

Nation how caring about one another and rallying together and working together can overcome any tragedy.

I also want to thank the Small Business Administration, Phil Lader especially, the Administrator. Just today, the Small Business Administration has announced that Taos County, where this fire took place, is a Federal disaster area. That means that the residents of Lama who lost their homes, and there is a total of 31 families, can now apply for low-interest loans. In the same vein, businesses that were struck down by the fire can apply for low-interest loans to rebuild.

Mr. Speaker, here is evidence of the Federal Government being able to help. Recently, the Federal Emergency Management Agency went to northern New Mexico to inspect damage, and they are working to see if they can be helpful, along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Here we have a situation where nature strikes, there are a lot of victims, and then the Federal Government can come in with some good programs and well-trained people and help citizens.

Mr. Speaker, New Mexico is also not burning. Only 1 percent of northern Taos County burned. We are sending a message out to the rest of the country from New Mexico that we welcome visitors; that the State is not on fire; that we have some of the best hiking and fishing and cultural representation of our country in our State. And we hope that despite this tragedy, that America will come to New Mexico.

The fire is under control. The Carson and the Santa Fe are still at risk, and if visitors come they have to be very careful about not initiating any camp fires or throwing matches on the ground or being careless because we are faced with a very, very precarious situation, especially in the Carson.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude by once again thanking members of the U.S. Forest Service for the splendid job they did in containing these two fires in New Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, the information referred to earlier is submitted herewith:

REPORT ON THE HONDO WILDFIRE AND OUR APPRECIATION TO THOSE WHO FOUGHT THE BLAZE

(By Congressman Bill Richardson)

At 12:30 PM on Sunday, May 5, our Taos Zone Dispatcher, Paul Mondragon, received a report of a fire spreading in San Cristobal canyon. Phil Tafoya, a Carson National Forest law enforcement officer, was dispatched to the scene. Fifteen minutes later, Marc Trujillo, the Carson's Fire Management Officer, ordered an air attack. By 2:15 PM planes were dropping their first loads in efforts to save homes and contain the fire.

In the meantime Ron Burnam, Red River Fire Marshall, and his fire crew as well as the Hondo/Saco and Taos Fire Departments were on site attempting to save homes from the ground. By 3:30 PM, Paul and Marc were ordering bulldozers and other heavy equipment to build fire lines around homes and communities. By 4:00 PM, it was apparent that this was a raging fire storm and Lama residents' lives were in danger as the storm headed their way. Carson National Forest

and local fire officials recommended evacuation of the Lama area.

At 4:00 PM local forest officials, realizing the severity of the fire, requested a full Type I fire team. Within hours this team of world class fire fighting specialists began to arrive. At 5:30 PM Carson National Forest Supervisor Leonard Lucero and Marc Trujillo flew over the fire and sized up the situation. By this time the fire had reached 9000 feet in elevation and was headed for Flag Mountain, just south of the Village of Questa.

Given the rate of spread, Carson National Forest officials in coordination with State Forestry and local officials and the State Police began the evacuation of residents on the southern edge of Questa and the Town of Red River. Before midnight the Class I Team, headed by incident Commander Gary Loving, arrived, having just finished work on the Dome fire near Los Alamos, New Mexico.

Within 24 hours, 32 twenty-person fire crews, six helicopters, 24 fire engines, and five tankers were working to protect homes of local residents and contain the fire. A small city of over 1000 firefighters, fire fighting strategists, safety and information officers, cooks, communications specialists and many more appeared on a mesa just west of the fire. The challenges facing the team were daunting: fighting a fire that had already engulfed almost 7000 acres, devastated one community and was threatening two others. The fire was burning on very steep slopes, fuel loads were very high, wind gusts were strong, and the weather was unseasonably hot and dry.

Yet, within days, the team managed to contain the fire. Much of the work was done by helicopters which dumped over a million gallons of water on the fire. What is perhaps most miraculous is that not a single life was lost, nor any serious injuries, neither firefighters nor residents. And from the time the team arrived, not a single home was lost.

On behalf of all of my constituents, I want to say thanks. Thanks to Supervisor Leonard Lucero and the entire Carson National Forest team for their swift response. Thanks to local volunteer fire fighting organizations, BLM, State Forestry Officials, Red Cross, the National Guard, our State Police and all the local volunteers for all working together seamlessly under great stress. Thanks to a wonderful community who pulled together to help those in need. Thanks to the Class I fire team and firefighters who came from all over the nation to help us. You are truly the best on the planet!

The Forest Service certainly receives their share of knocks from some who sometimes disagree with their decisions. But not this time. No one is knocking this agency in my district for these efforts. The men and women who helped us are nothing less than heroes. And we thank them from the bottom of our hearts. Muchas gracias a todos por su ayuda.

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

[Mr. MCKEON address 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. FILNER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

ALLOCATION OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. WISE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take the place of the gentleman from California [Mr. FILNER].

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from West Virginia?

There was no objection.

EXPLANATION OF BUDGET PROCESS AND VOTES ON BUDGET PROPOSALS

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

Mr. WISE. Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk a little bit about the budget process that has just passed, to put on the record the reasons I voted the way I did. I voted for the Coalition budget; I voted for the President's budget, both designed to get us to a balanced budget within a 6-year period, the same as the parameters set in the Republican leadership budget. I voted very strongly against the Republican budget.

Why did I vote for two and not the third? Well, basically the reason is, Mr. Speaker, because the first two at least recognized the importance of investment in the future for our young people, for our economic growth. Because those budgets, while they did balance in a 6-year period, the same as the Republican leadership budget, at the same time those budgets did not attempt to give tax breaks to the wealthiest individuals in this country.

The coalition budget had no tax cuts in it, recognizing that we have contradictory goals if we are trying to reduce the revenues coming in by cutting taxes and at the same time balancing the budget.

The President's budget, while it did have a tax cut in it, was a limited tax cut targeted for middle income working families and low income working families.

Neither of these budgets tried to take it out of the hide of low-income working people, such as the Republican leadership budget did, particularly because the Republican leadership budget sought to greatly reduce the earned income tax credit. That is the tax cut that was greatly expanded only 2 years ago, that gives tax relief to working families earning under \$26,000 a year.

□ 1730

I was also concerned because the Republican leadership budget would cut education again, and that is a battle we had just fought. It would eliminate the Department of Commerce. If anyone can tell me why, at a time when we have got a department that is actually generating jobs, generating contracts, has brought in \$80 billion of contracts and developed a national export strategy for the first time, why we seek to eliminate it. It seems to me it is simply a matter of ideology, and that is not a satisfactory reason.

I was also concerned, Mr. Speaker, because of the cuts that are proposed in Medicare and Medicaid. I have great problems in the Republican budget with the assumption of balanced billing. In other words, a senior citizen may now be charged more by the provider and the senior will be billed directly for that, as opposed to the senior paying out of pocket being limited, as is presently the law.

I am concerned about the cuts in Medicaid, because I think what that is going to mean is that it will go to the States in a block grant, but not satisfactorily enough to meet the needs. At the same time the needs will expand, the funds will decrease.

Those are a lot of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I voted against the Republican budget but for the coalition and President's budget. I have heard a lot of talk, Mr. Speaker, about the need to, and certainly we all agree that there is a need to make sure that our young people are not burdened by debt. At the same time, there is also a compelling need to make sure they are not burdened by ignorance through lack of educational opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, there is a compelling need to make sure that our young people are not burdened by lack of opportunity because we are not investing in our economy. There is a compelling need to make sure that our young people are not burdened by the problems of crime because we are not investing adequately enough in crime control and putting police officers on the street. There is a compelling need to make sure that our young people have a future, and you have to invest in order to make that future.

So I have thought that the two budgets that I did vote for balanced the budget over 6 years, what they did was to seek to keep those domestic investments up and growing, and at the same time, to reach that goal of a balanced budget within a 6-year period.

One concern I have, Mr. Speaker, is that none of these budgets adequately addresses the need of domestic infrastructure investment, that none of these budgets addresses the need to increase the growth rate in this country. The problem is that, if you accept the growth rate in any of the budgets, Republican or Democrat, and say that that is all we are going to grow, that is a ticket to economic stagnation over a period of time.

However, having said that, certainly the coalition budget and the President's budget, I felt, certainly offered much more satisfactory blueprints for the future than the Republican leadership budget. So I offer that as my explanation of why I voted the way I did, and why I am going to keep pressing for domestic investment so that our economy can grow.

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

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

ALLOCATION OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. WELDON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that I take the gentleman's place.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DICKEY). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

LET'S SAVE MEDICARE

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

Mr. WELDON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss one of the most important issues facing my constituents in east-central Florida.

It is an undisputed fact that Medicare is running out of money and will be bankrupt in just 5 years.

For me, this is not a partisan issue. This is a personal issue. I am a doctor and my patients depend on Medicare. I have a father who is dependent on Medicare.

I know the value of this program for my patients and my family, and I am 100 percent committed to finding a solution to protect Medicare for current and future beneficiaries.

As a medical doctor I've been disappointed that some have sought to use Medicare to gain political advantage. This is not a political issue.

The Medicare trust fund began going broke last year, it is already \$5 billion in debt this year, and will be completely broke in 5 years. We don't have time for politics as usual.

I hear some talk about cuts in Medicare. There are no cuts in our plan.

The plan I voted for increases Medicare spending from \$5,200 per person in 1996 to \$7,000 per person in 2002. That's an \$1,800 increase in Medicare spending.

We do want to spend smarter. We do want to attack waste, fraud, and abuse. We want to give seniors choices in health care.

I urge those who have made this a partisan issue, to look beyond partisan politics and come to the table to work with us to do what is right for our seniors and future Medicare beneficiaries.

Mr. Speaker, I call for bipartisan efforts to restore and preserve our Medicare beneficiaries.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MCINTOSH). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Connecticut [Ms. DELAURO] is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gen-

tleman from California [Mr. RIGGS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. RIGGS 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 New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

THE MINIMUM WAGE

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

Mr. DICKEY. Mr. Speaker, I would like to agree with the comments of the gentleman from Florida about the Medicare cuts being not cuts but just slowing of the growth. This is something that we are finding in our State of Arkansas, people are being deceived by ads being paid for by special interests, and I am glad that that is brought up.

Mainly what I want to talk about today is the minimum wage. I am an employer, a restaurant owner, as well as a Member of Congress from Arkansas. All of those things are important in this discussion. But before I get into more of the specifics, I would like for us to direct our attention to something that we have not seemed to bring to center stage as much as we should. In the business world, in the marketplace, it is the consumer, the person who is buying the goods, who is the boss. We lose sight of that fact.

Mr. Speaker, if the boss finds that he or she cannot afford the price of the goods, then the boss will go to somewhere else where they can find a better price. If in fact the boss cannot go where he or she can get good service, they will go somewhere else. So all the time that we are talking about raising the minimum wage, we are not considering the fact who is paying it.

The consumer, the people who buy the goods are paying it. In my particular instance, it is the person who comes into restaurants, and no question I am biased in that viewpoint, but I want to share with this body some of the bases for my being opposed to the raise, to the rise in the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, some people think that the cost that we have in restaurants, the only increase that we will have in the minimum wage debate is what we will pay in addition to the present wage that we give now or whatever the increase might be, but that is not true. Everything that we buy, the meat, the lettuce, the tomatoes, even the transportation, the paper goods, all of these things will have increased prices or at least the push up from increased prices.

So, if I am going to sell a taco for 89 cents and I want to keep the same margins that I have had before, which I am