

and now the final nail is placed in the coffin of congressional responsibility for the war power, delivering this power completely to the President—a sharp and huge blow to the concept of our Republic.

In my view, it appears that the fate of the American Republic is now sealed, unless these recent trends are quickly reversed.

The saddest part of this tragedy is that all these horrible changes are being done in the name of patriotism and protecting freedom. They are justified by good intentions while believing the sacrifice of liberty is required for our safety. Nothing could be further from the truth.

More sad is the conviction that our enemies are driven to attack us for our freedoms and prosperity, and not because of our deeply flawed foreign policy that has generated justifiable grievances and has inspired the radical violence against us. Without this understanding, our endless, unnamed, and undeclared wars will continue and our wonderful experiment with liberty will end.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, government's most solemn obligation is to protect the people it serves. Since 9/11 our government has rightly placed much of its attention on defending the American people from terrorism. But we should not forget that government has a responsibility to safeguard the public from all forms of violence, including violent crime.

Violent crime exacts a terrible price. Its costs are measured not only in the number of lives lost but in the number of citizens who live in fear that they or someone they love might be the next victim. Data released on Monday show that violent crime in the United States has fallen over the past few years. However, we cannot become complacent. Despite the positive national trend lines, certain American communities have become less, rather than more, secure.

The Federal Government has a particularly strong duty to protect its citizens from violence when that violence is linked to a crime that crosses State or national borders. That is why our government has worked hard to stem the flow of drugs entering the United States through Mexico and to combat drug-related violence along the southwest border.

But these efforts, while essential, are not enough. To protect the American people, we must protect the full length of our southern border. As Federal programs like the Merida Initiative choke off drug routes through Central America, narcotraffickers have increasingly

turned to the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico. Because of Puerto Rico's role as a key transit point for drugs destined for consumption in the 50 States, the island has one of the highest murder rates in our Nation.

Given the unacceptably high level of violence in Puerto Rico, and its close connection to the drug trade, one would expect that most Federal law enforcement agencies would have their positions filled there. But that is not the case. Over 50 percent of authorized ATF positions are vacant, 22 percent of ICE positions are also unfilled, and 17 percent of DEA positions are vacant. Puerto Rico has 31 Federal law enforcement officers for every 100,000 residents, well below the national average of 36.

This mismatch between the severity of the problem in Puerto Rico and the scale of the Federal response prompts this question: Why do Federal law enforcement agencies have such high vacancy rates in such a high-need jurisdiction?

The budget shortfall is certainly one reason. The Departments of Justice and Homeland Security are being asked to do more with fewer resources, including fewer agents.

But the problem goes beyond money. Fewer workers are entering law enforcement than in the past. Those who do seek to enter the profession are more likely to be disqualified by health problems such as obesity or substance abuse. And military recruitment, which has risen in recent years, is competing with law enforcement for the same talent.

In the face of these challenges, the Federal Government is not without tools. For example, executive agencies can pay a recruitment incentive to a newly hired employee if the position is difficult to fill.

But our government must go beyond piecemeal efforts. It needs a comprehensive plan to recruit, assign, and retain law enforcement officers in those jurisdictions that have the highest rates of violent crime.

Puerto Rico is one example of a jurisdiction where an increased Federal presence is needed. But there are also many other jurisdictions with high crime rates and too few Federal law enforcement agents. The primary reason for high crime in these States or cities may be the nexus with the drug trade, or it may have different roots. Regardless of the cause, the harm that results is the same. In communities beset by violent crime, residents become hostages to fear—fear that makes them think twice before walking to the store to buy milk, fear that makes them hug their kids for an extra moment before leaving them or sending them off to school, fear that prevents children from using the neighborhood playground.

It is imperative that the Federal Government reduce personnel shortages in Federal law enforcement agencies in high-need jurisdictions. Con-

gressman GRIMM and I recently introduced legislation to direct the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security to establish a program to recruit, assign, and retain agents to serve in locations that have experienced high rates of violent crime.

The Federal Government cannot be passive in filling law enforcement shortages, hoping the right candidates will volunteer. Nor can it simply expect agents to remain with the government, particularly when the private sector often pays more. Instead, the Federal Government must proactively address personnel challenges by dedicating staff to recruitment and retention.

I urge the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security to take action now to make recruitment and retention a priority. Vacancies at law enforcement agencies are not a minor administrative hassle but an urgent public safety problem. Too much is at stake to accept the status quo. For every moment we wait, we risk losing another American citizen to senseless violence.

WASHINGTON HAS A SPENDING PROBLEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DOLD) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DOLD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about a very serious problem, a problem that all Americans face and one that is not new here in Washington.

I would like to read a quote that some of my colleagues have also used during this morning's debate, and if I may, let me just quote it once again:

"Leadership means that the buck stops here. Instead, Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren. America has a debt problem and a failure of leadership."

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That was said by Senator Barack Obama back in 2006, and I frankly agree.

Just to put it in perspective, back in 2006, we were running a deficit. We had an administration that was running a deficit of about \$400 billion, just highlighting the point that this spending problem that we have here in Washington is on both sides of the aisle. This doesn't rest with one political party or another. It just outlines the problem that Washington has a spending problem.

The debt that we have today, we're up against our debt ceiling. It's about \$14 trillion. The real debt, however, is much greater than that. It's closer to \$100 trillion. The deficit that we deal with—it was at about \$400 billion back in 2006. Today, it's about \$1.5 trillion.

Now, what does that mean? My daughter, who is 9, she knows what 1.5 is. She says it's a little bit more than one and not quite two. But \$1.5 trillion

works out to be about \$3.4 million a minute. To put that in better perspective, it's \$58,000 a second. We can't even say it fast enough. This is a problem.

How do we get out of this problem? We have to map out a course. It's a budget. The Republicans passed a budget. The House passed a budget outlining a way for us to be able to cut back over \$6 trillion over the next decade. I would argue that American families and households all across the land operate on a budget. Businesses do the same. Yet we happen to not be able to do that here in Washington.

The United States Senate has not picked up or passed a budget in over 750 days. The American family wouldn't operate like that. I know as a small business owner I couldn't keep my doors open if I didn't have a budget to outline where our priorities were going to be. It is a blueprint. It's not a final standing bill or thing that's going to say exactly how we're going to spend it, but it is a blueprint going forward so that we can get those in the Senate and elsewhere to be able to come together so that we can map out how we are going to get out of this mess. Because I do agree with the President when he says that the choices that we're making today, the bad choices of today are going to be placed on the backs of our children and grandchildren. For me, that's unacceptable.

I decided to run for Congress largely because the amount of money that we were spending in Washington was going to be unconscionable for me to pass along to my children. I have a 9-year-old, a 7-year-old, and a 4-year-old. By the time they're my age, we are going to have to pay exactly double in taxes just to service the government. We pay 42 cents of every single dollar we have just to service our debt.

The administration now is asking us to raise the debt ceiling. This is an important issue. But I'm here to tell you that we need to have some leadership. Leadership is critical at this point in time.

What is the plan? I don't want to talk about bickering. I want to make sure that colleagues on both sides of the aisle come to the table. We know that there are negotiations going on right now, but I still would like to have a plan articulated to the American public. What is the plan? Because simply raising the debt ceiling without a plan on how we're going to pay down this debt is like—well, it's like sitting around the kitchen table and not worrying about the credit card debt of an irresponsible teenager. You wouldn't do that at home. We wouldn't do that in business. You should expect that your government does the same.

Now, when we look at this debt crisis that we have, as a small business owner, I look at it somewhat like a business. I look at it that we have just purchased a business, and we think it's the greatest business in the world with the United States of America. That business has some debt, and we're obli-

gated to pay that debt. We just have to figure out how it is that we are going to restructure that business so that we can pay down that debt and make it a strong, viable business going forward. That's what we have to do. To simply raise the debt ceiling and not have to restructure would be a violation of everything that we hold dear.

With that, I call on leadership, leadership here in Washington from those on both sides of the aisle, to come together to solve the problems of our time and put our country first.

HONORING THE LIFE AND MEMORY OF BERNADETTE MCARN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday in my home town of Wilson, North Carolina, the Wilson Community College held its annual commencement exercise. From all accounts, it was a wonderful occasion. But for one family in the community, the McArn family, there was great sadness on this occasion because their loved one was due to graduate; but sadly, she passed away on January 14, 2011, at the young age of 45. And so I take this opportunity today to honor the life and memory of that individual, Ms. Bernadette McArn.

The youngest of four children, Bernadette was born on July 12, 1965, to Isiah and Wynomia Crocker McArn. She was a graduate of Ralph L. Fike High School and, but for her passing, would have earned an associate's degree from the college. It is fitting to note that last spring Bernadette distinguished herself and pleased her family when she made the Dean's List.

This has been a very difficult time for the McArn family. They were very proud of Bernadette, and her memory will live within their hearts forever.

I ask my colleagues to join me in offering our deepest condolences to the McArn family, friends, and loved ones.

FOOD INSECURITY

Mr. Speaker, I want to use my remaining time to talk about the issue of hunger.

In this same community where Bernadette McArn lived her entire life, many are suffering from what I call food insecurity. At 11 p.m. last night, a line began to form at the Wilson OIC to receive food commodities today. Hundreds of citizens in this small community—black, white, and brown—stood all night long to be positioned to receive the basic commodity of food.

Earlier this year, a study by the Food Research and Action Center showed that the First District of North Carolina ranks as the second worst for food insecurity in the country. Last Thanksgiving, about 2,000 people waited overnight—again—for a 25-pound bag of groceries at this same community-based program. For those of us living in eastern North Carolina, this

comes as no surprise and underscores the need for a strong nutrition safety net.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident in our country. As a State, North Carolina ranks sixth worst in the country for food security, with a food hardship rate of 23.5 percent, and the numbers are even worse in my district in eastern North Carolina.

The Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina is called on to serve more than 500,000 people annually in 34 counties in central and eastern North Carolina, and about 73,000 different people receive emergency food assistance in any given week. Of those people, the food bank reports that 40 percent choose between paying for food and paying for utilities or heat; 33 percent choose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage; 37 percent choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care; and 38 percent choose between paying for food and paying for transportation.

Mr. Speaker, as we continue our work, we must keep in mind that as many as 50 million Americans are struggling with food security. The Federal Government certainly needs to find ways to cut costs and reduce spending, but that burden should not fall heaviest on the people with the greatest needs.

As I close, let me just encourage our citizens to stay strong in their faith and know that Democrats will fight for you.

And I would like to thank Mr. Howard Jones of the Wilson OIC, his staff, and all of the volunteers for their extraordinary contribution to the Wilson community.

DEBT CEILING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. GARDNER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. Speaker, creating jobs and growing the economy is the number one goal of the 112th Congress, everything we can do to create jobs and help this country move forward and get our economy back on track, but long-term economic growth and job creation is only possible if we control the uncontrolled debt and deficit situation that is driving this country into bankruptcy.

Last week, I had the opportunity to visit with a number of voters in my district who were very concerned about the direction of our country, and I read the following quote to them: "Leadership means that the buck stops here. Instead, Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren. America has a debt problem and a failure of leadership. Americans deserve better."

I didn't tell them who had said that. I just asked them if they agreed with that statement. Everybody clapped and cheered. I mentioned that this was said