

costs are comparable to the provision of services in many States.

Unfortunately, as the Nation benefits from the tremendous budget surplus, the Americans in the territory will also be excluded from many of the most significant policy initiatives presented this session.

The \$500 billion Social Security enhancement proposed by the Universal Savings Accounts, commonly referred to as the USA accounts, will not apply to the citizens in the island, even though we contribute to Social Security equally as all other citizens. What is more, money from our contributions to the Social Security funds will be used to manage and administer the program which will be denied to us.

But this initiative is just one of the many new proposals that will not apply to the nearly 4 million U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico. Many other proposals, ranging from welfare to work, to building new schools, to providing incentives to workers and even the empowerment zones and the new market initiatives that aim to stimulate the economic, will bypass us in the next century. We will not have the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the economy nor participate in the tax credits that are being proposed.

Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to bring these matters to your attention and to the attention of all my colleagues in Congress, because our Nation must do something to ensure that the American citizens in Puerto Rico are equal Americans. How can our Nation stand as a model for the world when it maintains a policy of discrimination, a policy of economic and political apartheid?

For 100 years, we have stood shoulder to shoulder as we have defended freedom and democratic values wherever and whenever it has been needed in the world. As we enter the millennium, we should not be pushed behind our fellow citizens in the 50 States. It is a national shame that in our country American citizens must time and time again beg to be given equal access to the programs that will promote economic prosperity, health and well-being.

REGARDING A 2-YEAR FEDERAL BUDGET PROCESS

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

Mr. REGULA. Mr. Speaker, on the first day of the 106th Congress I introduced H.R. 232, the Biennial Budget Act of 1999. This is an issue that I have been working on for the past 10 years, and I think it is time that we enact this important reform.

My legislation, and I might add that the Speaker pro tempore this morning has also introduced a similar bill, along with others, establishes a 2-year budget and appropriations cycle in-

tended to reduce the repetitive annual budget votes. It would also improve the entire process by allowing more time for long-term planning and careful oversight of government spending.

The bill converts the annual budget, appropriations and authorization process into a 2-year cycle. The first session of Congress would be devoted to decisions on budget and appropriations issues. The President would start the process by submitting a 2-year budget, which would cover the 2 years of the biennium, and planning levels for 2 additional years.

Then Congress would adopt a 2-year budget resolution, a 2-year reconciliation bill, if necessary, and 2-year appropriations bills during the first session of a Congress. The second year could be used to consider multiyear authorization bills and to oversight of Federal programs. We do not do enough oversight now. We do not have time with an annual budget to really look into programs to see if they are working well.

The current budget process consumes more and more of Congress' time. In 1996, budget votes totaled about 70 percent of all votes. It does not leave time for many of the other responsibilities of the Congress; and, obviously, it leaves less time for systematic oversight.

Another problem is that we do not get the appropriations bills done on time. Only twice since 1974 have we completed action on all of the 13 appropriations bills on time. Whereas, with a 2-year cycle, we would have the opportunity to get this legislation completed and then go into the oversight program.

Now, another benefit would be that federal managers, who are managing the taxpayers' funds, would know for 2 years how much they have to operate a park or other federal programs, and they could plan more wisely and could spend the money more efficiently.

I believe that the benefits of moving to the 2-year budget cycle would be many, including reducing repetitive budget votes, allowing Congress to engage in long-term planning and management reforms for Federal programs, improving the systematic oversight of current government programs, and providing greater stability and predictability in Federal spending.

I would just urge all my colleagues to take a look at H.R. 232 and sponsor this bill or some of the others, such as that introduced by our Speaker pro tempore today. It is an idea whose time has come, I think, as we try to manage the resources of our people and of our Nation more efficiently.

IT IS NOT ABOUT SPRAWL BUT ABOUT HOW WE BUILD

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, yesterday there appeared an article in The New York Times entitled, "There's Plenty of Space for Suburbs to Keep Sprawling". This article, I feel, represents a wrong turn in the discussion about our communities and how to make them more livable. The facts are true but beside the point.

It is true that we have only increased the amount of developed land in this condition by two-tenths of a percent in recent years. It is true that we have a great deal of farmland. It is true that we are protecting more open space around the country. But I think it is important for us to take a deep breath, step back, and look at what those facts represent.

To suggest somehow that we do not have a problem in terms of development in this country because we have a large inventory of land is a lot like suggesting that just because the earth is 78 percent water we do not have problems of water supply and quality. The fact is for much of the world, and many places in the United States, we often have too much water or we do not have enough or it is too polluted or sometimes we have a combination of all three of those problems.

As it relates to the quantity of farmland, the fact is that we have generated this farmland in the past in ways that we are probably not likely to do in the future: filling in wetlands, irrigating the desert, destroying forest lands. Many of these practices today we now recognize are harmful. We no longer do it and, in fact, there is a very real question whether or not that is sustainable in the future, particularly given the lack of water supply in many parts of the country.

It is also true that while we have added to the inventory of publicly protected forests and park lands, that is simply a reaction to the fact that we have more and more of this space imperiled. The good Lord is not making more forests and open space. We are having increasing pressure on those areas that we have now, and so we have taken this extraordinary step of trying to buy and protect more and more of it. That is not adding to the inventory. That is trying to just simply hold on to what we have.

We need to look no further than the jewels of our national park system, the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Yellowstone, to see that we are severely under assault. Even in the Pacific Northwest, in my home area, the Mt. Hood National Forest and the Columbia River Gorge are subjected to problems of pollution, overcrowding, traffic congestion and development encroachment. It is an indication of the problems that we need to face in the future.

It is also suggested that government intervention has been part of the problem in the past, to which I say: Amen. But the question is, how are we going to proceed from this point? Even if sprawl were possible to sustain into the

future, is this the pattern of development that we want for our country? Do we want to live this way?

□ 1245

Increasingly, Americans from coast to coast, border to border are speaking out and suggesting that is not their desired approach. Citizens are taking matters into their own hands on State and local levels with initiatives to try and improve the quality of life. They know that there are better ways of spending our tax dollars, that just because we have failed in the past in comprehensive planning is no suggestion that we should not try and do a better job of planning in the future, and just because the government has not always been constructive in efforts that it has undertaken does not mean that there is not a role for the government to be a constructive partner in the future.

It does us no good to pretend that we do not have problems of growth and quality of life in our communities. The citizens know that that is the case. The evidence is overwhelming. Now is the opportunity for us, under the banner of making our communities more livable, to engage the government as a constructive partner, to plan thoughtfully for the future involving our communities, spending our infrastructure dollars more wisely and engaging in a new generation of environmental protection that is performance driven.

I look forward to the day when we can get away from the wrong turns of this debate and get back to a productive discussion of how we can work together to make our communities more livable.

IN SUPPORT OF REPEALING HOUSE RULE XXIII

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. REGULA). 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, today I will be introducing legislation to require a separate vote before we raise the debt ceiling.

A lot of my colleagues will ask, why is this legislation necessary? Because often we allow the practice of raising the debt ceiling, the debt limit, to continue without a recorded vote. It is hidden within the budget resolution and passes without notice and, of course, without a vote.

Initially, this rule was added in the 96th Congress by public law and was originally applicable to concurrent resolutions on the budget for fiscal years beginning on or after October 1, 1980.

The rule was amended in the 98th Congress to reflect the enactment into law of a new permanent rather than temporary debt limit. The rule ties a passage of a concurrent budget resolution to an increase or a decrease in the limit of the public debt.

Legislation to repeal Rule XXIII would simply force Congress to vote separately on any increase in the public debt limit. Repealing this rule would simply force a floor vote on an increase or a decrease in the public debt; and this is a positive move, I think, for all of Americans.

Again I pose the question: Why is this so important we have such a vote? If we do not pass and repeal this Rule XXIII, we will continue to raise the debt limit with no type of accountability.

I would like to share with my colleagues some statistics that I think will help them to understand the relevance of what I am talking about.

In 1994, the debt ceiling of the United States Treasury was about \$49 billion, and we had a population then of about 132 million people. That is roughly about \$370 per person. Our population today is about 276 million people, and our debt now is approaching \$6 trillion. That is about \$22,450 per person.

In the 58 years since 1940, the U.S. population has doubled. Yet the debt ceiling has risen to about 121 times its 1940 level.

Now, when we start to talk about almost \$6 trillion, that kind of figure is beyond the understanding of most of us. If we put it in inches, it is the distance from the earth to the sun. In terms of the population of all of the earth, it is about \$1,000 for every person. It is a huge amount of money.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues know, House Rule XXIII stipulates, "upon the adoption by Congress of any concurrent resolution, the enrolling clerk of the House of Representatives shall prepare an engrossment of a joint resolution, increasing or decreasing the statutory limit on the public debt."

In other words, simply passing a budget subsequently raises the public debt limit. There are no votes on the matter, no floor debates, no nothing. Rule XXIII simply states that a vote for the budget "shall be deemed to have been a vote in favor of" raising the public debt limit.

It is way too easy here today and far too painless for us on the House floor to raise this public debt. It should not be easy, and it should not be painless, and we should have full debate. In fact, it should be very difficult; and, at the very least, it should be a publicly debated matter with a record vote.

So, Mr. Speaker, to remedy this situation I have this legislation which I will be dropping this morning; and I urge all of my colleagues to support it and just to call my office if they would like to be a cosponsor.

PHONEY POLITICAL DEFINITION OF 'BALANCED BUDGET'

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

Mr. METCALF. Mr. Speaker, we have all heard that we have now done it. We have balanced the budget. We have solved the deficit problem. Lots of talk. No more deficits. Now we have a surplus. Lot of talk. How should we spend it? How should we spend it? Well, we could have tax cuts. We could beef up Social Security. We could beef up existing programs. Several things.

Let us get back to reality, back to the cruel facts. We have a surplus only by using a political definition of "a balanced budget." This definition was designed by the Democrats when they were in the majority to mask the size of the deficit. To our discredit, when we took over control of the Congress, we continued to use a phoney political definition of when the deficit is balanced. And the Republicans continued it, and that is wrong.

From September 30th, 1997, to September 30th, 1998, that is the last fiscal year, the 1998 fiscal year, an honest report showed that that was the first year we said we had a balanced budget. But an honest record shows that we had a \$22 billion deficit in that first year that we balanced the budget. Well, we cannot do both. In fact, the balanced budget was a political definition; and we still do have a deficit.

However, we are on target to balance the budget. Maybe this year. I hope we make it. I am not sure we will. But certainly we are on target for the near future.

Now, as people are lining up now as to how to spend the surplus, whenever it happens, there are several things. Safe Social Security is topmost on the list. But any major talk of the surplus that we will have in a few years must include pay down the debt. We must pay down the debt.

We are paying huge amounts of interest every year on that huge debt. In fact, it amounts right now to about \$270 billion a year in interest. If we can start paying down that debt, then we can lower the interest payments, which gives us more money to pay down the debt, which lowers the interest payments further, and soon we could have enough money to do the job we are supposed to do properly without the kind of things that we see happening now.

So all I am saying, the point of my talk is, this is the time to pay down the debt just as soon as possible. Start paying on it, just a little bit.

As I mentioned, the fiscal year that we first said we balanced the budget we went further in the hole \$22 billion. I called up the Treasury Department and I said, how much does the United States owe on that particular day, September 30, 1997? And they told me. And I said, how much did we owe on September 30, 1998? And they told me. And I used to be a math teacher and I can subtract, even if they are big numbers up in the billions. We over spent by \$22 billion in the first year that we claimed to have balanced the budget.