Mr. President, we respectfully request your swift consideration and approval of this request. If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

BLANCHE L. LINCOLN.
MARK PRYOR.
MIKE ROSS.

MARCH 5, 2007.

Hon. GEORGE W. BUSH
President of the United States,
The White House, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT, I am writing to you because I have great concerns regarding the lack of a federal disaster declaration for Desha County, Arkansas, and the desperate need for temporary housing for this storm-ravaged Delta County.

On February 24,2007, two terrible tornadoes hit the towns of Dumas and Back Gate in Desha County, Arkansas. While my heart goes out to the people in Alabama and Georgia who were recently hit by deadly tornadoes, I write to you because I am concerned that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has now forgotten about our situation in Arkansas. The tornadoes that passed through our state destroyed or heavily damaged more than 150 homes; caused 800 people to be out of work because 25 businesses were destroyed; required the Governor to send in the National Guard to enforce security and for clean up purposes; and forced the town to be without electrical power for five days. In this small town, with an estimated population of 5,300, this level of damage and destruction has been overwhelming.

Desha County has still not been declared a federal disaster area, and one of my greatest concerns is the fact that there is no alternative housing for those residents who have been displaced. Nearly 9,000 brand new, fully furnished mobile homes sit less than three hours away at a FEMA staging area in Hope, Arkansas, and all I ask that you make wise use of our taxpayers' money and instruct FEMA Director David Paulison to move 150 of these mobile homes to Desha County for temporary housing.

Last week, I toured the devastation in Desha County with Governor Mike Beebe and strongly supported his request to you for a federal disaster declaration to assist those businesses and individuals that have been damaged or left without shelter. I also joined Arkansas's U.S. Senators Blanche Lincoln and Mark Pryor in support of that request. At that time FEMA Director Paulison informed me in a phone conversation that the Governor's request had been passed on from the FEMA Region VI office to FEMA's Washington, DC office and was pending his review.

Mr. President, as you and I spoke a month ago at the House Democratic Caucus Retreat in Williamsburg, Virginia, the need to put to use the nearly 9,000 brand new, fully furnished mobile homes stored in Hope could not be greater. It has now been more than a week since these storms hit our state, and I respectfully request that you do what is right and declare Desha County, Arkansas, a federal disaster area. Such a declaration would enable area businesses to take advantage of federal resources and allow you to begin moving mobile homes from the Hope Airport to Desha County for temporary housing.

I have toured the devastation in Desha County and seen first-hand the effects of this storm. I have also enclosed a photo taken Saturday of the nearly 9,000 fully furnished mobile homes purchased for Hurricane Katrina victims but never used that sit unused in Hope, Arkansas. I again ask that you declare Desha County a federal disaster area and make 150 mobile homes available so that victims can have access to temporary emergency shelter. This is the right thing to do and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

MIKE ROSS.

THE OFFICIAL TRUTH SQUAD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that recognition. I want to thank the leadership on the Republican side for the opportunity to address once again the House of Representatives and talk about some important issues that our Nation is dealing with, and bring the latest version of the Official Truth Squad. This is a group of folks who have determined to try to bring some sunlight and some truth to the issues that we talk about here in Washington. And after the last hour, Mr. Speaker, a lot of truth needs to be shed, because the amount of misinformation and disinformation that our friends on the other side of the aisle have put forward needs to be corrected, and so we are here as the Official Truth Squad to do just that. It is a great privilege, and I want to thank the Republican Conference, the Republican leadership for that opportunity.

The Official Truth Squad started as a group of freshmen last term who were frustrated by, as I said, the disinformation and the misinformation that was perpetrated and brought forward on this House floor day after day after day after day, and we thought that it was appropriate to get together and attempt to bring some light to issues, attempt to bring some facts to issues. And we have a favorite quote.

We have a lot of favorite quotes, but one of our favorite quotes is indeed one of my favorite quotes that I think crystallizes exactly what the mission is here. And in Washington it is so difficult to try to get to the second clause of this sentence. But this is from Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Senator Moynihan, a former United States Senator from the State of New York and a former United States representative of the United Nations, a wonderful gentleman, a very wise individual. And he said, ''Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts.'' Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts.

So it is in that spirit, Mr. Speaker, that we come to the floor tonight and talk about a number of issues, and try to shed some of that light, try to bring some facts to the table.

We get visited oftentimes here in Washington by folks who are constituents, folks from back home. They come here and they visit us, and they talk about the kinds of issues that are important to them. And today, Mr. Speaker, and yesterday in Washington we have been visited, all of us have been visited, I know, by members of the VFW, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. And it is very humbling to sit and to talk with members of the VFW, to listen to their stories, to hear their concerns, to appreciate the challenges that they have and the issues that they believe Congress ought to be addressing.

These are truly heroes. They are truly heroes from previous conflicts that our Nation has been involved in. And it is distressing when you talk to these members of the VFW and you hear their same kinds of concerns about facts.

Many of them from my district came, and they wanted to know why there was not the kind of correct information that was getting out on the floor of the House of Representatives, why we weren't talking about the truth as it relates to, not just our veterans, but the current situation in the world. They were extremely concerned that so many of our friends on the other side of the aisle were distorting the truth, were not bringing real information to the American people, and were causing great challenges for all of us to try to do the right thing as it relates to our Nation and to our members of the military right now who are defending liberty around the globe, and to assist veterans in their time of need. And so I shared my concern with them about the information that was being brought forth, especially about the situation in Iraq.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, we have heard what the strategy of the Democrats is as it relates to Iraq. They have preemptively surrendered. One of their Members has defined what has been described as a slow-bleed policy. It kind of gives you chills when you think about it, Mr. Speaker, a slow-bleed policy. That individual was interviewed 2 or 3 weeks ago, and during that period of time when asked how is he going to institute this, how is he going to institute this slow-bleed policy on the military as a Member of the House of Representatives, an influential Member of the House, a member of the majority party, a member who has an opportunity to do great things, and what he has said is, ''They won't be able to continue. They won't be able to do the deployment. They won't have the equipment.''

Mr. Speaker, that is chilling. That is chilling.

It is made all the more disgusting because of the comments of our own Speaker who said that funds would never be cut off from our troops in harm's way. And here the individual who is charged with developing the strategy for the majority party in the House of Representatives on Iraq says, ''They won't be able to continue. They won't be able to do the deployment. They won't have the equipment.''

Mr. Speaker, I don't know about you, but I get e-mails and communications sent to me from constituents who are serving in Iraq. I know men and women

who are serving in Iraq who are doing their duty. To have a Member of the House of Representatives in a remarkably influential role say he is going to do all he can to limit the equipment that will protect our men and women in harm's way in Iraq and around the world is deplorable. It is deplorable.

Mr. Speaker, that is a fact. Not an opinion, not my opinion. That is a fact. That is what he said. That is what he plans on doing. That is what he said he will work to convince his party to do.

About that same time, our Speaker was quoted as making the following claim, ''Democrats have proposed a different course of action over and over again, and we have suggested a different plan.'' That is the claim. That is the facts of the statement.

The truth, according to United States Senator JOE LIEBERMAN who has been a stalwart in recognizing the danger that the world finds itself in and recognizing the importance of supporting our troops who are in harm's way, the truth, as he states it, is, ''Any alternatives that I have heard ultimately don't work. They are all about failing. They are all about withdrawing. And I think allowing Iraq to collapse would be a disaster for the Iraqis, for the Middle East, and for us.''

□ 1900

Mr. Speaker, I find the double talk that is coming out of the majority party's mouth at this time as it relates to protecting our troops and fighting for freedom and liberty to be not only disingenuous, I find it to be a disservice to the American people, because when we are not talking about facts, it is impossible to reach the right conclusion.

All of us come to this body with various experiences, different backgrounds, different professions, different work experience. Mine is as a physician. I spent over 20 years, nearly 25 years practicing medicine. And I knew that when I took care of patients, that if I didn't do my level best to make certain that I had made the right diagnosis, that I had dealt with truthful items to get to the right diagnosis, I couldn't institute the right treatment.

And so I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, to my colleagues that unless we recognize truthful statements, unless we recognize the facts that are presented to us, that we will not make the right diagnosis. And I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the other side, the majority party has failed to make the correct diagnosis, so it will be difficult for them to institute the right treatment.

Now, I won't go so far as to say, although I might be legitimate in doing so, that occasionally, when physicians make the wrong diagnosis, they are charged with malpractice. But I would ask my friends on the other side of the aisle to appreciate and recognize that truth will get you to the right diagnosis, which will allow all of us to work together to identify what the right treatment ought to be.

And that is in the case with this reprehensible, ''slow bleed'' policy that has been put forward by the majority party, as much it is with the rest of the policies that we will address, some of which we will address tonight.

I want to just highlight a couple other matters as it relates to this ''slow bleed'' policy. And Mr. Speaker, as you know what that has been defined as is cutting off the funding or decreasing the funding, not for the troops specifically but for the equipment, for the logistics, for the support staff that is required, all of the things that make it so our men and women can be secure in the knowledge that they are able to have all the equipment and the personnel available to protect themselves and to carry out their mission.

So, once again, the quote from our Speaker, another quote from our Speaker about, almost now 2 months ago, from January 19, 2007. The quote was, ''Democrats will never cut off funding for our troops when they are in harm's way.''

The reality is, and it goes into a broken promise that I believe, we believe, the other side is getting very adept at. They are continuing to break promises that they make with the American people over and over again. This one, the promise was, we will never cut off funding for the troops.

The reality, according to Mr. JOHN CONYERS, Representative JOHN CONYERS, ''The founders of our country gave our Congress the power of the purse because they envisioned a scenario exactly like we find ourselves in today. Not only is it in our power, it is our obligation. It is our obligation to stop President Bush.''

Another quote from Representative MAXINE WATERS, Representative from California, made just a couple of weeks ago, ''I will not vote for one dime. I will not vote for one dime.''

So, Mr. Speaker, we see the promises that are being made, that are being talked about to the American people, but the truth of the matter is that the majority party is continuing to break promises, and I find that very distressing. I also find that of great concern to being able, once again, to reach the right diagnosis of the challenges that we have before us and then moving forward with the correct treatment.

I want to talk for a little bit, now, Mr. Speaker, about another item that has, another issue that has not had a whole lot of light from the other side of the aisle on it, and that is our economy and the remarkable economic growth that this Nation has seen over the last three to 4 years.

If you look at truth, and you look at facts, one would have to admit that this has been a remarkably robust economy. We have now seen nearly 3½ years of solid, consistent economic expansion which followed the downturn, the economic downturn and the recession of 2001.

The measure of economic expansion can be measured by all sorts of different parameters, and we are going to look at a couple of them this evening. Measure of economic expansion can be measured by real GDP growth, gross domestic product growth. And that has averaged a robust 3.6 percent since the enactment of what, Mr. Speaker? Tax reductions in 2003. The tax relief measures of 2003 have resulted in, I believe, we believe, a remarkably robust economy.

And so as we move through these facts tonight, as we move through these measures, it is important to appreciate, well, how did that all come about? Why did that happen? It didn't just happen willy nilly. And so what we have seen over the last 3½ years is a remarkably robust growth in the gross domestic product; 3.6 percent, as I mentioned, over that period of time. Mr. Speaker, that is faster than the averages of the 1970, which was 3.4 percent, the 1980s, which was 3.1 percent, and I know this will come as a shock to some folks, Mr. Speaker, but those glory days of the 1990s, when we all thought that the economy was booming as rapidly as it could and as good as it could; in fact, that growth during the 1990s was 3.3 percent, again, compared to 3.6 percent since the tax reductions, appropriate tax reductions in 2003.

What we have on this chart, Mr. Speaker, is the unemployment rate, and it is another kind of gauge of how the economy is doing. How many jobs is our economy creating? And that is the good news, Mr. Speaker, that since June of 2003, 7.4 million new jobs; 7.4 million new jobs, Mr. Speaker, which is a remarkable number, an average of 169,000 new jobs each and every month.

Now, you would say, well, that had just been going on just like that before the reductions in the tax rates in 2003. But this poster, Mr. Speaker, speaks to that. What this poster shows is the level of unemployment, the percent level of unemployment in our Nation and plots it over a period of time.

Here on the far left portion of the graph, we have 2001, and on the far right portion, we have 2007. So over the past 7 years, 6 to 7 years, what we see is this red line that demonstrates the level of unemployment. And we see it climbing from a rate of mid 4 percent until 2003, at this point where it reached its apex, its highest amount of about 6.3 percent. And at that point, something happened.

Something happened, Mr. Speaker. And what happened was that this administration recognized and this Congress recognized that the economy needed stimulating, needed some encouragement, needed some investment. And our good friends on the other side of the aisle oftentimes say, well, when the economy needs more money what we need to do is to get more taxes from the American people. We need to take more money from them so that government has the amount of money that it needs to be able to do whatever they would like to do with revenue that comes into the Federal Government.

But what we understand, and what fiscal conservatives understand and what true historians understand is that, when you cut taxes, when you decrease taxes on the American people, revenue goes up, the economy booms, and jobs are created. And that is what happened in 2003, Mr. Speaker. And you see, since then, a steady decline in the unemployment rate. Why? Because the American people had more money in their back pocket, because American people know best how to spend their money, not government. It is not the government's money. It is the American people's money. And when they have that money and can make those decisions, those personal financial decisions, then our Nation is helped in ways that are incalculable. Incalculable. And what happens is that the economy grows, the economy booms, and more jobs are created.

What about household net worth? We have heard, well, it is not getting down to real people. It is not getting down to those who own homes. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are more individuals, more people, more percent and more numbers of Americans owning homes now than ever before in the history of our Nation. Mr. Speaker, that is a good thing. That is a good thing.

I know there is a lot of doom and gloom out there, and a lot of people in this town don't want the American people to know that there are some good things that are happening in our Nation. I, frankly, get tired of all the naysayers. I know that people in my district do as well, because they know what is happening on the ground and what is happening out there across America is that more Americans own their home now than ever before in the history of our Nation.

And that is not just absolute numbers. That is a percent. Nearly 70 percent of the American people own their home. That is a record. That is a record, Mr. Speaker.

And when you look at household net worth, household net worth, the value of homes for the American people has reached an all-time historic high, and in the last year, it increased by 7 percent. We see the unemployment rate down to 4.6 percent in January of this year.

We talked about some averages for economic growth over the last couple of decades, comparing now, where we are right now, to where we have been over the last couple of decades.

What about unemployment? Well, the unemployment rate that we have right now, at 4.6 percent, is lower than the average for the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and yes, Mr. Speaker, the 1990s, too. Isn't that something? That is wonderful news. That is great news. And I would suggest to my colleagues in the House that it would be important to relay that news to your constituents. That is a good thing.

The average rate in the 1960s of unemployment was 4.8 percent. Right now, 4.6 percent. The average for the 1970s, difficult time, 6.2 percent. Right now, Mr. Speaker, 4.6 percent. The average through the 1970s, 7.3. Right now, Mr. Speaker, 4.6 percent. And you remember the 1990s? Again, that wonderful time, those halcyon days of the 1990s, when our economy was booming and everybody was doing just grand?

Well, Mr. Speaker, the average unemployment rate in the 1990s was 5.8 percent. Today, 4.6 percent. Mr. Speaker, that is a fact.

And remember, Mr. Speaker, people are entitled, as Senator Moynihan used to say, they are entitled to their opinion, but they are not entitled to their own facts.

And then we hear, well, there are jobs, yes, but they are not good jobs. They are not real jobs. They aren't jobs that have seen any real economic growth. Well, let's look at some facts there, too, Mr. Speaker.

Productivity growth, which is a fundamental driver of the potential long-term economic growth, what kind of productivity, what kind of output our economy is producing, grew at a rate of 2.1 percent in 2006. The average growth between 1993 and 2000, remember those halcyon days, Mr. Speaker, the average growth during that period of time in productivity was 1.8 percent.

□ 1915

The average growth now, productivity growth: 2.1 percent.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are good days from an economic standpoint.

And then wage growth, we hear from some of our friends on the other side of the aisle, well, they just aren't good jobs. Real wage growth isn't happening. But wage growth plus benefits growth, total compensation, which had lagged behind productivity growth earlier in this recovery, surged in the last year, in 2006. It was up 6.3 percent, 6.3 percent on an analyzed rate in the fourth quarter of 2006.

Mr. Speaker, that is good news. That is good news. I would once again urge my friends on the other side of the aisle to convey that good news to their constituents. And then I would urge them to ask why is that happening, why have we seen this kind of good news.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it is because of the appropriate tax reductions that this Congress, this administration passed on to the American people in 2003.

We have many folks who will say, well, when you cut taxes, what happens is that the government doesn't have enough money to be able to do what it needs to do. And that sounds plausible, I guess. But when you look at what really happens, when you look at what happens historically and you look at what has happened with this tax reduction in 2003, what we have seen is a significant increase in revenue coming into the Federal Government. And it ought not be a surprise, Mr. Speaker, because in the two major tax reductions that have occurred in this Nation over the last 45 years, the tax reductions of President Reagan's administration and, yes, Mr. Speaker, the tax reductions of President Kennedy's administration, both of those tax reductions saw a significant increase in the amount of revenue that comes into the Federal Government. And why is that? It seems kind of counterintuitive. Why is that?

Well, again, when you allow the American people to make decisions about their own money and not have the government making decisions about that money, they decide for themselves when to save or to spend or invest that money, and what that does is stimulate the economy in ways that the government never, never can stimulate.

And consequently what you see, Mr. Speaker, is this kind of graph: here we have the capital gains tax revenues. These are revenues from taxes on the gains that are seen across all types of investments. And what we have is the amount of money from that capital gains that came into the Federal Government in the years 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 on the same track as heading for 2007. And the yellow line on the bottom here, Mr. Speaker, is the projection that the CBO, the Congressional Budget Office, made prior to the tax reductions, appropriate tax reductions. So we see a gradual, steady increase in the amount of money coming into the Federal Government based upon capital gains tax revenue. The same graph would hold for dividend taxation revenue.

And what we see actually happened when the tax reductions were instituted is the blue line, and it tracked a little bit above it for the first year. But what we always see, when you keep tax reductions in place, is more economic development, more job growth, more gross domestic product growth, more revitalization of the economy; and so what happens is that annual revenues coming into the Federal Government actually increase, and they increase by a huge amount. Increase by a huge amount.

The tax relief has resulted in significant economic growth that has resulted in significantly higher tax revenue. After the declines from 2000 to 2003, revenue surged in 2004, 2005, and 2006. In 2005 the revenues grew by 14.6 percent. In 2006 they were up by 11.8 percent.

This next statement, Mr. Speaker, is important because it speaks to the permanence and the penetration of the result of these tax reductions and how they affect the economy and how they affect our Nation. Those two revenue increases, 14.6 percent in 2005 and 11.8 percent in 2006, that was the first time since the mid-1980s, and you will recall that that was the last time we had significant tax reductions, the first time since the mid-1980s that our Nation has generated double-digit revenue growth in consecutive years. Remarkable, Mr. Speaker. It really is.

And I would think that any individual charged with representing this Nation and charged with having some input into how to keep this economy moving and how to generate more growth in this economy would want to know why, why did that happen? What happened in 2003 to turn that around?

And it is still continuing. Revenues continue to surge in fiscal year 2007. Through the first 4 months of the year, revenues are up by 9.8 percent, with 12.6 percent for individual receipts and 22.1 percent for corporate receipts.

Mr. Speaker, these are incredible numbers, truly incredible numbers. So one would think that Members of the House of Representatives, Members of the Senate, who are charged with formulating national policy that by any estimation anybody would look at these numbers and say, yes, that kind of looks pretty good, maybe we ought to continue that. And if you are charged with developing policy, Federal policy, national policy that results in these kinds of good numbers, you would think that they would want to know why, how did that happen.

How did that happen? Well, there are some other charts that I would like to share with you that will demonstrate how that happened and the effect of it.

I think it is always helpful, Mr. Speaker, to compare what happened before the tax reductions and what has happened since because unless you can point to a date on the calendar when something concrete changed and identify the occurrences in this Nation from an economic standpoint before that date and after that date, it becomes difficult to answer that question why, why did these seemingly good things happen?

So this poster here demonstrates business investment before and after the tax relief of 2003. And this is remarkably telling. As you see, the middle line here is the percent of business investment, either increased investment or decreased investment. And you could say, Mr. Speaker, that through 2001 and 2002 and the first quarter of 2003, virtually all of those quarters had decreased business growth or investment. In fact, the average was a decrease of 5.6 percent. And that is a decrease from year to year to year. So, in fact, the cumulative amount of decreased investment is huge.

And then something happened here. Mr. Speaker, on this vertical line, something happened. And it answers the question why, why did we see these remarkable improvements? And it was the appropriate tax reductions of 2003. And these are undeniable numbers. This is the business investment after the tax reductions of 2003, and they have averaged since that time 7.29 percent every quarter. So you see it over and over and over and over again. In fact, we have had 15 straight quarters of economic business investment increase. And that is not because the business of America says it is not a good idea to invest, it is not a good idea to grow. That is because they say it is a great idea. And the policies that have been put in place at the Federal Government level will result in their opportunity to succeed, their opportunity for their employees to succeed, the opportunity for employees to then take that success from the company and from the employee and go buy homes and go buy cars and go buy all sorts of items that are needed by each and every American. And what happens then is that it just becomes a wonderfully self-perpetuating cycle.

But, Mr. Speaker, the reason that it is important to look at this and the reason that I am talking about this tonight and that we on our side of the aisle are trying to bring truth and light to this issue is because there is a plan on the other side of the aisle to do away with the tax reductions that have resulted in all this wonderful, wonderful economic news. And that is just baffling to me when I think about again the challenge, the charge that each of us in this House has, which is to, I believe, develop policies that will work to the benefit of the vast majority and as many Americans as possible.

And these types of numbers here, these facts, Mr. Speaker, not opinions, but facts, demonstrate that that is exactly and precisely what the tax reductions have done from 2003. And they have done so by decreasing also the budget deficit. And, again, if the economy is booming to a greater degree, if it is more successful, more people working, more people investing, more people participating in the American Dream, that is a good thing. And what happens is that more revenue comes into the Federal Government, and what happens, Mr. Speaker, to the budget deficit? It decreases. It goes down. In fact, if we allow the tax reductions to remain in place, which is what we absolutely ought to do, and some of our friends on the other side of the aisle, some of our friends in the majority party have already said they don't believe any of those tax reductions ought to remain in place, that every American ought to have a tax increase, but if we allow them to stay in place, what this chart demonstrates, Mr. Speaker, is that the budget will balance of its own accord because of the policies already in place within a 4-year period of time. Within a 4-year period of time.

Now, our friends on the other side of the aisle, they will come up to the well of the House and they will say, sure we have got to balance the budget, but we have got to raise taxes to do it.

Mr. Speaker, it just isn't so. It just isn't so. So I would encourage all Members of the House to look at these numbers, to appreciate the trend that has occurred, the facts of the economic numbers that we have available to us in this Nation, and to appreciate that there is a reason, there is a reason that more people are working now. There is a reason that more people are owning their own home. There is a reason that more individuals are able to invest in this economy. There is a reason that there is more money coming into the Federal Government. And that reason is we are allowing more Americans to keep more of their hard-earned money.

Oftentimes I hear in committee meetings many Members of Congress who will talk about the government's money as if it is the government's, as if it is ours in Congress, that we have ownership of this money and that we ought to be able to just spend it as we please without absolute priorities.

We heard our good friends earlier this evening talk about PAYGO, pay-as-you-go, making certain that new programs that come before the Congress, that any costs for those new programs will be offset by decreasing the expenditures for another program. But what they don't tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that in that small print of the rules that they have passed, it doesn't apply to the vast majority of the budget. It doesn't apply. And, in fact, what the Rules Committee upstairs does over and over and over again is to say we are going to bring this bill to the floor and we are going to adopt this program and we will adopt it and not require it to comply with the PAYGO rules that this House has supposedly adopted.

That is what happened in the very first 100 hours, Mr. Speaker, the vaunted 100 hours, that period of time when the new majority was taking this Nation in what they called a ''new direction.'' Well, they were. And the direction they were taking them was into the red, further into the red, by spending more money without any offsets.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think that is what the American people voted for in November of 2006. I just don't believe that. And when I go home, that is what people tell me at home. They don't believe that the Federal Government ought to be spending more money. They think that we ought to be decreasing the expenditures, not increasing them.

So the challenge from an economic standpoint is truly the size of the Federal budget and the lack of ability of this Congress, this new majority Congress, to prioritize where it wants to spend the hard-earned taxpayer money.

□ 1930

Again, Mr. Speaker, it is not the government's money. It is not the government's money. It is the American people's money, and they work hard, hard, for that money, and we ought to be very diligent about how we address spending their hardearned money.

I believe that we ought to allow them to keep a whole lot more of their hardearned money. I believe, if you look objectively at the facts of our economy right now, we are moving along pretty well. But there is caution on the horizon.

We are moving down a highway, and we are ticking along pretty well, our speed is pretty much at the speed limit, but the signs are flashing. They

are flashing, and they are saying, caution ahead, caution ahead, because, in our Federal budget, there is automatic spending that is occurring, and it is occurring primarily in three programs: Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, three wonderfully successful programs providing great comfort and assurance to the individuals who receive the benefits from those programs.

Each of those programs have been promises made to the American people, and those programs ought to continue for the individuals who are eligible for those programs currently in the manner in which they were instituted. But if we continue them in that manner for every American who reaches that wonderful age of 62 or 65 and becomes eligible for them, then this is what happens, Mr. Speaker.

This chart demonstrates the entitlement programs, and I don't like that word ''entitlement,'' I like the word ''automatic,'' because it is automatic spending. It just keeps on going. These programs have a formula built into them that generates increased money going into those programs year after year after year because there are more individuals who become eligible for them, because of the demographics of our society. But we are an aging society. There are more individuals who are becoming eligible for these programs, and consequently, it takes more money.

This poster demonstrates the percentage of the Federal budget that is generated in tax revenue, and this line here is the revenue of the Federal budget. So we average somewhere a little below 20 percent of the gross domestic product coming in as tax revenue. If we continue that right along, that is, if we don't raise taxes on the American people, which is what we are committed to doing, that is, not raising taxes, this is about the level of revenue that we will have as a nation.

Down below are the fiscal years starting with 2007, this year, and moving forward all the way to 2050. People say well, that is a long way away, and they are absolutely right. But if no changes are made in these three programs, Medicare being the blue, Medicaid being the yellow and Social Security being the green, this chart demonstrates that those three programs, those three automatic spending programs, will consume the entire Federal budget, the entire Federal budget by the year 2045 or 2046.

That seems like a long way away, Mr. Speaker, but do you know what? That is under 40 years from now. Under 40 years ago was the late sixties, and I remember the late sixties very well. Many of us will remember when the United States landed on the moon. That is about 40 years ago, 38 years ago. Many individuals, most individuals who were alive at the time will certainly remember when President Kennedy was assassinated. On the one hand, it seems a long time ago. On the other hand, it doesn't seem like very long at all. It doesn't seem like very long at all. So this is not a long way away.

What this is screaming at us, what this is shouting at us, what this is saying to us as we travel down that road and those caution lights are flashing, is that we as a United States Congress, in order to be wise and prudent and spend taxpayer money appropriately, these programs need to be reformed. We need to keep the solemn promise that we have with the American people who are in these programs currently, and we need to make certain that we move forward aggressively and actively with programs that will make it so these are financially sound programs.

Now, there are a couple ways you can go. There are a couple directions you can head when you reform programs like this. The real question that becomes asked when you reform these kinds of programs is this question, Mr. Speaker. It is the question that is really being shouted right now in Washington. That is the question, who decides? Who decides?

We all come to Washington as Members of Congress with different experiences, as I mentioned. We come to Washington with different political stripes. We come to Washington with different political philosophies. We come to Washington with various degrees of understanding or appreciation for our Nation's history and how we became great.

Right now, we are at a crossroads, Mr. Speaker. We are at a crossroads for our financial programs. We are at a crossroads for so many of our social programs. We are at a crossroads for, I believe, our Nation when it relates to freedom and liberty. And the question being asked is, who decides?

Are we going to, with our tax policy, allow the Federal Government to make more and more decisions as it relates to how to spend the hard earned taxpayers' money? Are we going to allow the Federal Government to be the ones that prioritize how the American pocketbook ought to be spent? Are we going to allow the Federal Government to increase its involvement in American lives?

Our friends in the majority party talk about new direction. Mr. Speaker, that is the new direction that I see. When they talk about it, bill after bill and policy after policy, if you look at each and every one, whatever the policy is, the question that they are answering is, who decides?

Their answer to that question, more often than not, Mr. Speaker, is that the Federal Government ought to be deciding, not the States, not the local communities and not the American people.

Mr. Speaker, I happen to believe firmly in the rectitude of decisions made by the American people. I believe strongly that decisions are best when left to the American people, about almost anything. I believe that the American people know best how to spend their hardearned money.

That is why I believe that it is incumbent upon all of us to ask those questions, why is the economy doing as well as it is right now, appreciating the truth in the facts that have been presented this evening that demonstrate that the reason that the economy is doing so well right now is because Americans have more of their hardearned money in their back pocket so that they can decide when they spend or they save or invest their money. What that results in is the ability and the opportunity for them to make those personal decisions; not the Federal Government.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you see people coming down to the floor of the House and they are asking questions about or asking their colleagues to support this program or that program or this policy or that policy, I would ask you to think about this question: Well, who is deciding? Who are they asking to make decisions in this bill? And more often than not, Mr. Speaker, I think you will appreciate that this new majority, the Democrat majority that is currently controlling this House of Representatives, is answering that question with the Federal Government. The Federal Government is deciding.

I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, that I am a physician. In my previous life, I was a doctor. I practiced medicine outside of Atlanta for nearly 25 years. I have great concerns about the direction of health care in our Nation.

We are at one of those crossroads, and this is the question that this Congress will have to answer as it relates to health care: Who decides? Who is going to be allowed to make personal health care decisions? Is it going to be patients and doctors, is it going to be families and their children, along with the guidance of a medical professional, or is it going to be the Federal Government? Is it going to be individuals in buildings around this Capitol and around this Nation who may or may not have any medical training or any medical experience at all that will be making decisions, personal health care decisions, for people?

I don't think that is the direction in which we ought to go, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think that is what the American people believe we ought to do as it relates to health care, and I certainly don't believe that that is the new direction that the American people thought they were going to get when they went to the polls last November.

You say, well, what kind of program could that be? Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of proposals that have been put forward by members of the majority party, and not just freshman members, not just members who don't have any input, real input, into the nuts and bolts of health care policy that is coming forward. In fact, what we have are the chairs of the committees of jurisdiction, the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee that has jurisdiction over health care

and the chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee that has jurisdiction over health care in this Nation.

Those individuals, certainly the latter, has said that what he believes we ought to move toward in terms of health care in this Nation is what he describes as Medicare for all. Medicare for all.

Mr. Speaker, I am here to tell you that all patients have to do around this Nation, all citizens have to do around this Nation, is the next time they talk to their doctor, ask their doctor, do you believe that our health care system would be better if it were to look like Medicare? Do you believe that my personal insurance would be better if it were like Medicare? Do you believe that allowing the Federal Government to make health care decisions like they do in Medicare for our entire Nation is the right way to go?

I don't believe that is the case, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that is what the American people want, and I know, I know that when patients ask their doctors around this Nation, that is not what they will want.

Why? Why wouldn't we want Medicare for all? Let me give you an example or two, Mr. Speaker.

We had a huge debate a couple of years ago in this Nation about whether or not Medicare ought to cover prescription medication for Medicare recipients. That debate went on for a few years. It was a proposal by this administration, passed by this Congress in 2003, and we have seen that program instituted over the past 14 months, 15 months, and it is a relatively successful program.

But I don't want to talk about the merits of the program, because that is a different debate. I want to talk, Mr. Speaker, about a program that takes 40 years to decide that it needs to cover prescription medication for seniors in this Nation. That is Medicare. It is a government program that cannot, it is impossible for it to be responsive to people. It is impossible for it to incorporate the kind of new inventions and wonderful treatment options that are available to the American people in a private system. It is impossible for them to be able to incorporate those treatment changes to benefit patients.

Why is it impossible? Because it is a massive government bureaucracy, and a massive government bureaucracy cannot be by its very definition nimble and flexible and responsive to the American people. And that is the answer to this question, who decides? Who decides?

This new majority thinks that the Federal Government ought to be deciding personal health care decisions for people. I, and most of my colleagues on our side of the aisle, simply believe that ought not be the case; that patients and doctors, that families and children in consultation with their doctor, that those people ought to be the ones that are making those personal health care decisions.

So I urge my colleagues to ask as we go through the next number of months, as we go through the kind of policy suggestions and bills that will come to the floor, to ask this question. I know what my answer is. Who ought to decide in terms of the policies that we brought forward? I know what my answer is. I believe that the American people ought to be the ones deciding.

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I believe that the American people ought to be the ones that have an opportunity to say, I think that my hard-earned money ought to be spent in this way. I ought to be allowed to decide when to spend or save or invest my money, not the Federal Government, not the Federal Government. As well intentioned as they are, and individuals who work in the Federal Government by and large are extremely well intentioned, they are encumbered by the very apparatus that is in place because of the size and massive nature of our Federal Government. It is impossible for them to be responsive to the American people. It is impossible for them to be as nimble as they ought to be, to be as flexible as they ought to be.

Health care is one example where science is exploding, and all sorts of wonderful opportunities are available for the treatment of disease. But should we in this House of Representatives be the ones deciding what kind of health care treatment ought to be given in a very particular instance? I would say no. Those decisions ought to be the decisions of people, individuals with their doctor and their family.

So I urge my colleagues as we look at the issues that come before us over the next number of months to ask this question: Who decides? Who ought to decide? I think if they answer honestly, they will come down on the side that I have come down on, and that is on the side of the American people.

I would encourage my colleagues when they go home this weekend when they talk to their constituents to ask their constituents, who do you think ought to decide how to spend your money? Should you, should the American people decide that, or should the Federal Government? Should the American people be able to decide what kind of health care treatment they ought to receive, or should the Federal Government? Should the American people be able to decide what kind of education system they want for their children, where they want their child educated, what kind of curriculum they want for their children in their community, or should that decision be made by the Federal Government?

Huge questions, Mr. Speaker. We are at a crossroads. We are at a crossroads in this Nation on so many areas. Our time right now is to govern responsibly. It is our time to make certain that we listen to our constituents. It is our time to do our due diligence to make certain that we appreciate how we became this wonderful and glorious and grand and great Nation. It is our responsibility in the United States Congress to listen to the truth, to appreciate how we got to where we are right now and to incorporate the structure that allowed us to become this great and wonderful and glorious Nation, to be the Nation that truly is the beacon to all who love freedom and love liberty around this world. How did we become that Nation, and to incorporate the reasons, the rationale and the policies that brought us to that point into the policies that we promote to move our Nation forward.

I am confident that if we do that, we will answer the question of who decides, with the American people being first and foremost. I am confident if we do that as a Congress, we will make the right conclusions. I am confident if we do that as Congress, we will make the right diagnosis for this Nation, and we will develop the right treatment plan as we go forward.

I want to thank once again the leadership for allowing me the opportunity to come and speak to the House this evening and bring some truth and light to some issues that are oftentimes very complex, but oftentimes very simple because we ask simple questions. We ask simple questions: Who should decide? Should it be the American people or the Federal Government? Mr. Speaker, I vote for the American people.

PEAK OIL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ARCURI). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BARTLETT) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland. Mr. Speaker, I believe this is the 24th time since the 14th day of last March that I have come to this floor to talk about a subject which is growing in importance. That subject is energy.

I had the privilege of leading a codel to China. We left just after Christmas and we spent New Year's in Shanghai. There were nine of us who went there, and the primary purpose of that congressional delegation was to talk to the Chinese primarily about energy.

I was both surprised, shocked, and really pleasantly surprised that they began their conversation about energy by talking about post oil. This just wasn't the energy people in China, it was high officials in other parts of the government. Everywhere we went and spoke with them, they talked about post-oil, a recognition that oil cannot be forever, and they talked about a five-point program.

The first point of this program was conservation, a recognition that the world has no surplus energy to invest in developing alternatives. If there was any surplus energy, we wouldn't be paying $60 a barrel for oil.

Conservation not only frees up oil, but it buys some time because if we in