

We have seen problems of Michigan schoolchildren coming down with hepatitis A as a result of importing of strawberries from Mexico. We have seen a variety of problems with pesticides. Pesticides that are banned for use in this country still are manufactured here, sold to Central American and Latin American countries, including Mexico. Then they are applied on crops and sold back into the United States, pesticides that we have made illegal because we know they are unhealthy for consumers.

Promise number four was that NAFTA would help us deal with the illegal drug problem. One former drug enforcement official called NAFTA a deal made in narco heaven. In fact, that Customs report where he said that has not been released to the American public. In spite of repeated attempts by me and others to get that report public, they will not release it, in large part because it contains so much bad news about drugs coming across the Mexican-U.S. border. The DEA estimates that the drug trade is bringing in, coming across the border, what amounts to over \$10 billion a year.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, promise five, that NAFTA would not reduce the safety of our highways, again has been an abysmal failure. Fewer than 1 percent of the 3.3 million Mexican trucks coming into the United States each year are inspected. For 5,000 trucks per day across the Texas-Mexican border, only two to five inspectors are on duty during weekdays, fewer on weekends. Governor Bush has not done his job, the U.S. Government has not done its job. Then in the year 2000 those Mexican trucks will be allowed to come into all 48 States.

Mr. Speaker, NAFTA has been a failure. We should consider repealing or markedly revising that agreement.

TRUTH IN BUDGETING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for my colleagues this morning: How can the budget be in surplus if the debt went up last year by \$109 billion? Indeed, how can the budget be in surplus if the debt is projected to go up another \$101 billion this year, and another \$90 billion the year after that?

Did anyone question these numbers, numbers which were released on January 29 by the Congressional Budget Office? Mr. Speaker, is there a single Member in this body who can deny that the national debt will continue to rise until the year 2005? It is interesting that we have become too careless with our language, or perhaps crafty, that the next few years of budget surplus will result in billions and billions of dollars more in debt over the next 6 years.

The reason for this situation, of course, is the social security trust fund. The temporary surpluses in the social security trust fund are masking the true size of the deficit.

That is why I am introducing "The Honest Balanced Budget Act of 1999." The intent of this legislation is simple: to guarantee honesty in budgeting. The social security trust fund surplus should not be used to fund other programs. It should not be used to mask our Nation's deficit.

Added to that is the irony that this very same fund is scheduled to go bankrupt soon after the baby boomers start to retire, so this trust fund, which will soon go bankrupt, is now in surplus, hiding the true state of the Federal budget.

Rarely has a government program caused so much confusion, misled so many people, and bedeviled so many policymakers. What is the lesson we should draw from this situation? Number one, our budget problems, despite all the talks about surplus, are far from over. Entitlement spending is still on auto pilot, and still growing by leaps and bounds.

Medicare is still projected to go bankrupt not long after that. Social Security is still projected to go bankrupt not long after that, also. The national debt, which is the sum total of all the earlier budget deficits we have been running for so many years, the national debt is still at \$5.6 trillion and climbing.

This may be disappointing news to some, politically unwise to bring up to others, but it is the truth, the reality, the actual state of the situation. That is why we should pass legislation to require truth in budgeting, to require Members of Congress to acknowledge these facts and to require the media to point them out.

We have been very zealous in cutting welfare spending and reducing the size of our government's bureaucracy. We should keep up our efforts and continue to cut unnecessary spending. Whatever surplus we may have is the result of lower taxes, controlled government spending and our balanced budget.

What would happen, Mr. Speaker, if the economy should start to falter? How would that affect the budget process if the surplus were to shrink, keeping in mind that the true state of our budget surplus is dubious at best?

That is why I hope my colleagues will join with me by cosponsoring The Honest Balanced Budget Act, so we can bring truth in budgeting finally into the process.

THE DEBT AND AMERICA'S CURRENT BUDGET SITUATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. SMITH) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk also about

debt and how we can get rid of it, and about our current budget situation.

We are getting better, which is the good news. In 1992 it seemed like we would never have anything but rising yearly deficits contributing to a larger and larger national debt for the rest of our lives and beyond. But we have turned that around.

We have seen the earlier deficits go down steadily since then and we have now even heard talk of actually running a surplus. The gentleman who preceded me is absolutely correct, we are not there yet, because we are still borrowing money from the social security trust fund and counting that as income, but we are getting closer. Even without counting social security, the debt this year was \$30 billion, which is a lot less than it was 5 or 6 years ago. If we maintain the path of fiscal discipline we can get to the point where we begin to run surpluses.

What I would like to talk about today is taking that one step further, not just begin to run surpluses, but actually begin to pay down the debt. That debt is pushing towards \$6 trillion, and has a devastating effect on our economy. We should get to the point where we can start paying down that debt to do a lot of positive things: to reduce interest rates and also stop the amount of interest we have to pay.

I have a couple of charts to illustrate this point. The first chart talks about how much money we spent on the debt. There are a lot of crushing needs that we have in government: defense, education, infrastructure, Medicare, social security. But this shows that one of the biggest items that every year out of the budget is paid is interest. Two hundred forty-three billion dollars, or 14 percent of our budget, is paid on interest, which does nothing for us. All it does is it meets our obligations on the debt.

To the extent we can reduce that debt, we can reduce the amount of money that we have to spend on interest and free up more money for tax cuts or for spending on other programs that are necessary, like national defense or Medicare. That is a huge blow to our budget. Every \$100 million we can spend down on this debt will reduce this crushing figure we have to face and pay every year.

This goes beyond the effect it has on government. Paying down the national debt will have a profound effect on the lives of individual citizens, as the second chart will show. We have achieved a record level of home ownership in this country, and that is great, but it is still only about 60 or 65 percent.

We need to go even higher, and those of us who are homeowners would also like to see the monthly payment reduced. If we can pay down the debt, the government will not be the single largest borrower in this country. We will not be out there gobbling up all the money and driving up interest rates. We can actually reduce interest rates. What this basically means is that we will save in our mortgages.

This chart shows an example of an average home price of \$115,000, so actually in today's market that is probably below average in a lot of areas. This shows what you can save on a home mortgage if you have a monthly payment of \$844 at the 8 percent interest rate.

If we can reduce that interest rate by just 2 percent we can save as much as \$155 a month, which is almost \$2,000 a year out of our personal family budget. All that is by reducing the amount of money that the government gobbles up for its own debt. That can help make that money more available for people who want to borrow money for home mortgages, and also for businesses, for farms, for a variety of other interests. We can reduce that debt.

We face a lot of challenges in the next few years, but this is one of the biggest. The economy is strong right now. We have unemployment of 4.3 percent, we have low inflation, we have relatively low interest rates. Now is the time to save the money and pay down the debt, because that economy will not always be this robust.

When the time comes and the economy slows, that is when we might need to help the economy, maybe borrow money to help get the economy back up.

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While we are in such a strong economic situation is the wrong time to be running debt the size of our current debt. There needs to be a constituency out there for reducing our Federal debt, help reduce interest rates and recognize the amount of money that the government is borrowing and also pays on interest each year in the budget.

As a Democrat, I want to make this a very important issue. I think for too long Democrats have been accused of not being fiscally responsible. I think we can and should be. And for my part, as a Democrat, I am going to argue we need to save some money, begin paying down that debt to reduce interest rates and reduce the amount of money that government spends on interest every year. It is the fiscally responsible and prudent thing to do when the economy is strong. If we wait, we are in no position to do it when the economy is weak.

Now is the time to step up our fiscal responsibility. We can all be proud. We can finally see someplace in the future where we will have a surplus. But let's take it one step further, let's pay down the debt.

INTRODUCTION OF THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN ENHANCEMENT ACT AND FEDERAL EMPLOYEE CHILD CARE AFFORDABILITY ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SWEENEY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce the recent introduction of two important pieces of legislation to enhance the quality of life of Federal employees and to invite my colleagues to join in cosponsoring this legislation.

Federal employees play vital roles in ensuring that the many important services offered by the Federal Government are provided to citizens of the United States when they are needed. All too often, instead of being rewarded for their work on behalf of all Americans, Federal employees find themselves facing many arbitrary barriers restricting their ability to enjoy many of the privileges that other Americans enjoy.

In a recent column in the Washington Post, Mike Causey pointed out the unfair situation under current law prohibiting Federal employees from saving for their retirement in the same manner as private sector employees with 401(k) plans. To address this, and other inequities affecting Federal employees' retirement savings, I have introduced H.R. 483, the Federal Thrift Savings Plan Enhancement Act. This legislation will provide Federal employees with tools essential to ensure that the Thrift Savings Plan meets their retirement needs.

The bill will allow employees to invest up to the IRS limit of \$10,000 to the Thrift Savings Plan without changing the government contribution. Currently, FERS employees can put up to 10 percent of their salary into their TSP accounts. CSRS employees can only invest up to 5 percent of their salary into these accounts. This arbitrary percentage limitation works to the clear detriment of Federal employees.

For instance, a FERS employee at a GS-10 level earning \$35,498 per year, may only contribute 10 percent, or \$3,550 annually, into his or her TSP account. However, someone in the private sector earning the same amount may contribute as much as \$10,000 annually into his or her 401(k) account, which is \$6,450 more than the similarly situated Federal employee may invest.

My legislation is a sensible way to encourage Federal employees to increase their savings for retirement. At a time when we are encouraging Americans of all age to save and invest more for their retirements, it is absolutely inequitable to arbitrarily restrict the ability of these employees to invest in their retirements in the same manner as private sector employees with 401(k) plans.

In addition to remedying this inequity, my bill will eliminate all waiting periods for employee contributions to the TSP for new hires and rehires, making these employees eligible to contribute their own funds to the TSP immediately. President Clinton declared, during his State of the Union address, that "We must help all Americans from their first day on the job to save, to invest, to create wealth." Well, this bill will enable Federal employees

to do just that, to begin investing for their retirement from day one.

Finally, this legislation ensures the portability of retirement savings by authorizing employees to roll in money from a private sector 401(k) to their TSP accounts. That really does make sense. Doing this gives employees entering the Federal work force the ability to continue managing their retirement account and maximize the wealth that these accounts create.

America has one of the lowest savings rates among industrialized countries. It has fallen steadily over the last 20 years, seriously jeopardizing Americans' security during what should be their golden years. While Americans recognize they should be saving more, half of all family heads in their late 50s possess less than \$10,000 in net financial assets. With the retirement of America's baby boomers approaching, Congress must encourage Americans to save more, and this legislation is an important tool in empowering Federal employees to do precisely that.

I also want to point out that I am also working on child care needs. Critically important. I have introduced H.R. 206, the Federal Employee Child Care Affordability Act. It is a bipartisan bill. It will allow Federal agencies to use their salary and expense accounts to help executive agency employees pay for child care. Surprisingly enough, under current law, they cannot do that. So they need the authorization which would come from this bill, and the Federal agencies want it.

This bill, developed with the help of OPM, would allow agencies to pay a portion of the providers' operating costs, thus enabling child care centers to reduce the fees charged to lower income Federal employees. And, frankly, Mr. Speaker, it does not require any additional appropriations.

I do hope that all of my colleagues will join in cosponsoring these two important pieces of legislation.

TRIBUTE TO NATION'S LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS AND REQUEST FOR SUPPORT OF 21ST CENTURY POLICING INITIATIVE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to our Nation's law enforcement officers; to thank them for risking their lives every single day to keep my family and my community safe.

I have had the fortunate experience of meeting many of my local officers, because they are spending more and more time in our neighborhoods, and it is through the success of Community Oriented Policing that we have helped thousands of local police departments getting their cops out on the beat and away from their desks.