, and in fact he frequently says things that criticize both the Republicans and the Democrats, and he said this. He said:

"The so-called Republican revolution is being undermined by a political ineptness hard to match in modern history. The result could be a derailing of the best opportunity in three decades to win control over runaway entitlements and to put some sense back in the congressional spending process."

But he goes on to say this, Mr. Speaker, and I think these words are so important for many people to hear. He said:

"For 30 of the 40 years Democrats controlled Congress before last year's GOP takeover, the majority displayed a constitutional inability to deal with the building budgetary crisis. Any effort to stabilize Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, pensions and welfare was not only rebuffed; it was labeled as mean-spirited and used to defeat its proponents."

So politically volatile were these issues that few members of Congress from either party would dare to whisper publicly what everyone knew: that unless something was done to control the costs of these huge programs, our economic future was in grave jeopardy."

Mr. Speaker, I think those words are so very important as we consider the debate that we are going through at this time.

Mr. Speaker, I will have more to say about this later on. I see that my time has expired.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from South Carolina [Mr. CLYBURN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. CLYBURN addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. KIM] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. KIM addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. THOMPSON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. THOMPSON addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

EXPLANATION OF PRESIDENT'S DECISION TO FURLOUGH NON-ESSENTIAL FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maine [Mr. LONGLEY] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LONGLEY. Mr. Speaker, today is day 3 of the President's decision to furlough nonessential Federal employees, and I know that there has got to be a great deal of concern across the country as to exactly what is happening, and I think that we, as Members of Congress, owe it to the public to explain to them in our view what precisely is happening, and I would like to explain the furlough in these terms.

Yesterday was a defining day. It was a defining day in the debate about the role of the Federal Government and the interests of the respective parties in dealing with the problems of Government spending. It was a defining day for the President because he came out and made it clear once and for all that he is opposed to balancing the Federal budget, despite the fact that in his campaign in 1993 he claimed that he could balance, and would balance, the Federal budget in 5 years, despite the fact that in various times he has come out for either a 7-year balanced budget, a 10-year balanced budget, an 8-year balanced budget, or a 9-year balanced budget, or the fact that in January of this year he submitted to this Congress a budget that will never balance, that shows \$200 billion a year in deficits as far as the eye can see.

The President, Mr. Speaker, made himself clear last night. He indicated that he is opposed to balancing the budget in 7 years.

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It was also a defining day for the Congress. Last night we voted a continuing resolution wherein 277 Members of this body went on record in support of a clean continuing resolution, and when I say clean, I mean a resolution that had as its only condition that the President agree to work with the Congress to balance the Federal budget over the next 7 years, no other condition; no conditions about Medicare, no conditions about tax cuts, no conditions about spending adjustments, nothing, other than one simple agreement and understanding, that we will work together to balance this country's budget over the next 7 years.

Needless to say, that passed by 277 votes, nearly a veto-proof majority. But I also need to chide this House, and bring to its attention the fact that in January of this year we had 300 Members who went in support of a balanced budget amendment that would have required and would require that we balance the Federal budget over 7 years. Of the 300 votes in support of that, we received the votes of 72 Democrats.

I should note that since January, four of those Democrats have crossed the aisle to join the Republican party, precisely because of their commitment and support for the objective of balancing the Federal budget. Nevertheless, of those 68 remaining Democrats who voted for the balanced budget amendment, only 48 last evening voted to actually balance the budget in 7

years, per the terms of the continuing resolution.

Despite all the sweet talk and promises and posturing that the public has witnessed, the fact remains that we must get on a track to balancing the Federal budget, that we need a commitment from the Members of this Congress, a commitment to meet their word and to fulfill the promises that they made in their campaigns. We must get this country on the track to a balanced Federal budget.

This is about whether the Federal Government is going to, once and for all, recognize that there is a limit to what it can spend, a limit to what it can tax, and a limit to what it can regulate. Again, I hope that the President sees the light and is willing to fulfill the commitment that he made in his campaign.

REPUBLICANS IN CONGRESS ARE DETERMINED TO BALANCE THE FEDERAL BUDGET

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. Fox of Pennsylvania). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Connecticut [Mr. SHAYS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, I was elected to the State House in 1974, and began to serve office in 1975. At that time the national debt was about \$375 billion. I periodically would pay attention to the spending habits of Congress and note that it would spend more than it raised in revenues.

In the State House, I wondered how Congress could do this, because in the State legislatures, we of course have to balance our budgets. Obviously, a Congress, when times are difficult, during times of war and so on, during times of recession, it is logical that Congress would want to generate economic activity and help bring the economy out of its recession, but Congresses and Presidents collectively, Republicans and Democrats, allowed for deficit spending.

The national debt since that time has grown to \$4,900 billion, or \$4.9 trillion. When I was elected to Congress in 1987, I joined with a group of Republicans, primarily, and a few Democrats who wanted to end this. At the time our group was about 35 Members. Each year it kept growing, with each election it kept growing more and more and larger and larger, until last year our number was about 160.

Finally, with the election of 1994, we got a bulk of Members, Republicans and Democrats, who voted for the balanced budget amendment, as the gentleman from Maine [Mr. LONGLEY] pointed out, 72 Members on the other side, and every Republican except 1, I think, or 2 in the House. What are we trying to do? The first thing we are trying to do is get our financial House in order and balance our budget.

The second thing we are trying to do is save our trust funds, particularly Medicare, from bankruptcy. The third