

I have stood up to defend the Puerto Rican Bar Association, a clear voice for justice that has been attacked by the ruling party and their legislature and their allies on the Federal bench.

I have spoken on the House floor and leaders have spoken on the island about the environmental emergency the ruling party has brought on to Puerto Rico. The government declared an energy emergency to avoid routine fact-finding and licensing procedures so that it could build a 100-mile long, \$500 million gas pipeline on a tropical island that is designed more to help wealthy insiders than the people of Puerto Rico.

While actions in Wisconsin and Ohio and other States that threaten workers' rights are discussed routinely in the U.S., the fact that the Governor of Puerto Rico has fired tens of thousands of public employees and canceled labor agreements, all contrary to contract promises, is largely unknown.

But Tea Partiers don't rejoice: he has also doubled the property taxes on everyone.

Even the courts are under attack on the island. This Governor has packed the Puerto Rican Supreme Court with activists of the ruling party. He created two new positions on the supreme court in order to add two new judges to a court that already had a majority of the ruling party. He did this, of course, despite the fact of having denounced Hugo Chavez when he believed he was doing the same thing in Venezuela.

Just 2 weeks ago, the ruling party yet again changed the law so they could fire the island's ombudswoman for the elderly, who had years left on her 10-year appointment, because of her independence and vocal disagreement with the ruling party.

And because I have spoken out against the ruling party of Puerto Rico, I have earned a resolution of censure from the ruling party's legislature. I have earned a full-page ad in Roll Call condemning me for using my right to speech.

Only the ruling party of Puerto Rico would respond to complaints about free speech and civil rights abuses by officially passing a resolution condemning someone for speaking. Should any of my colleagues not believe this absurdity, you just need to come to my office where I display proudly these documents. I invite you to come and see them.

I ask my colleagues today: please pay attention to what is happening in Puerto Rico. If it were happening in Illinois, New York, Texas or Wyoming, or any of the States of our Union, this Congress would have great concerns.

One meaningful first step would be to join me in urging the Department of Justice to complete the investigation that they have initiated and to police abuses in Puerto Rico that started in 2008 and promptly release the results. I would also ask my colleagues and their staffs to attend the congressional briefing organized by the ACLU next Tuesday, July 12, at 10 a.m.

And, finally, I ask my friends and colleagues to do what we do whenever we see regimes that refuse to treat people fairly: please speak out for the values that define us as Americans. Please join me in standing for liberty and justice for all.

THE VOTE TO INCREASE DEBT LIMIT

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

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, today the United States Government owes close to \$14.3 trillion. It's estimated by the Congressional Budget Office that by the year 2021, the government will spend 100 percent of every dollar raised in revenue on entitlements. And yet we are being asked to raise the debt limit to \$16.3 trillion. That's a \$2 trillion increase, or 14 percent increase. In 2010, our national GDP was \$14.6 trillion. Raising the debt to \$16.3 trillion means our debt ceiling will surpass our country's GDP.

And yet for the 81st time since 1940, we are being asked again to raise the debt ceiling. In 2002, our debt stood at \$6.2 trillion. Now, not even 10 years later, we are asked to raise it to \$16.2 trillion. That's a 250 percent increase, or an average of 16.7 percent increase per year. Obviously, continuing on this path next year, it is likely we will be asked in this Chamber to raise the debt ceiling to \$19 trillion. That's staggering.

In keeping with this 70-year tradition, we are certain to force our Nation's spiraling and out-of-control debt onto the backs of our country's children and grandchildren. Raising the debt ceiling today without reform will merely lead to a new call, a new call to raise the debt again tomorrow.

Is the United States disciplined enough to solve this debt problem through austerity and productivity? I think it is. Yet I believe we can, but only if we break this tradition of continued spending.

Now recently a constituent of mine wrote a simple letter to the editor of my hometown paper and this what is he said: "If you and your wife haven't made a budget for the last 2 years, and now you have maxed-out the \$14,300 credit limit on your Visa card, do you: A, expect Visa to raise your limit to \$16,700; B, print counterfeit money to cover your debts; C, borrow more money; or, D, sell the Cadillac."

Responsible Americans would sell the Cadillac. It's time for the Federal Government to do the same thing: reduce spending or sell unneeded assets.

We must begin to closely scrutinize our bills and eliminate wasteful and fraudulent programs, sunset some of them. As we negotiate the upcoming vote on the debt ceiling, we should ensure that any cut in spending exceeds any increase in the debt limit. Selling the Cadillac is meaningless when you continue to max out on your credit

card. The point here is to make a difference in our debt, not to merely provide a vehicle to continue Washington's spending addiction.

Moreover, any future spending must be restricted. We cannot sell the Cadillac this year only to buy a Mercedes Benz next year. Again, we must begin to live within our means.

I know that leadership is working tirelessly to ensure that a compromise can be reached and the Republicans' demands can be met, and it appears we are making progress.

□ 1020

But, the President has in one breath asked both parties to leave their rhetoric at the door, but then in the same next breath he accused Republicans of refusing to cut tax loopholes for the rich in order to curb the debt problem. But that alone won't do it. Beyond being contradictory and self-serving, these accusations demonstrate that Democrats continue to misunderstand the real problem. CBO has nailed it. They recently revealed that it is runaway spending, not a lack of revenue, that is driving our debt today. According to CBO's long-term budget forecast, even with a tax increase that raises revenues from its historic 18 percent of GDP to 23 percent of GDP, the national debt will continue to grow unless we have the spending reductions.

Everyone here in Congress understands how important this vote is, but surely after the CBO analysis, we must confront the fact that spending is growing relentlessly and needs to be placed under control. Therefore, to move the debt ceiling up another \$2 trillion, we need to see corresponding spending reductions regardless—regardless—without tax increases. Now is the time to do it. It can be done. And it must be done today.

WHAT DOES \$10 BILLION A MONTH BUY?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, since 2005, I have spoken from this very spot 399 times. On nearly every occasion that House rules allow, I have stood to deliver a 5-minute special order speech highlighting the moral outrage of the United States' continued military engagements in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Libya. I speak of the need also for a new Smart Security to keep America safe.

Today will be my 399th speech. I look forward to reaching number 400 next week, and I will continue this drumbeat until my last day as a Member of Congress, which gives me approximately 18 months, 1½ years, time to bring our troops safely home.

During this week, the week that the House is debating defense appropriations, I thought it would be fitting to focus on war spending, on the staggering costs that taxpayers are being

asked to bear for our military occupations.

Ten billion dollars a month is a lot of money. That's the price tag for the privilege of continuing to wage a 10-year war against Afghanistan: \$10 billion a month. The American people who are writing that check have a right to ask and to get answers to some very important questions: Where is that money going, and what exactly is it accomplishing? What are we getting for our \$10 billion a month? Are we more secure here at home? Is the Afghanistan central government introducing the rule of law? Have we not already defeated al Qaeda? And so who are we fighting and why?

For \$10 billion a month, Mr. Speaker, our expectations as taxpayers, as Americans, and as Members of Congress, should be high. Is it too much to think that \$10 billion a month could buy a stable ally, an ally capable of standing on its own two feet, taking responsibility for its own security, and having respect for the rule of law? Instead, corruption and chaos are ruling the day in Kabul. Basic government institutions are failing to provide services. President Karzai has tried to establish a special court, in fact, for the purpose of stripping 62 members of Parliament of their seats. The financial system is teetering on the brink of collapse with the head of the central bank fleeing the country and accusing Karzai's regime of fraud and cronyism.

And just a few days ago, Mr. Speaker, a brawl broke out on the floor of the Afghan Parliament with one member throwing a shoe at another member when a motion was proposed to impeach President Karzai. For \$10 billion a month, is it not too much to ask that the Afghan Parliament not look like an episode of the "Jerry Springer Show"?

There is so much we could do with \$10 billion a month right here at home, especially at a moment when so many of our people are struggling and so many of our communities so badly need public investment, especially at a moment when the clock is ticking toward a catastrophic default on the national debt. I'm not suggesting that we ignore or that we run away from Afghanistan's deep-seated problems, but I believe we cannot begin to address their needs with a military solution. It will never work. It is time to reinvest at pennies on the dollar in Smart Security efforts, humanitarian and civilian aid, aid that will promote democracy, and economic support to address poverty and to rebuild infrastructure in Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, this is a moment and this is a time where we put our priorities in order, but it's not a job for our troops. They have served with unbelievable valor. Now it's time to bring them safely home and invest in a humanitarian way in Afghanistan.

DEBT CEILING SOLUTIONS

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

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, Congress has a very important decision to make very soon on whether or not to increase the national debt ceiling. Today, our national debt limit is a staggering \$14.3 trillion, and the President is seeking a \$2.2 trillion increase in our debt limit. An increase to our Nation's debt ceiling that is not accompanied by equal or larger spending reductions would be reckless and arrogant.

Speaker BOEHNER was right when he said, "It's true that allowing America to default would be irresponsible, but it would be more irresponsible to raise the debt ceiling without simultaneously taking dramatic steps to reduce spending and reform the budget process."

This debate is a unique opportunity to achieve significant and serious spending reforms in Washington and to prove to the American people that their employees, the Members of the United States Congress, are listening to them.

I believe this is our best chance for the foreseeable future to obtain substantial and credible long-term deficit reductions, to reform the way Washington spends taxpayer dollars, and save America from ruin.

Elections matter. Last fall changed the debate here in Washington. We may not be cutting spending as fast as some of us prefer, and quite frankly, I have been frustrated by the pace. But the discussion has shifted to how much should we cut, not how much should we spend. This distinction is critical to getting our Nation's fiscal house in order and one that has been driven by conservatives in the House.

House Republicans have developed a three-fold "cut, cap and balance" strategy that includes deep spending cuts, enforceable spending caps and a balanced budget amendment with strong protections against Federal tax increases. These proposals will ensure that the Federal Government adheres to the same parameters that families and businesses live with every single day.

The time for irresponsible Federal spending is over. With each passing day, our Nation's fiscal problems only compound, leaving our children and grandchildren with a larger legacy of debt. My colleagues on the other side have advocated an increase to our debt with no strings attached. They continue to stand for business as usual right here in Washington, DC. But we cannot ignore the problem, nor can we simply tax our way out of this mess.

Furthermore, in the event we fully reach the debt ceiling, we cannot trust the White House to prioritize our debt payments, nor can we trust the administration not to default on our obligations. The American people must remember that if we default on our debt, the executive branch would have full

control over what programs get cut, not Congress.

□ 1030

Mr. Speaker, the only resolution to this problem is to secure trillions in spending cuts and put our Nation on a solid fiscal path to financial sanity, and ensure a strong and prosperous future for our children and our grandchildren.

IMPROVING FEDERAL GRANT SOLICITATION PROCESS

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

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, each year, 26 Federal agencies award over half a trillion dollars in grant funding. Earlier this year, Congress significantly changed the manner in which the Federal Government allocates funding. In the past, State and local governments and nonprofit organizations spent a great deal of time trying to persuade individuals Members of Congress to earmark funds to support local projects.

While debate will no doubt continue on the value of congressionally directed spending, the reality is that, at least for the time being, the days of earmarks are over. With a ban on earmarks, a greater emphasis will now be placed on competitive grants, whereby applicants from across the Nation compete for funding made available for different purposes.

In theory, a larger role for competitive grants in the Federal appropriations process holds promise. Under a well-administered grant competition, an application is judged on its merits. In practice, however, an increased emphasis on competitive grants will only improve the overall process if the Federal Government announces and publicizes grant opportunities in a clear and organized manner. Grant seeking will not be a true meritocracy if the process of identifying, applying for, and obtaining Federal grants is clouded in mystery and confusion and understood only by paid experts.

In 1999, Congress created a Web site, grants.gov, which allows applicants to search and apply for grants online. But much more needs to be done to make the grant solicitation process as transparent and user friendly as possible.

Many of my constituents have expressed frustration with the manner in which the Federal Government makes grant opportunities known. Often, a potential grantee will seek to apply for needed funding only to learn that the deadline for the most relevant grant passed days or weeks earlier. In other instances, prospective applicants will search grants.gov, but become frustrated upon finding that they need to scroll through pages and pages of grant listings, some of which are outdated or have not been funded by Congress.

To address these problems, I recently introduced H.R. 2393. This bipartisan