

after the good guys and spend time and money going after the bad guys.

And that's just the way it is.

DOES GOD TRUST US?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) for 5 minutes.

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker and my colleagues, as we see the Nation going through such pain, I rise once again to see why we can't get along, why Republicans and Democrats find it almost impossible to try to raise some solutions to the problems we face.

There is no question that there are many Republicans in the House and Senate that believe that the most important contribution that they can make to our country is to get rid of the President. But at the same time, we have 14 million people that have lost their jobs, many have lost their homes, their savings, their hopes for the future. Probably double that number we find underemployed. And the millions and millions of people in districts like mine where people have actually given up hope that they can restore their dignity and get the resources necessary to provide for their families.

Yesterday, the House overwhelmingly passed a bill that would support the motto "In God We Trust." I reluctantly supported it because I didn't want anyone to believe that I didn't trust God. But I felt awkward because I didn't see where that was the question.

The real question, I would think, is, does God trust us? Does God trust us to do the things that every religion says we should be doing? Are we trusted to provide care and compassion for the vulnerable? Are we trusted to know that we have a responsibility to the sick, to the aged, to the disabled? That's where God really counts, no matter what your religious background is.

And to talk about a motto and sharing that, I don't think that has to be challenged. What is challenged is, what are we going to do about it?

Why do we find people young and old around the country protesting against the disparity that exists between the poor, who God said through his servant Jesus, his son Jesus, that they should be taken care of? And the Scriptures are not too kind—at least not as kind as I am—to the rich. But common decency would expect that there be fairness in the resources this great Nation would have.

And that when we find that less than 1 percent of Americans control 42 percent of the national wealth, would we find that our educational system is definitely not going to allow us to be competitive in the future? When we see that the American Dream—and that to me is the most important part of my pride in being an American; you don't have to succeed in America, but the hope and the dream that people from all countries can come here and have an opportunity to break out of their class system, out of poverty, and join the middle class.

Even those who came as slaves and had their backgrounds just eliminated; their names, their culture, their songs, their history, but nevertheless, because of the Congress and trust in God they, too, have been able to achieve, even to the extent of becoming President of the United States and honored Members of the Congress through the Congressional Black Caucus.

So once that hope is challenged by anybody, then it means for the whole world the symbol that America is supposed to be. It's not one that improves your quality of life but finds us having people losing hope in the system. The fact that we don't speak out when thousands of young Americans, brave warriors, are being killed and have been killed in countries that their families have no idea where the countries are located or what the issues were, and the necessity of protecting oil has no longer been the issue.

So I say, yes, in God we trust, but we've got a few days left to see whether or not we can have God trust in us.

BACK TO BASICS WITH THE BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

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

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, the International Monetary Fund estimated that as of Halloween night, the debt of this Nation surpassed its entire economy for the first time since World War II.

We all know that if you live beyond your means today you're going to have to live below your means tomorrow. That's the tomorrow that our generation has created for the children who were dressed up as princesses and cowboys when they came calling on Monday night. This is our generation's eternal shame. And it's something that our generation must act to set right.

The House is expected soon to vote on a balanced budget amendment that's critical to stop this plunder of our children. There are a number of excellent proposals out there, and I'd have no trouble supporting any of them. I do rise, however, to express the hope that the final product of these deliberations proves worthy of the wisdom that guided the drafting of the Constitution.

The beauty of the American Constitution is in its simplicity and its humility. The American Founders recognized Cicero's wisdom that the best laws are the simplest ones. And they realized that they couldn't possibly foresee the circumstances and conditions that might confront future generations, and therefore they resisted the temptation to micromanage every decision that might be made centuries in the future.

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Instead, they set forth general principles of governance and erected a structure in which human nature, itself, would provide guidance in future

decisions to conform with these principles.

In crafting a balanced budget amendment, we need to maintain these qualities. We shouldn't attempt to tell future generations specifically how they should manage their revenues and expenditures in times that we cannot comprehend. The experience of many States that operate under their own balanced budget amendments tells us that the more complicated and convoluted such strictures become, the more they are circumvented and manipulated.

Many have quoted Jefferson's 1798 letter to John Taylor as support for a balanced budget amendment. Here is what he actually wrote:

"I wish it were possible to obtain a single amendment to our Constitution. I would be willing to depend on that alone for the reduction of the administration of our government to the genuine principles of its Constitution. I mean an additional article: taking from the Federal Government the power of borrowing."

What is a balanced budget? It's simply a budget that doesn't require us to borrow. So, as Jefferson did, why don't we just say so? Instead of trying to define fiscal years, outlays, expenditures, revenues, emergencies, triggers, sequestrations, and so on, I hope that we would consider 27 simple words:

"The United States Government may not increase its debt except for a specific purpose by law, adopted by three-fourths of the membership of both Houses of Congress." That's it.

Such an amendment, taking effect 10 years from ratification, would give the government time to put its affairs in order and to thereafter naturally require future Congresses to maintain both a balanced budget as well as a prudent reserve to accommodate fluctuations of revenues and routine contingencies. It trusts that three-fourths of future Congresses will be able to recognize a genuine emergency when they see one and that one-fourth of Congress will be strong enough to resist borrowing for light or transient reasons. The experience of the States warns us that a two-thirds vote is insufficient to protect against profligacy.

Some advocate going much further by establishing limitations on spending and taxation as well; but if borrowing is prohibited, there exists a natural limit to the ability and willingness of the people to tolerate taxation and therefore spending. The real danger is when runaway spending is accommodated and made possible by borrowing, which is simply a hidden future tax. The best and most effective way to invoke that natural limit is with a simple prohibition.

At the end of the week, I will introduce this 27-word amendment and will ask my colleagues to consider it with the many others that are currently before the Congress.

As I said, I like virtually all of them, as they all accomplish the purpose of restraining the reckless deficits that our generation has produced; but in drafting an amendment to guide not only this generation but all of those to follow, I would hope that we would do as the Constitutional Convention would have done had it had the benefit of Jefferson's wise counsel: to set down the general principle only and allow future generations, with their own insights into their own challenges, to put it to practical effect.

VOTING RIGHTS

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

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, the right to vote is under attack. It may not be easy to see; but in State legislatures all across this country, we are seeing a quiet passing of laws that will strip American citizens of their right to vote.

It may come as a surprise that this is happening in the United States. Our great country is best known for its rich democratic tradition, which is predicated on the right to vote; and this right to vote has been expanding over time, not retracting. Throughout our history, brave men and women have fought and died for the right, and it has been denied to too many Americans for too long. Since its founding, the United States has been on a course toward enfranchisement, not disenfranchisement. Incredibly, that seems to be changing.

State legislatures are turning back the clock on decades of hard-fought voter protections. This year, 34 State legislatures introduced prohibitive voter ID bills. If passed, they could affect the voting ability of nearly 21 million Americans. Two States have enacted prohibitive proof-of-citizenship laws, which stand to exclude even more voters at the polls; 13 States are working to make it harder to register to vote; and nine are working to reduce early and absentee voting.

These laws add up to the greatest attack on voting rights since the Jim Crow era. In all, they could strip more than 5 million Americans of the right to vote. That figure alone is half the margin of victory from the 2008 Presidential election. Congress must act. Today, I am introducing two bills to push back against these laws and protect Americans' right to vote.

The first bill, the Voter Access Protection Act, will ensure that no American citizen is denied the right to vote because they don't have photo IDs on election day. The second bill, the Same Day Registration Act, will allow Americans to register to vote on the same day they cast their ballots. No American citizen should be turned back at the polls because they didn't register weeks or months in advance. These bills will help ensure that all Americans are able to exercise their fundamental rights in Federal elections.

If you truly believe in democracy, you should be doing everything you can to increase the enfranchisement of American citizens, not to take it away. I urge all of my colleagues to support this critical and patriotic legislation.

DOMESTIC ENERGY PRODUCTION IS THE SOLUTION

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, rural Pennsylvania, like other parts of the country, have not been immune to difficult economic times; but today Pennsylvania is uniquely positioned to become a source of growth and strength for our State, the region, and the Nation through the development of what could be one of the world's largest natural gas fields, the Marcellus shale, much of which is located in my congressional district.

Marcellus production is offering our region and the country expanded access to clean, reliable, and affordable energy—and a new source of economic growth and stable jobs.

As Congress tackles challenges regarding jobs and the deficit, we must consider domestic energy production as a logical and obtainable solution to both of these challenges, for the United States has enormous untapped deposits of coal, oil, natural gas, and other sources of energy that can offer good-paying jobs, new sources of revenue, affordable and reliable energy, as well as national energy security.

The economic success story of the Marcellus shale can be replicated across this country by opening up all of America's domestic resources and allowing new investment and technologies to expand the exploration and production of America's own resources.

We can develop these resources, create jobs and tens of billions of dollars in revenues, but only if the Federal Government encourages and not discourages production. I'm not talking about a Solyndra-style subsidy but, rather, government's getting out of the way of accessing the natural resources that God has blessed us with.

PRISONER TORTURE IN AFGHANISTAN

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

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, I spoke in this Chamber about the U.N. report that outlined, in gruesome detail, prisoner abuse at detention facilities in Afghanistan—inmates beaten with electrical wires, hung from their wrists, and much worse. Now additional reporting by The Washington Post has revealed that U.S. officials knew for some time about this torture of prisoners by Afghan security forces.

So what did our top people in Afghanistan do about these warnings? Apparently, not a thing.

For years our Special Operations forces and CIA officials had been in and out of these prisons—dropping off detainees, meeting with Afghan authorities, taking advantage of the intelligence gathered there. We paid to rebuild one prison with the cold and chilling name Department 124, which sits behind a concrete fortress near U.S. military headquarters in Kabul.

It would be hard—actually, it would be impossible—to miss what was going on inside those walls; but for a long time, it was ignored—nothing said, no meaningful oversight exerted. It wasn't until a few months ago, when the U.N. made it clear they were releasing a report detailing the torture, that our military commanders suddenly took notice and stopped sending prisoners to these facilities. In a flash, they instituted a monitoring program and human rights training.

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It's embarrassing, Mr. Speaker. But it seems like our leadership was more concerned about public relations damage control than adherence to human rights norms and international law.

The American people have sacrificed a lot for this war. And in return, they've been fed a lot of high-minded assurances that we're doing important work that advances American values. The name of this mission is Operation Enduring Freedom, but apparently we're not practicing what we preach in Afghanistan because torture has no place in free society, no place in a campaign that professes to be about human dignity and the rule of law.

At a time when we're considering major cuts right here at home in life-saving domestic programs so that we can get our fiscal house in order, how can we possibly justify spending billions of dollars every week on a military occupation that seems to be promoting and encouraging torture? We cannot wash our hands of this. We cannot avoid responsibility because this is happening on our watch.

Torture, whether we're practicing it ourselves or just tacitly condoning it, isn't just reprehensible; it's bad national security policy as well. It represents the United States of America in the worst possible light and is surely a great recruitment tool for the terrorists. When it comes to international affairs, the greatest currency we have is our moral authority, but we continue to waste it by acting like outlaws instead of the greatest superpower on Earth.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come. It is time we had a national security approach that showcases the very best of America, one that demonstrates our decency and compassion, one that emphasizes diplomacy and reconciliation, one that puts civilian and humanitarian experts on the ground instead of 100,000 troops with guns.