

billion that we are spending every year on interest in order that we can ensure that we will have the ability to meet a lot of other pressing needs, whether it be national defense or whether it be education.

As I said earlier, this is in the interest of all of our families because, by paying down the national debt, we are also going to be alleviating the burden on an average family of four today who is paying, in effect, \$3,644 a year to finance that interest.

We had earlier speakers that talked about what it means in terms of mortgage payments. If we paid down the national debt, we are going to see an expected reduction of interest rates of 2 percent, which again means the difference in a monthly mortgage payment of \$155 a month.

When people talk about making a tax cut or providing all of our citizens with a tax cut, I can think of no better tax cut than paying down the national debt because we are, in effect, reducing the burden of this interest payment.

I myself, besides being a Member of Congress, am a farmer. As most farmers, we have to borrow money in order to operate our enterprises. An average operating loan of maybe \$250,000 a year, that 2 percent reduction in interest rate means \$5,000 in the bottom line in profits to a farmer.

When we purchase a new piece of equipment, which are becoming increasingly expensive, an average combine today costing \$200,000, again the benefits of paying down our national debt, which will reduce interest rates, will manifest itself in a total savings on interest on the purchase of one combine of over \$11,000 a year.

So in this Congress, when there is going to be a debate among those who are supporting a policy that the President is advocating of paying down the national debt in order to try to keep this economy on a sound path, in order to ensure that we can see even lower interest rates than we see today, that is a course we should take.

I think we ought to be very cautious in succumbing to the allure of tax cuts which would pose a great jeopardy to the country if they are not paid for by reductions of spending in other components in our budget, because they have the danger of taking us once again down a path that will lead to increased deficits and increased national debt, which will undermine the solvency of our economy and certainly will continue to obligate our families and future generations the responsibility of continuing to pay the carrying cost of our excess spending of today.

□ 1500

DISCUSSION ON THE SURPLUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURR of North Carolina). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. CUNNINGHAM) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of discussion on the surplus, not just how to spend it but how we got here. Different people can take a different view of both, but I would like to point out some actual facts.

First of all, in 1993, the White House under President Clinton, they had the House, the Senate and the White House. They gave us in 1993 what the Democrats called an economic stimulus package, which raised taxes to the highest level ever on the American people, and they state that that brought us the surplus.

I would claim that that is inaccurate. Because in 1995, when the Republicans took over the House and Senate, we rejected over 90 percent of that economic stimulus package. We are not even operating under that stimulus package.

And what did that stimulus package do? It increased the tax on Social Security. It increased the tax on middle-income working families. I do not use the term "middle-class." I do not think there is any such thing as a middle-class citizen. There are middle-income citizens. And for the first time, in 1995 we decreased the amount of tax on Social Security that the 1993 bill did. And when people fill out their tax forms this April, for the first time, they will receive a \$400 deduction per child. Next year that will go to \$500 per child.

They can also receive tax credits. But we repealed the 1993 bill to actually give more dollars back to working Americans instead of the Government itself.

Take a look at welfare reform, when the Democrats said they were responsible for the deficit. First of all, the President vetoed the balanced budget. And I think we can all remember he said, well, it will take two years. It will take four years. It will take six. It will take eight. And finally, after the third time, he came around and signed it and gave us the same Medicare program that they put over \$100 million in ads demonizing the Republicans for and he signed that. But for 40 years they took money out of the Social Security account and paid for welfare.

The President just said in his State of the Union, look, we have less than one half of the welfare rolls that we did before. Now, instead of government having to pay people on welfare and take out of the budget, now the Welfare to Work program, we have people actually working and contributing to the budget and adding to that. That is more money.

The billions of dollars that we gave to welfare recipients, the average, Mr. Speaker, was 16 years, the average, on welfare. That is wrong. All of those savings and the quality of life for those families and for those children that were on welfare is better.

Are there people that need welfare money? Absolutely. And we do not mind giving our tax dollars to that. But 16 years is too much. But yet many of the progressive caucus would just

give more money and more money and more money without managing the program. That is what led a lot to the deficits that we had in the different budgets.

If we take a look at the balanced budget, the balanced budget, according to Alan Greenspan, has lowered interest rates between 2 and 8 percent. Look at what that has done to the markets and the increase in the markets, in the economy. Capital gains reductions paid for itself.

If we take a look at the other tax breaks that we gave to American people so that they spent the dollars, not the government, the surpluses are due because the Republicans gave money back to working people instead of taking it away.

FISCAL DISCIPLINE AND REDUCING NATIONAL DEBT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Ms. HOOLEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. HOOLEY of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, Americans now are looking at the longest peacetime expansion of the United States economy since the start of the 20th century. The outlook for our future is rosy. Economic growth is expected to continue to rise, and unemployment is predicted to stay below 5 percent. Inflation is expected to remain low, and it is believed that the interest rates on mortgages and loans will continue to remain attractive.

This booming Federal economy has passed on some benefits to the Federal Government. The most notable are the increased tax revenues and Social Security dollars that result from a fully employed workforce. With this economy, Congress is faced with a new and interesting predicament of deciding what to do with those Social Security surpluses.

If we look only at the short term, we might be tempted to spend those funds on what later generations would call reckless tax cuts. Now, I support cutting taxes and I hope we can find some room this year to do just that. But the American public is more savvy and will not condone irresponsible use of projected budget surpluses.

My constituents, if they retired, would not go out and spend all of their retirement on a new sailboat the day they retired. Well, I think they want us to show that same fiscal restraint and discipline.

While economists are predicting good times ahead, our future also holds a growing number of baby-boomers who will be moving from the work force into retirement. They have paid into Social Security and they should know it will be there for them in the future.

The youngest citizens of our Nation also need to know that we are thinking ahead. If we work to save Social Security and Medicare now and pay down our national debt, we will leave them

with a healthy economy and the resources they need to move this nation ahead.

This year, as a member of the Committee on the Budget, I will be looking forward to working on these issues. We know that the part of our national debt "held by public" will be 42 percent of our Gross Domestic Product this year. This is the term we use to describe the money the Federal Government has borrowed from banks and pension funds. With a Federal debt in the area of \$5 trillion, we need to focus on paying that down and end the process of borrowing.

The budget proposal sent to Congress by the President does just that. It makes sure that we save and makes sure that Medicare and Social Security are there for the future, as well as it pays down the debt. This is a home run for all of our citizens.

If my colleagues look at this chart, we look at the interest again, 14 percent. If we have the discipline, the fiscal discipline, to make sure we have Social Security there for the future, that we have Medicare there for the future and pay down that debt, we will get that down to about 2 cents per dollar. With that kind of a reduction, I want to tell my colleagues, there will then be real money for tax cuts and real money for investing in a lot of programs that people want.

I am looking forward to working on this agenda that will be healthy for the future economy of the United States.

NEVADA IS TARGET FOR NUCLEAR PAYLOAD

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. BERKLEY) is recognized for 10 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. BERKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I come before my colleagues to give voice to the well-founded fears and concerns of the citizens of the Las Vegas Valley, which is my home district, and the citizens of the entire State of Nevada.

Over one and a half million Nevadans live within an hour or so drive from the so-called temporary high level nuclear dump proposed in H.R. 45. This bill would dump over 70,000 tons of an incredibly lethal substance at one location in southern Nevada. Those Nevadans, mothers like myself, fathers, sons, daughters and grandparents, deserve the same health and safety protections as every American.

H.R. 45 would deny equal protection under the law to the citizens of Nevada and to future Nevada generations. But I will also discuss how this bill places Americans in all parts of this country at risk.

When one lives in a State that has been singled out as the target for a nuclear payload, he gives close attention to the issue. Nevadans know just how toxic, how dangerous, how menacing high-level nuclear waste really is. To

give my colleagues some idea, a person standing next to an unshielded spent nuclear fuel assembly would get a fatal dose of radiation within three minutes.

Under H.R. 45, the concentrated level of deadly radiation in one place in my home State staggers the imagination. H.R. 45 would force all of the Nation's high-level waste on the people of one State, a State where there is not even one nuclear reactor.

For nearly two decades the nuclear industry and the Department of Energy have tried to convince Nevadans that high-level nuclear waste transportation and storage is safe. Their argument basically is, we will just stuff this stuff right into metal cans, screw the lids on tight, and there is nothing to worry about.

Well, what is wrong with this picture? Well, if those cans of nuclear waste are so safe, why do they have to be shipped from all parts of the United States into the State of Nevada? That question has haunted Nevadans for years, and our concerns have intensified with H.R. 45.

This bill would unleash high-level nuclear waste onto the Nation's highways and rail lines. It is this issue, the transportation of high-level nuclear waste, that binds Nevadans with all Americans as potential victims of H.R. 45.

Americans from all parts of the country would be exposed to unacceptable and unnecessary risk because they live near highways and railroads where nuke trucks and trains would roll. Moving nuclear waste to Nevada would require well over 100,000 long-haul shipments. Nuclear waste will be speeding around the clock every day for nearly 30 years on our roads and rails. This should sound a national alarm.

The deadly cargo will intrude on 43 States and hundreds of cities and towns across our nation. Fifty million Americans live within just a mile and a half of shipping routes. The waste will rumble through Birmingham, Alabama; Laramie, Wyoming; Portland, Maine; and the suburbs of Los Angeles; Miami, Florida; Kansas City; and St. Louis, Missouri. In short, nuclear waste will be on the move all over the country all the time for 30 years.

The Department of Transportation counted more than 99,000 incidents in which hazardous materials were released from trucks and trains from 1987 to 1996, causing 356 major injuries and 114 deaths. The Department of Energy has described a plausible crash scenario involving high impact and fire that would contaminate an area of 42 square miles with radioactive debris. It is truly horrifying to picture this happening in a populated area.

We have been repeatedly told that shipping nuclear waste across the country and stashing it at a dump site is safe. But let us take a brief look at the history of how the Federal Government has handled nuclear projects. The lands around nuclear installations at Hanford, Washington, Rocky Flats,

Colorado, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, Fernald, Ohio, are contaminated. The GAO concluded that 124 of our 127 nuclear sites have been mismanaged by the DOE.

Nevadans do not buy this "don't worry, be happy" attitude towards radiation, and for good reason. I grew up in Nevada. Nevadans were proud to volunteer for the patriotic chore of playing host to above- and below-ground nuclear weapons testing, but the Federal Government never leveled with us about the risks.

In the 1950s the Government produced films advising that if people just stayed indoors as clouds of fallout drifted through communities, everyone would be safe. As a safety measure, the Government suggested that a quick car wash would eliminate any pesky radioactive contamination.

It seems harmless enough if it were not for the evidence of a disturbing increase in cancer that later traumatized these same communities. Harmless? Perhaps, if above-ground testing did not spread radioactive elements across the country.

Supposedly safe above-ground nuclear tests were stopped when it was proved that radiation was winding up in the bodies of American children through the milk they were drinking. Underground testing was supposed to be the safe answer, or so the Government said. The radioactivity would be trapped underground, never to get out, except that some of the underground shafts burst open, spewing radiation into the air. Now scientists are finding that plutonium thought to be trapped in these test shafts is moving through the groundwater at alarming speed.

□ 1515

So I have a healthy skepticism about Federal nuclear programs. My healthy skepticism persuades me that H.R. 45 is, in fact, a Trojan horse for permanently dumping high level nuclear waste in Nevada.

Make no mistake, there is nothing temporary about H.R. 45. This bill is a political vehicle to get the waste to Nevada, to be conveniently parked next door to Yucca Mountain, the site of a failing effort to justify a permanent dump.

The past year has been marked by a quickening pace of scientific evidence that clearly eliminates Yucca Mountain as a safe place for nuclear waste. Water will saturate the dump. Those who thought Yucca Mountain would be dry for 10,000 years are stunned to discover that water is filtering through at an alarming rate. Yucca Mountain has been, is and always will be jolted by earthquakes. In recent days seismologists described swarms of earthquakes that rocked the area. To visit Yucca Mountain is to feel the earth move.

A growing number of scientists fear that a Yucca Mountain dump intended to isolate deadly radioactivity forever may well explode into an environmental apocalypse of volcanic eruptions. It is not nice to fool Mother Nature. Where earthquakes, water and