

Mr. Speaker, I remind this body, the Constitution does not only protect the rights of the people, it also protects the rights of the States. This is our responsibility, to remember them when we write, debate and vote on legislation here in this Chamber.

What I am urging here is not only a political philosophy that most would argue has drifted from the mainstream, but a most important one that has affected our budget, and a gloomy budget forecast it has been for the future.

This is what the caucus is about, these weekly information sessions. It is really well past time that we turn a critical eye on to the Federal Government. This will be how we will lower our deficit, grow our economy and ensure that America remains that "beacon on the Hill."

Now, aside from being informational, this caucus also seeks to make specific legislative gains in the name of governmental efficiency and constitutional adherence. We will support legislation that seeks to return power and authority back to where it belongs, to the States, to the local governments and to the people.

So, to close, I look forward to working with my friend from Utah and other members of this caucus and other Members of this body, from both sides of the aisle, as we work each week in the days and weeks ahead. We owe nothing less to our constituents and to generations, both past and future, to defend this great experiment of American republicanism and democracy.

□ 1715

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CAMPBELL of California). 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 Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. VAN HOLLEN 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 gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

THE OFFICIAL TRUTH SQUAD ON THE HISTORY OF AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, the Official Truth Squad tonight is going to continue the theme that has already been addressed by three of our friends, Mr. OTTER from Idaho, Mr. BISHOP from Utah and Mr. GARRETT from New Jersey. They have been talking about our history. They have been talking about the philosophy of America and who we are and what we are and what we stand for. So for the next few minutes we will be discussing our history, the American Revolution, the people who lived before us, what they thought, what they wrote, and what they said.

I have with me tonight my friend from Texas, another freshman, Mr. CONAWAY from West Texas, and he is going to start out discussing our heritage and giving us some truth about who we are, what we are, and what we stand for.

Mr. CONAWAY. Judge, I thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to share this hour with you tonight and to be able to discuss these very important topics with our colleagues in the House.

One of the things that occurred to me while I have been here in Congress is that we don't do a real good job of delineating between the role of the Federal Government and everybody else. There is a great push every single day while we are here to expand the reach, to expand the scope, to expand the Federal Government's role in all of our lives. One of the reasons for that is I don't think we have a really good, clear appreciation for our founding documents.

So I have introduced a bill, H. Res. 485, called the America Act, a modest effort to reinstitute the Constitution in America, which would require every Member of Congress, every Representative, every Senator, to read the Constitution once a year. It would also require our senior staffers to also read the Constitution, because an awful lot of what you and I do every single day is somewhat influenced by what our staff does; the idea being that you and I raise our hand in January of every odd-numbered year, one of the seminal moments of my short term here in this Congress in January of 2005 when we stood up to take our oath of office. We pledge to protect and defend the Constitution. In our role as lawmakers, we write laws to implement the Constitution, and, every once in a while, we attempt to change the Constitution.

So it seems pretty self-evident to me we should know what is in the Constitution, and, given the reach of this Federal Government over the years, it seems we may have lost our way with respect to that.

When the Constitution was being written 230-plus years ago, there was a constant struggle or tension, as has already been discussed on this floor tonight, of what the role of the Federal Government should and should not be. Those headed up by Alexander Hamilton thought a wide-ranging, wide-reaching government would be appro-

priate. Others, such as Adams and Jefferson, thought a much more narrow interpretation of the Constitution would narrow the scope of this Federal Government.

I doubt that if our Founding Fathers could join us today, that even the strongest proponents of the most expansive Federal Government would recognize what we have done under the Constitution with this Federal Government. It reaches into every single portion of our lives.

You and I also, when we campaign and when we are talking on this Hill, talk about reducing the size of government, reducing Federal spending, the threat that the growth in spending has to our way of life.

The real solution, in my mind, is going to lead to some hard decisions that sweep major programs, major perhaps Cabinet-level agencies, out of the Federal Government; a clear recognition that this Federal Government should be limited; that there should be certain things that are totally left up to the States. I am not going to name any of those tonight, because that is going to create some controversy when we begin to talk about that.

The truth of the matter is if we are, in fact, going to rein in the growth of the Federal Government, we have to begin limiting the reach into particular areas that our Founding Fathers did not envision. So a modest step, a new effort to try to help each of us understand clearer what our role should be and what this Federal Government's role should be in our day-to-day lives, will be a reading of the Constitution.

So I am going to begin asking each of my colleagues to cosponsor and join this effort to pass this resolution that would require all of us to read the Constitution once a year. It is going to be an honor system. We are honorable men and women in this body, and I think we can trust ourselves.

I am a CPA by trade. You are an attorney. Our professions all require continuing professional education: doctors, lawyers, engineers, CPAs. CPAs in particular have to have 40 hours a year of continuing education just to stay current.

It seems to me that politicians and folks serving this body should be as well informed about their job as anybody serving in a profession should be informed, and the start of that would be the Constitution, the base document on which this great hall is founded.

So this requirement would require each of us to read that Constitution once a year, and record that in our records, and be available for constituents to ask us, now, when is the last time you read the Constitution, Mr. Congressman?

I want to thank my good colleague from Texas, the great judge from the southeast part of the State. We are from the same State, but we are probably 600 miles apart in our homes. But it is a wonderful State to represent,

and I am honored to have TED POE and the freshman group with me this year. I want to thank you for giving me this time to share this hour with you tonight.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. CONAWAY. You made several excellent points about our heritage. Reading the Constitution is certainly something that all Members of this body ought to do on a regular basis.

I would hope all school teachers in this country would pick up this document, read it from time to time, and have their kids read this document. It is not very long. I have with me a pocket Constitution and Declaration of Independence that many of us in this House carry with us every day.

Your comment about taking an oath to uphold the Constitution: Not only do Members of the United States House of Representatives raise their right hand and swear to uphold the United States Constitution, but every elected official in this country takes that same oath. Members of the Supreme Court take it, the President takes it, every State representative, State senator, the Governor of every State. Every peace officer takes that oath, every member of a city council, every school board, every person in public service in our country takes an oath to uphold the Constitution. It is the only oath that most of us take while we are serving in office. It certainly is an oath that we are obliged to follow.

Several years ago the world was divided between free and unfree, and we had this Iron Curtain that existed in much of the world that separated those of us who are free and those that were not free. After the great wall came down, we heard many stories about those oppressed people who lived behind the Iron Curtain and what their life was like in that political slavery in which they found themselves.

Several prisons throughout the Eastern Bloc of Europe housed political prisoners, one of which was a Czechoslovakian student who had been imprisoned and sentenced to 5 years for reading from a prohibited document in that Communist nation.

What he did, he found himself on the steps of Prague University. He stood there, defiant, and quoted a document from history. It went something like this: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

For reading from that document, that Czechoslovakian student went to prison. Yes, that is a portion of the Declaration of Independence, our Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson.

Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence justified to the world our independence from Great Britain. It gave the reasons why we had the divine right to leave that country.

It starts out, "When in the course of human Events, it becomes necessary

for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation."

That is how the Declaration of Independence starts. It gives the justification, the divine right, for an independent Nation, and, first and foremost, sets the parameters on where we get rights.

As many in this body do, I from time to time talk to kids in schools, the younger the better; talk to them about America and our history, our glorious history. And I ask the question many times to students, where do you get your rights? And I hear all kinds of answers. "My parents give me the rights." "Teachers give me rights." "The government gives me rights." More often than not, most of them say, I don't know where I get my rights.

But the Declaration of Independence establishes to the world, first and foremost, where we receive those rights.

So there is no misunderstanding. Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence wrote it down, that was later signed by 54 signers of the Declaration of Independence, that "We hold these Truths to be self-evident." The truth. It is obvious. That is what that means. We hold these truths to be obvious. "That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by," and notice what the word is, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't say government. It says "their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

We live in a time where in our society we don't want to talk too much about the Almighty.

□ 1730

Or we may offend somebody. We may get sued. Our schools may get sued if they happen to mention God in the public school system.

Well, they are going to have to mention the Creator if they are going to mention the Declaration of Independence, because the philosophy of who we are is that we receive our dignity not from government but from a creator, from a supernatural being.

And the rights that we have come from the creator. Many times we hear about the right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but for some reason we seldom say where those rights come from.

Mr. Speaker, this is a big deal. It is not a minor deal. Because, you see, government does not have any rights; only people have rights. Government has power. And it gets power from us, the people. We are higher than government. We are not lower than government.

And this philosophy was new in 1776. Always before, the King was most pow-

erful or the dictator was most powerful, or the military; Caesar was most powerful, not the people.

And so when our forefathers got together and started talking about this concept of freedom and independence and America, they knew that the rights that they wanted to talk about did not come from the King; they did not come from a dictator; and they did not come from some military official. They came from the Creator.

Because, you see, if they came from government, that means government can take them away. And the only way government gets its power is from us, the people. So the most important phrase in the Declaration of Independence establishes that the rights that we all claim to have come from a creator.

It is interesting to note when Thomas Jefferson first penned the Declaration of Independence, his first draft, the three rights that he mentioned were life, liberty and property. But after it was debated, the issue was changed from property to pursuit of happiness.

You know, it is important that we understand some basic principles about our past and who we are. Tonight, Mr. CONAWAY and several others have mentioned Alexander Hamilton. And Alexander Hamilton understood that principle that Jefferson wrote about, that our forefathers signed.

And he said in 1775, a year before Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, that sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchment or musty records. They are written as with a sunbeam in the whole volume of human nature by the hand of the Divinity itself and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.

One of our forefathers, once again speaking to the absolute truth, that rights that we have are because of a creator. And we have that right, those rights, because of the dignity and worth of the individuals, all of them because of that.

Now, government seems to be very powerful nowadays, our Federal Government does. As Mr. CONAWAY mentioned, I doubt if our forefathers would believe the power of the Federal Government over the people.

Now, whether we think it is a good idea or not, the power is tremendous. Now, think about the different things the Federal Government has gotten itself involved in since the Revolutionary War. For example, I will give you one minor example. Where in our Constitution do we give the Federal Government the authority to decide what every toilet bowl in the United States looks like and how much water runs through it?

But yet the Federal Government has assumed that authority, that power. And you can go on and on and on talking about the role of government and the power of government. But I think all of us would agree the Federal Government today is more powerful than it ever has been.

And every time we give government power, I am talking about the people, because we give them that authority, because government does not have any rights, we take a little bit of liberty away from the rest of us every time government makes those decisions.

And there is a difference between the government in control and having all authority, and the independent or the people having authority. I have used the example of the Iron Curtain and Communism. There are many Americans today who did not live during the time of what we call the Cold War or during the time and have watched what occurred behind the Iron Curtain.

I had the opportunity back in 1987, almost 20 years ago now, to go to the Soviet Union and it was the Soviet Union at that time, a Communist nation that believed that the state was all powerful and all authority and rights went to the state.

And the state doled those responsibilities and duties out to the people. But all citizens looked at the "Almighty State."

And I spent some time there traveling different portions of the Soviet Union. Quite an experience. Different than being here in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

But some examples of that. When I went to the Soviet Union, there was only just three of us that went over there. All of us were judges. And everywhere we went, we were followed. Usually by the KGB. We were followed two ways. Sometimes we were followed with the KGB agents right behind us. He or she wanted us to know that they are there. That was about half of the time.

Other times we were followed, and we knew that we were being followed, but they were where we could not see them. But every place we went, we were followed by the government.

We stayed in hotels in the Soviet Union. And the way it worked was you would give your passport to someone at the end of the hall, and they would give you a key to your room. When you left your room, you gave your key back to the person in charge, and they gave you your passport back.

They would also give you a slip of paper that allowed you to get out of the hotel. You needed that piece of paper and your passport to get back into the hotel. If you did not have this government document, you never got back into the hotel.

While we were gone, our hotel room was searched every time. And those who searched our rooms wanted us to know that the room was searched. Our phones were bugged. We could tell, when we were listening to phone, that it was constantly bugged.

And the people in the Soviet Union, you know, they are good people. But you could tell by the way they walked and carried on their daily lives they were oppressed. What were they oppressed with? The power of government in their personal and private lives, be-

cause government completely controlled everything, from where they worked, to their health care system, to where they lived, to whether they could even leave the city on a little vacation. Total government control of the individuals, because government had to assert the individual's worth and had taken it on as the power of the state.

And we got to talk to a few Soviet citizens. They were very skeptical about talking to Americans. They would usually tell you directions, but they never wanted to talk much about life in the Soviet Union because, you see, there is a crime under the former Soviet regime that said it is a crime to engage in anti-Soviet activity.

Now, that is a very broad statement. What is anti-Soviet activity? Well, it is anything that the government says it is: talking to the wrong person, taking a photograph of a particular building, writing something in a letter, trying to get on television to say something about the government. Any of those could be engaging in anti-Soviet activity and would cause this citizen to be arrested and tried by that oppressive government.

After we left the Soviet Union, we flew out on a Soviet aircraft, Soviet commercial aircraft. There were not very many of us on the plane. We are all Westerners. As soon as the pilot comes on and announces in English that we are leaving the airspace of the Soviet Union and are now entering the airspace of Finland, everyone on the airplane immediately cheered.

I mean, it was spontaneous cheering. And when we were getting off the airplane in Europe, I asked this flight attendant, I said, what did you think about all of us Westerners cheering when we got out of the Soviet Union? He said, it did not surprise me, because it happens every time we fly out of the Soviet Union.

So the oppression in the Soviet Union was lifted because of the people in the Soviet Union and the people in the Free World. And that is why freedom is so important, because it is not just something Americans possess or want; it is something everybody wants. The people in the Soviet Union want freedom just like those people in Iraq want freedom, and Afghanistan, because it changes the worth of the individuals and puts the individuals most important and puts government below the individuals.

And that is exactly the way it ought to be. You know, the 54 signers of the Declaration of Independence, some people have said when our country got together and started, those 54 people from all walks of life, many of them very wealthy in their own right, were the smartest and wisest people that ever existed as a group in American history to formulate these concepts of freedom.

And the purpose of the Declaration of Independence was to establish the reasons why we had the right as a people

to leave an oppressive government, Great Britain; and it was justified and outlined in the Declaration of Independence.

After the Declaration of Independence was signed and the war with Great Britain was won, after several years, it was noted that freedom is always expensive, it costs the lives of other freedom fighters, because it is that important that life is put on the line for freedom. Success occurred. The Nation was free. But we did not have a basic rule of law to follow as a people. We started with the Articles of Confederation and basically the Articles of Confederation gave the Federal Government very limited authority.

And so our Framers got together again at the Constitutional Convention and drafted the Constitution that we have now. There were 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention; 39 of them signed the Constitution. Several of them did not, one of whom was Patrick Henry, one of my heroes from Virginia: Give me liberty or give me death.

He would not sign the Constitution. The reason he did not is because it did not ensure and protect individual liberty or what we now call the Bill of Rights. The average age was 42.

A French diplomat that was here in the United States at the time made this comment about those people who got together to frame our government. He said that never before, even in Europe, had there been an assembly of more respectable people for talent, knowledge, disinterestedness and patriotism to a cause than these that are assembled here, talking about our forefathers who got together to frame this document called the United States Constitution.

And before they started discussing this document, the Constitution, Benjamin Franklin, who was in his 80s at the time, said that if the Good Lord above is concerned about a sparrow that falls out of a tree, certainly he would be concerned about a new nation at its birth, and maybe we should ask for his guidance through prayer.

And when he made that statement, those men at the Constitutional Convention got together and prayed before they wrote that document. That is one reason why in this House every morning we start with a prayer, needing Divine guidance and wisdom for the decisions we make.

□ 1745

And so when they set up this new concept it started out with the simple phrase in the Preamble that, "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, ensure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

So the Constitution starts out with the purpose of government and why we

as a people get together and form government. Government's main duty is to protect us, protect us from domestic and foreign enemies.

The Constitution established three branches of government. It established the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch; and, if you read the Constitution, established it in that order.

This is part of the legislative branch. We call this the people's House. The reason we call this the people's House is because to be in the United States Congress as a Representative, you have to be elected. You cannot be appointed to the United States Congress. Even on a vacancy, there has to be an election.

So all Members of this House, all 435 of us are elected somewhere in these United States, each representing about, now, 651,000 citizens.

Down the hallway we have the second house, the United States Senate, two Members from every State in the United States. And when the Senate was first designed, the Senate's purpose was to represent States, and the representation of each State was put with two Senators, U.S. Senators. At first the legislative bodies of each State determined who the Senators were. And later, by a constitutional amendment, that was changed so that the people of the whole State elected their Senators.

So we have the people's House, we have the United States Senate down the hallway. And the reason we call that the Senate and this the people's House is because, even in the Senate, if there is a vacancy, there can be an appointment by the Governor until there is an election. And that was put as the basis for all democracy because we represent the will of the people of the United States of America in making our decisions.

Down the street is the second branch of government, the President of the United States and the Vice President, the executive branch of government. The purpose of the legislative branch is to write the law, or, I call it, write the will of the people. That is what we are supposed to do. That is what we are supposed to do, write the will of the people, enact the law and the will of the people. The President's, the executive branch, is to carry out the will of the people.

Unlike the House of Representatives, we are elected for 2 years, the Senate is elected for 6, the President is elected for 4 years. The second branch of government.

The third branch of government is on the other side of this House. It is across the street here. It is called the Supreme Court of the United States, the judicial branch of government. Members of the judiciary are appointed for life, at least in our Federal systems. I was not appointed for life. I had to stand for elections as a judge in Texas, and many States elect their judges, but in the Federal system judges are appointed for life.

So we have, in the middle, the legislative branch; down the street, we have the executive branch; and we have the judicial branch. And I think it is worthy to note that in the Constitution our forefathers envisioned that this body, Congress, should be the most powerful branch of government because we represent the people. The people put us here. And so that was their philosophy.

The second most powerful branch of government was to be the executive to carry out the law, the President. The weakest branch of government was to be the judiciary because, you see, they are not elected. They are appointed for life. And they were to interpret law to the extent that if a law passed by Congress was passed, and it violated the Constitution, it was to be overturned, and Congress was supposed to write another law that would pass muster.

It is interesting to note that that symbolism of Congress being the most powerful, legislative branch most powerful, the President being the second most powerful, and the judiciary being the weakest even occurs here in this House at the State of the Union message that just happened not too many weeks ago. And if you recall, Mr. Speaker, at the State of the Union message, at the top of the rostrum the Speaker of the House of Representatives was there along with the Vice President. The Vice President is the Speaker of the Senate.

The legislative branch was at the top of the podium. The President spoke from the second podium below the legislative branch. When President Bush spoke, he was below the legislative branch. And it is interesting to note that the Supreme Court of the United States sits even lower, down here on the House floor. It is symbolic of the way that our forefathers meant for government to work.

Even though that was the way they established our country and the Constitution, it is not that way anymore. I think few would argue that no longer is the legislative branch the most powerful branch of government. It is the weakest branch of government. The President is still the second most powerful branch of government, the executive branch. But the judiciary is now the most powerful branch of government; because, you see, in many cases the judiciary has taken over the role of not just the judiciary but the legislative branch. When they find a law they do not like, they do more than rule it unconstitutional; they move it a step further and legislate the way things, in their opinion, ought to be.

I personally think that is a disservice to our Constitution. Hopefully those nine men and women down the street will understand that their role in government was to be people who interpret the Constitution and not pass law. That is one reason myself and Judge Gohmert resigned as judges. We want to make law and pass law rather than interpret the law.

So in any event, that was the way our Constitution envisioned we were to work things and how this government we have is to function. The Constitution was inadequate because it did not provide for a protection of citizens of their basic rights. And we have even heard tonight some comments about the Bill of Rights, and it is really more than a Bill of Rights that we have. It is a bill of prohibitions against government.

If you go through and read each of the amendments to the Constitution, especially the first 10 amendments, you will see that the amendment's purpose is to protect us from government. It does not bestow rights on government. It bestows more prohibitions on government, on how government is to treat the people. And I will just mention one of these basic rights or amendments tonight.

The first amendment. It is first for a reason. It did not just happen to show up first. The people who put that first had an absolute commonsense reason for establishing the first amendment to be first because of what it says. That Congress shall make no law, it does not seem very difficult to understand that, Congress should make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

That is basically two rules that Congress, that is us, cannot violate. We cannot as a body establish a national religion. You see, the Church of England was a national religion and our forefathers, one of the reasons they came over here was because of religious persecution in Europe, England, and other places. And they did not want to uphold the national religion, and to prevent that from happening here in the United States, Congress was prevented from establishing a national religion.

You notice it says "religion." It does not say "prohibition about the Almighty." It says "establishing religion." And also Congress cannot make any laws prohibiting the free exercise of religion.

Now, the first amendment and the first phrase was first for a reason: because our forefathers wanted to practice religion and religious freedom, and they wanted government to stay out of the way of both of those.

Now, I wonder whether or not we are balancing these two prohibitions. Is government allowing in our country the free exercise of religion or not? And it all comes to the interpretation of this very simple phrase. The second right and prohibition by government is Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech.

The freedom of speech was second in the Bill of Rights. Or freedom of press.

And you notice it does not say "fair press." It just says a "free press." That is what we are guaranteed. The right to have a free press, not necessarily fair, because fair is always in the eyes of the

reader. In any event, the rights of freedom of speech and press were next, and then the right of us, the people, to peaceably assemble and petition the government for redress.

You see, these rights are first because if you do not have these, the rest of them in the Bill of Rights do not mean anything. And when this speech phrase was put here, it was put here because there were two types of speech our forefathers wanted to protect: religious speech and political speech. You see, that is the controversy. You could not say what you wanted to say about the king. You might get in trouble. And so political speech is protected. Religious speech is protected. And that is why you have the right of freedom of speech and, of course, the right of press. And a free press protects the rights in this amendment and all the others as well. And, of course, the right of the people to assemble and petition the government.

So as we progress in the next few weeks, we will talk more about our Constitution in detail, hopefully getting some interest in the American public, into reading this book. Most books like this have the Declaration of Independence in it and then the Constitution.

The Declaration of Independence was the promise. The Constitution was the fulfillment of that promise. And it is a philosophy our forefathers had that we still are arguing and debating about tonight and debating in this House on a constant basis. It is the idea of freedom from government, or government controlling us. That is the choice we make every time we pass legislation.

Every time we give government more authority, we are taking more authority and responsibility from us, the individual and the people, and willingly giving it to government. Maybe we should do that and maybe we should not. But freedom is something that is very valuable. It is, in fact, the most valuable thing that any of us as individuals have or will ever have. And that is why the Founders of our country believed and died and lost so much to be free from British rule.

It is now a world we live in, where many countries are free, that raise the value and worth of the individual to its highest level and put government below the people. And in this country we must constantly be vigilant to protect the people from government, because it is government's responsibility to do our will, not our responsibility to do government's will. Our will is paramount to the government's. And the only way government gets authority is because we decide to give it authority over the rest of us.

I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to spend these few minutes talking about these great two documents, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States. And as the weeks progress, we will talk more about these truths that are self-evident, that these two docu-

ments are who we are, what we are, what we stand for, and what we will continue to stand for.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed without amendment a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 1053. An act to authorize the extension of nondiscriminatory treatment (normal trade relations treatment) to the products of Ukraine.

□ 1800

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SCHWARZ of Michigan). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor once again to come before the House. I would like to thank Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi for allowing us to have the time and the Democratic whip, Mr. HOYER; Mr. CLYBURN, our chairman; and Mr. LARSON, our vice-chair.

Mr. Speaker, we have been coming to the floor all this week. We are going to be talking tonight about our plans to hopefully move this country forward. Maybe we can work together in doing that in a bipartisan way. Mr. RYAN is here at the top of the hour tonight, and I am so glad that you are here.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, it is great to be here. We have a lot to talk about again, as we wrap up another week of business here at the Capitol.

There are a lot of issues facing our country, and I had a lot of meetings this week on different issues: education, folks in about manufacturing, about the local economy and the problems that they are having with pension and health care.

I think if you look at what is happening in the country, you will see that most Americans either intellectually or in their gut realize that the country is going in the wrong direction.

So our plan tonight, as we come here several nights a week, is to try to let the American people know that we are moving them forward.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is very easy to say that, trying to let them know that we are moving forward because that is what we are trying to do, Mr. Speaker. We are trying to move this country in the right direction. Unfortunately, I must add there has been a lot of discussion here under the Capitol dome about who we are going to do business with, how we are going to do business with them, and how we are going to prevent ourselves from getting into a situation like this ongoing port situation that is some back-room deal that took place with a special com-

mittee, and we are finding out more and more about it each day.

When we start, I do not really want to focus on that, Mr. Speaker. I want to focus on the fact that we talk about working in a bipartisan way. The Republican Party here in this House is in the majority. That means that the majority has the opportunity to lead in a comprehensive way, including all Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, as we start to move down the road to not only making this country financially secure but secure its borders and secure all America.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. One of the issues that I think is a fundamental issue that we have in the country facing us is the issue of balancing the budget here and making sure that our country pays its bills. The Republican majority has not been able to get themselves together in a comprehensive way, as you said, to try to balance the budget here in the United States.

I want to just make a point here, and we have got several charts I think that are pretty powerful in illustrating this point.

The Republicans have increased the debt limit, Mr. Speaker, by \$3 trillion, \$3 trillion. This Republican Congress, Mr. Speaker, has said to the Treasury Department, go ahead out and borrow that money. In June of 2002, increased by \$450 billion. In May of 2003, increase of \$984 billion. In November of 2004, \$800 billion, and we have an increase coming that is going to probably come in the next couple weeks of another \$781 billion. Over \$3 trillion this Republican Congress has okayed for the Treasury to go out and borrow because this Republican Congress does not have the fiscal responsibility or the discipline to rein in spending.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. There is no probably about it. You are saying they probably will raise the debt ceiling. There is no probably about it. It is going to happen.

We have our rubber stamp here because you know that they are going to rubber-stamp this deal. They are going to take this stamp out, and they are going to rubber-stamp raising the debt ceiling. What does that mean? What that means, by some \$821 billion, raising the debt ceiling, even more, beyond where it is now, and that is just the number that I received recently that Secretary Snow has predicted we need to raise the debt ceiling by.

It is because of the love affair with special interests, giving oil companies more subsidies or more money in the time that they are making record profits. It is when the President says let us make tax cuts permanent for billionaires, knowing that we have been fiscally irresponsible, Mr. Speaker; and I think it is important, I was about to just give some information that is pretty fresh about what happened last night in Appropriations Committee, and I think it is important for us to reflect on this.

We talk about bipartisanship. We talk about working in a comprehensive