

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 SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana 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 Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. EMANUEL 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 Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BILIRAKIS 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 California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY 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 gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GOHMERT 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 North Carolina (Mr. MCHENRY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MCHENRY 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 California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California 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 Michigan (Mr. STUPAK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. STUPAK 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 gentle-

woman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. FOXX 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 gentleman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD 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 gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. ENGEL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

RESTORING ACCOUNTABILITY TO OUR GOVERNMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) is recognized for half the time until midnight as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, this evening on behalf of the 37-member-strong, fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, I rise to talk about restoring accountability to our Nation's government.

As you can see here, today, the United States national debt is \$8,347,371,018,253 and some change. If you divide that number by every living man, woman, and child, including the children, the babies being born today, every citizen of the United States' share of the national debt is \$27,910.

For those of you that have walked the halls of Congress, you have seen this poster outside each of the 37 members of the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition. The number changes daily. It is staggering. It is our way to try to hold our government accountable for this reckless spending and the largest debt ever in our Nation's history as well as the largest deficits ever in our Nation's history.

Tonight, I would like to talk about accountability. Mr. Speaker, let me just say that under the United States Constitution, which I carry one with me, Congress has an obligation to provide congressional oversight of the executive branch. Congressional oversight prevents waste and fraud, ensures executive compliance with the law, and evaluates executive performance.

However, under the current leadership, Congress has abandoned this responsibility by failing to conduct meaningful investigations of allegations of serious waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement of taxpayer dollars. And tonight, on behalf of the 37-member fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, I rise to hold

this Republican majority, this Republican Congress, responsible for failing to conduct meaningful investigations of allegations of serious waste, fraud, abuse and mismanagement of taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Speaker, by failing to serve as a check and balance for overspending, waste, fraud and financial abuse within the executive branch, this Republican-led Congress has failed the American taxpayer. Every 24 hours, \$279 million of your tax money is being spent in Iraq; and the current Federal debt is \$8,347,371,018,253, much of which is borrowed from foreign countries. Our Nation is spending about a half billion dollars a day simply paying interest on the debt we have already got. A half billion a day.

Many of America's priorities are going unmet because of this reckless spending. Just in my congressional district in Arkansas, I need \$1.5 billion to finish I-69. We could do it with 3 days' interest on the national debt. I need another \$1.5 billion to finish Interstate 49. Again, we could do that with 3 days' interest on the national debt. I need about \$100 million to complete the Hot Springs Expressway. We could do that with just a few hours' interest on the national debt. I need \$200 million to finish Interstate 530. We could do that with just a few hours' interest on the national debt. I need about \$300 million to four-lane U.S. Highway 167 from Little Rock to El Dorado and on past there connecting I-39, 40 with I-20 in Louisiana. I could do that with less than a day's interest on the national debt. We need to four-lane U.S. Highway 82. We could do that with just a few hours' interest on the national debt. These are just some of America's priorities that will continue to go unmet.

Others are making college affordable for young people, ensuring that our young people get the best education possible K-12. Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, so many of America's priorities are going unmet, are going not fully funded because of the reckless spending going on by this Republican Congress. These massive deficits, this large debt, is forcing much of your tax money to be spent, not meeting America's priorities and improving the quality of life for our children and grandchildren, but rather it is going to simply pay interest, not principal, just interest on the national debt.

Now on top of that, what is happening? On top of that, our Nation is borrowing \$1 billion a day. As I said earlier, we are sending about \$279 million every day to Iraq. But do not ask the President to be accountable for it. Do not ask him for a plan on how he is spending that money, because he will tell you that you are unpatriotic. I disagree with that. I believe that this President, this Republican Congress must be held accountable when they spend your tax money.

About 45 percent of the billion dollars we are borrowing every day is

coming from foreign central banks and foreign investors, money that our children and grandchildren some day will be forced to pay back.

American taxpayers simply deserve to know how their money is spent. They deserve answers as to why their children and grandchildren will have to foot the bill for this administration's fiscal mismanagement of the Federal budget. This includes answers as to why the Federal Emergency Management Agency, commonly referred to as FEMA, continues to pay a quarter of a million dollars a month to store almost 10,000 mobile homes. That is right, 10,000 mobile homes at the Hope Airport in my congressional district, while many victims of Hurricane Katrina remain homeless.

There was a photo of it today in the New York Times. Literally 9,959 was the count earlier this week of brand new, fully furnished, 16-foot-wide, 60-foot-long mobile homes that are sitting there at the Hope Airport literally in a hay meadow. You can see the barbed wire fence. You can see the grass where they are just sitting. FEMA's only response has been to spend as much as \$4 to \$6 million laying gravel on this hay meadow to prevent these brand new, fully furnished mobile homes from sinking.

FEMA's response should have been to get these mobile homes to the people who lost their homes and everything they own as a result of the devastating storms Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. It is past time for FEMA to be held accountable and provide these new, fully furnished mobile homes to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

This is an aerial view, an aerial view of some of the 9,959 mobile homes that are sitting parked, never been used by the storm victims, sitting parked, purchased by our government through FEMA. These were decisions made at the highest levels of FEMA, and here they are sitting, sitting at the airport in Hope, Arkansas.

Now FEMA is beginning to bring back travel trailers that have already been used by storm victims where they will either be refurbished for future storms or auctioned off to the highest bidder.

□ 2330

This is not to be confused with these brand new, fully-furnished mobile homes that were never used by storm victims, purchased with your tax money by FEMA. Again, it is past time for FEMA to be held accountable and provide these new, fully-furnished mobile homes to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

No business in our country could succeed financially if it failed to fully report back to its shareholders on how it is spending its money. However, that is exactly how our Federal Government is operating.

The administration is not telling its shareholders, the American taxpayers, how it spends the money coming into

Washington. But we can see how it is being spent: 9,959 brand new, fully-furnished 16-foot wide, 60-foot long mobile homes intended for storm victims from Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita sitting, unused, never used, at the airport in Hope, Arkansas, and FEMA's only response is, oh, goodness, we don't want them to sink in that hay meadow, so we will spend \$4 million to \$6 million dollars putting gravel on the hay meadow.

In 2004, \$25 billion of Federal Government spending went absolutely unaccounted for, according to the Treasury Department. The Bush administration was unable to determine where the money had gone, how it was spent or what the American people got for their tax money. Even worse, the Republican-controlled Congress failed to hold the Executive Branch accountable for this admission.

The next year, the Government Accounting Office reported that 19 of 24 Federal agencies were not in compliance with all Federal accounting audit standards and could not fully explain how they had spent taxpayer money appropriated by Congress.

That is worth repeating. The Government Accounting Office in 2005 reported that 19, 19 of 24 Federal agencies, were not in compliance with all Federal accounting audit standards and could not fully explain how they had spent taxpayer money appropriated by Congress. Yet Republican leaders in this Congress did not force these agencies to fully account for how the money was being spent before doling out billions more of your tax money for the same programs.

Clearly Congress has failed to ask serious questions about the Bush administration's fiscal irresponsibility and record high deficits four years in a row, which have now pushed the Federal debt to a staggering \$8,347,371,018,253.

The time has come to hold this administration accountable for its reckless behavior. I believe Congress must act now to renew its Constitutional responsibility. It is right here in the Constitution of the United States of America, to serve as a check and balance for overspending, waste, fraud and financial abuse within the Executive Branch.

That is why Members of the 37 member strong, fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition and I are co-sponsoring legislation that would require Congress to renew its duty to conduct hearings on spending and hold administration officials accountable for waste, fraud and abuse within their agencies.

Mr. Speaker, if you have questions or comments or concerns about the program that I am outlining tonight, I would encourage you to e-mail us, Mr. Speaker, at Bluedog@mail.house.gov. That is Bluedog@mail.house.gov.

The legislation I am referring to is House Resolution 841, introduced by one of the founding members of the fiscally conservative, Democratic Blue

Dog Coalition, Mr. JOHN TANNER of Tennessee.

Our legislation does this: Number one, Congressional hearings. It would require Congressional hearings within 60 days of a Federal Office of Inspector General report documenting fraud, waste, abuse or mismanagement in the government that results in a cost to the government of at least \$1 million. Increased Congressional involvement in Inspector General reports would improve agency performance and save taxpayer funds.

This legislation, House Resolution 841, requires Congressional hearings when a Government Accounting Office report names an agency high risk for mismanagement. GAO's "high risk" series is an effort to assist Congress in dealing with one of its important obligations, to exercise accountability for taxpayer funds.

In 2003, the GAO identified 26 high risk areas for the Federal Government. Since then, only three programs have been removed from the list and four more have been added. Clearly it is necessary that Congress become involved to curb mismanagement in Federal agencies.

It also requires the House Committee on Government Reform to hold hearings to question heads of departments or agencies whenever their auditors issue disclaimers or restatements of financial statements indicating accounting information is inaccurate or incomplete.

It requires Congress to hold hearings at least twice a year to review the Office of Management and Budget's performance-based review program called Program Assessment Rating Tool, or PART. The PART was developed by the Office of Management and Budget to assist and improve program performance so that the Federal Government can achieve better results.

A PART review helps identify a program's strengths and weaknesses in order to make the program more effective. However, despite several GAO recommendations that the Office of Management and Budget share their evaluation plans with Congress to ensure that their findings will be timely, relevant and credible, coordination with Congress is still lacking.

The second bill that I would like to refer to that we have introduced as members of the Blue Dog Coalition that I am proud to cosponsor is H.R. 5315, the Accountability in Government Act of 2006. The lead sponsor on that is representative DENNIS CARDOZA of California, one of the co-chairs of the fiscally conservative, Democratic Blue Dog Coalition.

Here is what that bill would do. It would require each Federal agency produce an audit within 2 years that complies with the standards established in the Federal Financial Management Improvement Act of 1996. It would require the Senate to hold reconfirmation hearings on any cabinet level

official whose agency cannot fully account for how it is spending your tax money within 2 years.

I am also a cosponsor of H.R. 5542, which amends the Federal criminal code to impose on a public official who engages in conduct in furtherance of a Federal felony a fine and a 2-year prison term in addition to any penalties imposed for such felony. Those who write the laws, Members of this body, Members of this Congress, must be held not to a lesser standard than everybody else in America, but to a higher standard. That is what this bill would do.

It defines "public official" as an elected official of the United States or of a State or local government, a presidentially-appointed official or an official appointed to a State or local government office by an elected official of a State or local government. It says that if you are an elected official who has been placed in the public trust and if you break the very laws that you helped write, you should have a stiffer fine and additional 2 years of prison time tacked on to the term that any other citizen in this country would get. It is time to hold our elected officials to a higher standard. When they break the law, they should be punished to a greater degree than everyone else.

Wasteful government spending has forced the national debt to its current record level, and future generations will have to pay that bill. Future generations will have to pay back with interest the money the Federal Government is borrowing from other countries due to this administration's fiscal recklessness.

The time has come to restore common sense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's government. The legislation that I am talking about this evening will put our Nation back on the track toward balancing the budget and restoring accountability within our government.

That is what the fiscally conservative, Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, 37 members strong, is all about, trying to restore some common sense and fiscal discipline and accountability to our Nation's government and requiring that elected officials be held to an even higher standard than everyone else. If elected officials break the law, they should be punished to a greater degree than everyone else, for they have been placed in the public trust, and when they violate that trust, they should be punished and they should be punished extensively.

Mr. Speaker, if you have questions about our program, I would encourage you to e-mail us at Bluedog@mail.house.gov.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, again, as of this evening, the national debt is a staggering \$8,347,371,018,253.

THE LATEST EDITION FROM THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH SQUAD

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GOHMERT). Under the Speaker's an-

nounced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) is recognized until midnight as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, what a pleasure it is to come back to the House floor this evening, even though it is for really just a few short minutes, and bring the latest edition of the Official Truth Squad.

The Official Truth Squad is a group of Republican Members who began with a group of freshmen Members of Congress in their first term this past year, who got together and said, why on Earth do we have all of the misinformation and disinformation and distortion that you hear oftentimes on this floor over and over and over again, and nobody, nobody, refutes it. What is going on? So what we did is we formed the Official Truth Squad.

We have heard some items just this evening that deserve some truth. So I am pleased to come this evening to the floor, Mr. Speaker, and to bring some facts, some facts, to the issues, because facts are important when we are talking about issues in Washington. If you don't deal with true facts, then it is extremely difficult to get to the right solutions.

We in the Official Truth Squad have a saying that we are fond of, a quote that we like to identify and like to call to people's attention. It is from the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. He said everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but they are not entitled to their own facts. That is important, Mr. Speaker.

We have just heard from what has been described as the fiscally conservative Blue Dogs. Well, I am here to tell you, Mr. Speaker, these folks have perfected, perfected, saying one thing at home and doing something here. In fact, as I was sitting here tonight, they have perfected saying one thing here and doing something different here.

To point that out, facts, Mr. Speaker, the truth, Mr. Speaker, here they tout the importance of the line item veto. We believe in the line item veto. A number of years ago we had an opportunity to demonstrate our belief in that by a vote on the floor of the House. This vote was back in 1995. At that time, eight Democrats voted in favor of the line item veto.

This is a bill that would give the President an opportunity to control spending, to assist in making sure that we move toward a balanced budget, and in fact eight Democrats voted yes. 194 Democrats voted no. Most of those, most of those that were in the Blue Dog contingent, were in the no column.

I haven't updated this, Mr. Speaker, but as you know, last Thursday we voted on a new line item veto bill on this floor of the United States House of Representatives. I have got to update this, because the numbers are staggering. The numbers are staggering. 156 Democrats voted no. It is a fact, Mr. Speaker, they voted no on the line

item veto. In fact, half, virtually half of those folks who call themselves fiscally conservative Blue Dogs, voted no.

So, as I say, Mr. Speaker, they have perfected the fine art of saying one thing here and doing something different here, not just saying one thing at home and doing something different here.

You heard about a balanced budget tonight, how strongly they support a balanced budget. Well, what about when given the opportunity to vote for a balanced budget, Mr. Speaker? What happened then? This is very recent, just this year. Roll call vote 156 this year, 2006, the balanced budget substitute was an amendment to the fiscal year 2007 budget. This is a bill that the Republican Study Committee put on the floor of the House and it would in fact balance the budget, which is what most folks say they desire and what they say they want.

□ 2345

But when given the opportunity to speak up, what they say they want with true action, what happens? You see it right there, Mr. Speaker. Not a single, not a single Member of the minority party voted in favor of that bill, including, including all of the Members of the Blue Dog Group.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know facts are difficult, because they are tough to argue with and they are tough to refute. But truth and facts are important. And there are individuals here trying to do very responsible things as it relates to the economy and as it relates to our budget, and as it relates to being responsible with spending hard-earned taxpayer money.

And the vast majority of those folks are in the majority party. And the reason that I say that with such confidence is because the actions that have been taken by the Republican majority have resulted in a remarkable economy. A remarkable economy.

Now, you will not see that on the nightly news, and you will not hear about it on the radio, likely, and you will not read about it in your local newspaper. But it is important stuff that is going on. It is important and exciting activity that is going on in our economy. And I would just like to highlight a few of them. We have got some charts that we would like to show that demonstrate that.

The economic boom that we are currently under is almost unprecedented. Today, at this point, last month America had 75,000 new jobs, 75,000 new jobs created, which is in addition to 1.9 million new jobs in the last 12 months. This is really exciting news, Mr. Speaker.

More than 5.3 million new jobs since August of 2003. Now, the unemployment rate fell to 4.6 percent. Unemployment rate at 4.6 percent. That is lower than the average of the 1960s, the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, this is all great news. It is remarkable that we do not hear that