

Witt. We were there during the August break, and we saw the resurgence of that community. It is remarkable. This is a town where more than 90 percent of the homes were affected by flood. This is a community that was also hit before the floods by the worst winter storm in 50 years. Then the floods came. In the midst of floods came fire. It was an extraordinary series of events, but there was also an extraordinary Federal response, and I am here today to thank my colleagues who stepped forward and were willing to assist. But I also want to recognize the extraordinary work of HUD, and specifically Secretary Cuomo, because rarely have I seen the kind of response we saw during our period of crisis. In part, it was because he had this new mechanism, these community builders across the country who were infusing new energy and new ideas into the agency that made that response possible.

In Washington, we hear over and over that government needs to be more responsive to people's needs and that government needs to be more flexible and work similar to the private sector. I can say that in Grand Forks, HUD did just that. Grand Forks is not an isolated example. We saw it up and down the Red River Valley. It wasn't just in Grand Forks; it was in Fargo; it was in Wahpeton; it was in Grafton; it was in Menoken. Town after town that was threatened had a full Federal response, and no agency was more responsive than HUD; no people were more helpful than those community builders.

That is why I thought it important to come to the floor and say restore the Community Builders Program, restore it in the conference committee. Let's not recruit some of the top people from all across the country, asking them to serve for 2 years, and then, after a year in a program that has been deemed successful by every independent entity that has examined the program, say to them: Forget it; go home.

The amazing thing is, they won't go home because we have signed contracts with them. If we don't fund it, we are still going to have to pay for those positions.

I hope very much the conference committee will restore the funding to the Community Builders Program, to say to those 400 people who have given so much, we recognize their contribution; we intend to keep them as part of a new HUD, a HUD that has been reformed, a HUD that is responding in a splendid way to disasters such as the one we faced in North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. CONRAD. I am happy to yield to the Senator.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I was pleased to hear the remarks of Senator CONRAD about the Community Builders Program at HUD. I echo all of the comments he made about the difference that HUD made in the lives of the peo-

ple in the Red River Valley who suffered so immensely from the massive flooding that occurred a couple of years ago.

I am on the Senate Appropriations Committee, and we had a discussion about the Community Builders Program. I share the feeling Senator CONRAD has expressed on the floor of the Senate about that program. It seems to me we ought to find a way to continue to fund that program. These are people all across this country who are making a difference, men and women who give new energy and new vitality to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. I think it is a step backward for this Congress to say that program doesn't work. We know it works. We know firsthand its value. We understand its contribution in our communities and other communities across this country.

I placed a statement in the RECORD a couple of days ago about this subject. I was pleased to have my colleague describe this in more detail, its functioning in the context of what we experienced.

I ask the Senator if he doesn't believe, in the end process, in the overall scheme of the amount of money that is spent and invested by the Congress, if the funding for the Community Builders isn't almost an asterisk of an amount, but so significant in terms of what it means to the new direction in HUD and to the capability of HUD to provide new energy and new vitality to these programs. Is it not the case that funding for this program can be done easily, without cost to other programs, but in a way that will make it an incredibly important investment in HUD in the long term?

Mr. CONRAD. The Senator is exactly right. I think back to the time when we were in the midst of that crisis and what a splendid response we got from HUD.

I think people are often critical of Federal agencies. Certainly HUD, especially in the past, has received lots of criticism—well deserved, unfortunately. However, this new Secretary, Mr. Cuomo, has done a remarkable job of transforming that agency. We saw it firsthand in the flood disaster of 1997. Not only did they stay in all weekend down at HUD to get the money out to the affected communities, which was a splendid performance, but they were with us every step of the way in revitalizing and rebuilding that community.

We have just seen the result. The Senator from North Dakota was with me and with James Lee Witt as we toured Grand Forks to see how that community is coming back. It would not have happened, the mayor of Grand Rapids said to me when we were at the League of Cities meeting Saturday night in North Dakota, without the assistance from the Federal Government that was received by the community of Grand Forks.

The key agencies were obviously FEMA and HUD, also SBA. All of those

were major contributors, as well as the Commerce Department and EDA. Those four agencies made a profound difference. The mayor said to me flatly, without the contribution made by HUD and Secretary Cuomo, that town would not have come back in the way it has in just this short period.

It is truly amazing to drive through the streets of Grand Forks now, to see the schools that have been rebuilt, to see the downtown that is under construction—a new corporate center, a new county facility—to see other buildings that are being rehabilitated, to drive through the neighborhoods and see the new homes that have been constructed, hundreds of new homes, to see the devastated homes that have been taken out, to see the new greenway that is being created, and to go across the river and see a brand new superstore that is being built and will attract hundreds of thousands of people a year. This is a testimony to programs that work.

We all know there are Federal programs that don't work. We all know there are times when Federal money is not well spent. This is an example of when the Federal Government proved its worth and proved its mettle, performed, and made a difference in the lives of tens of thousands of people.

I want to publicly commend Secretary Cuomo and the people at HUD and to say this Community Builders Program ought not to be thrown over the side. We have 400 people who were recruited from 9,000 who applied to come to work for the Government for 2 years—in and out—to add their expertise and energy. We ought to continue the experiment. We know from every independent analysis this is a program that has worked.

#### BUDGET SURPLUS

Mr. CONRAD. Today the Office of Management and Budget announced the unified budget is in surplus for fiscal year 1999 by at least \$115 billion. That is significantly higher than the unified surplus of \$70 billion for fiscal year 1998 and, in fact, is the largest dollar surplus in the history of the United States.

This is a good day. This is a good day for the country, and this is a good day for the Congress. It is certainly a good day for the President and the administration.

In 1992, the budget deficit was \$290 billion. The forecast then was that the deficit for this year would be over \$400 billion. That was the forecast in 1992 for where we were headed if we didn't change course. We did change course. The President proposed, and the Congress passed, a plan in 1993, a 5-year plan, that has worked splendidly. In each and every year of that 5-year plan, the deficit came down. In 1997, we passed a bipartisan addition to that plan. That addition closed the gap, made the difference, and finished the job. Now we can report we have budget surpluses.

The job is not fully complete because while we are reporting a \$115 billion surplus this year, the Social Security surplus is \$124 billion. In this year, we are still using \$9 billion of that \$124 billion Social Security surplus for other things. We shouldn't do that. It ought to stop.

But what dramatic progress we have made. We have gone from budget deficits of \$290 billion just 7 years ago to a \$115 billion budget surplus this year, and we are within hailing distance of stopping the raid on the Social Security trust fund. The Social Security trust fund is a \$124 billion surplus in fiscal year 1999, and we are running a surplus of \$115 billion. So we are very close to stopping the raid on the Social Security trust fund.

I hope very much we are able to stay on that course. We know that is in real jeopardy for fiscal year 2000. We know that if everything plays out as is currently contemplated in the Appropriations Committees, we will be using between \$30 billion and \$40 billion of the Social Security surplus next year. We will be going backwards. Let's not do that. Let's not go backwards. Let's keep moving forward. Next year, let's be able to report that we are not using any of the Social Security surplus for any other purpose. That ought to be our goal.

We are now in this remarkable position of being able to say that if we stay the course, if we don't go out on some big, new spending binge, if we don't have some radical, reckless tax scheme, we will be able to balance the budget without counting Social Security and we will be able to eliminate the publicly held debt of the country in the next 15 years.

Every economist who has come before the Senate Budget Committee and every economist who has come before the Senate Finance Committee has said the highest and best use of these surpluses is to reduce the debt. What we did in 1993 confirms that view.

Remember that in 1993 we took action on a 5-year budget plan to reduce the deficit each and every year. The idea was, that would take pressure off interest rates and that would give the greatest lift to the economy, that by reducing deficits and debt, we would reduce pressure on interest rates, that lower interest rates would help our economy perform more strongly, and we would improve our competitive position in the world.

How well that strategy and plan have served this country. Each and every year of that 5-year budget plan passed in 1993 we reduced the budget deficit. Each and every year we were moving towards lower spending as a percentage of our gross domestic product. Every year of that 5-year budget plan we were moving towards the point at which we could start reducing the national debt. That plan worked.

Now we are able to see the longest economic expansion in our history, the lowest inflation in 30 years, the lowest

unemployment in 30 years, and the lowest welfare rates in 30 years, with total spending of the Federal Government being reduced. We have gone from 22.7 percent of our national income, our gross domestic product, going to the Federal Government to this year it being down to 19 percent. We are headed in the right direction. Let's keep that up.

Let's move to a circumstance in which we will be able to report next year that we have stopped raiding the Social Security trust fund. Let's be able to report that we are on schedule to eliminate the publicly held debt of the United States in 15 years. What a great thing that would be for our country. How well that would position us for the baby-boom generation, because pretty soon we baby boomers are going to start to retire. We are going to add dramatically to the burden on the Federal Government from Social Security and Medicare, and the single best way to prepare for that eventuality is to reduce publicly held debt. We can do it. It is within our grasp. But we have to avoid new spending schemes and we have to avoid risky tax schemes if we are going to deliver on that promise.

I hope very much that together we will stay the course and put America in a circumstance in which it is able to announce in 15 years that there is no publicly held debt in America. What a great circumstance that would be for our Nation. I can't think of anything that would be a better present to our children and our grandchildren than to be able to eliminate the publicly held debt in the next 15 years.

I thank the Chair. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I want to make a few comments about the subject of education.

We will have two votes later today on two competing resolutions offered by the majority leader and the Democratic leader here in the Senate on the subject of education. I would like to make a couple of comments about that general subject.

Some long while ago, I was touring refugee camps as a member of a hunger committee in the House of Representatives. One of the camps I recall visiting was on the border between Honduras and Guatemala.

At the United Nations High Command for Relief Operations camp that they were running there on the border of Guatemala, I saw a lot of impoverished people who had been forced to leave their homes and were living in the camp. I visited with some of them through an interpreter. One older fellow, probably in his seventies, could not speak English but he motioned with his hands for me to come with him.

So I followed him about 20 paces or so back to this area where he was liv-

ing in a tent with so many others. The refugees at this camp had cots to sleep on, and this fellow reached under his cot, and from among his meager belongings, which would have fit in one small knapsack, he pulled out a very small book. Then he grinned a rather toothless grin. He had only a few teeth in his mouth, but his smile was a mile wide as he held up this book to show me. The interpreter who had walked with me into that tent said: He wants to show you the book he is learning to read.

Here was a man living in a refugee camp, sleeping on a cot, in a tent with many others with only a meager subsistence who was proud to show a visitor that he was learning to read. The book he held up to show me was the Spanish equivalent of a "See Spot Run" book. In halting Spanish, he read a couple of pages, and the interpreter interpreted what he was reading for me.

I have always remembered those circumstance because there on that dirt floor, in that tent, in that refugee camp, this fellow in his seventies was enormously proud of being able to learn to read, even though he was on his first primer book.

This story illustrates for a lot of people how important it is to be educated and to have opportunity. How does it happen that opportunity exists in some societies and not in others? How does it happen that we in America have been so fortunate while some others have not?

I have told my colleagues before that one of the first visits I made when I came to Congress was to the oldest Member of Congress at the time, Claude Pepper. He was then in his late eighties. Above the chair in his office were two photographs autographed to him. The first photograph was of Orville and Wilbur Wright making the first airplane flight. Orville Wright had autographed it to Congressman Claude Pepper before he died. Beneath it was an autographed picture of Neil Armstrong walking on the Moon, also autographed to Congressman Claude Pepper.

I was struck by those two gifts from the first persons who learned to fly and then from the first person to fly to the Moon—autographed pictures that occurred in the span of Congressman Pepper's lifetime.

What was it that caused that explosion of knowledge, learning, and technology? The answer: Education. It was our education system that said to every young boy or girl in this country: You can become whatever you want to become. You can be a physicist, a scientist, a doctor, a barber, a mechanic. You decide what you want to become, and our education system allows your young minds to flower and to develop their full potential.

How is it that in our country we invented the television, we invented the computer, we invented plastic, radar, the silicon chip, we learned to fly, we