

elsewhere. Failing to allow nature to take its course invites a bigger disaster as more and more water is forced into the narrow fortified walls of the Mississippi.

Think about how we have shortened and narrowed that river. We haven't reduced the amount of water; we've just reduced the areas where it can go. It makes the inevitable flooding worse. Building a levee is simply going to move it a little further downstream.

The solution is to allow the river to go where nature wants it, not encourage farmers to cultivate even more land that will be vulnerable to crop loss, more disaster relief, more crop insurance loss, and to take away increasingly scarce wildlife habitat for the millions of Americans who would like to hunt and fish. Done right, this can be a virtuous cycle. It saves tax dollars, improves the environment, reduces the damage from flooding and all the attendant costs.

It is a classic example of where the Federal Government should learn from 200 years' experience of trying to engineer the Mississippi River and instead allow, in some cases, nature to take its course and avoid more expensive and worse damage.

This is what we need to do across the Federal Government. We don't have to spend twice as much money on health care as most of the developed countries for outcomes that are mediocre at best. We don't have to spend more money on defense than 12 or 13 of the remaining largest defense budgets and on weapons that in many cases, like our nuclear arsenal where we have far more than we need and can ever use and can afford, we can pare down, save tens of billions of dollars and still be the most powerful Nation in the world; or the outrageous crop insurance that encourages reckless and expensive behavior by paying farmers to plant crops on land that never should have been cultivated in the first place.

□ 1210

While we will control spending and increase revenues, the most important thing we can do is to change the way we do business, using common sense, proven technology, stretching our tax dollars, and making our communities more livable. We can start by not pressuring the Corps of Engineers to complete the levees, spending millions of dollars we don't have on a solution that will make the problem worse. Let's work, instead, to understand the impacts of global warming and extreme weather and then do something about it.

FEDERAL DEBT

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

Mr. WHITFIELD. Mr. Speaker, tonight, in this House Chamber, President Obama will give his State of the

Union address to a joint session of Congress.

Article II, Section 3 of the Constitution requires that the President, whoever it may be, shall, from time to time, give to Congress information on the State of the Union. George Washington, the first President, addressed the joint session of Congress, but Thomas Jefferson and each succeeding President up until 1913 presented a written statement of the State of the Union to the House and Senate. So from 1801 until 1913, Presidents submitted a written State of the Union, and on April 8, 1913, Woodrow Wilson, like George Washington, addressed a joint session of Congress, and that has been the manner of our State of the Union by every President since, with the exception of Herbert Hoover.

Today, I am asking for another little change in the State of the Union. I think that we should consider a requirement that the President, on a day that coincides with the State of the Union, also have the Federal Government make a formal declaration of national debt.

My purpose in calling for the declaration is twofold: First, while information about the debt can be found, it is spread throughout a vast array of budget submissions, trustee reports, and other documents that are nearly impossible to navigate or to understand when trying to determine the total national debt and unfunded liabilities our Nation must pay now and in the future. And then the second reason, of course, is to elevate the issue to remind the American public the significant dangers of large government debt.

As of today, our Nation's Federal debt exceeds our Nation's gross domestic product. What does that mean? Gross domestic product is used to determine the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced in America annually, and it includes all of the private and public consumption, all of the government outlays, all the investments and all the exports, less the imports.

Our debt is increasing so quickly that it really is difficult to give an exact figure of our national debt. Suffice it to say that it will, in the very near future, exceed \$17 trillion. When I looked at the so-called "clock" on my way over here, it was approaching \$16.6 trillion. Now, if you stacked \$16 trillion one-dollar bills one on top of the other, it would extend more than 1 million miles, which would reach to the Moon and back twice.

Now, former Speaker PELOSI said a few days ago that we do not have a spending problem. Now, I do not believe that most Americans would agree with that statement. Families throughout America must live within their means or suffer the consequences, and our government must live within its means or suffer the consequences. Many people say there are no real consequences, but all of us have seen the loss of jobs, the violence, the lack of

economic growth in countries like Greece and Spain and other parts of the European Union.

President Obama took office on January 20, 2009, and the Nation's total debt on that day was \$10.6 trillion. Today, it is over \$16.5 trillion. The President has drastically increased this country's debt in a mere 4-year span; in fact, it has increased by over 45 percent. However, it should be pointed out that he and he alone is not responsible for all this dramatic increase in debt. Every person that has served in the U.S. Congress in the recent past or today, House Members and Senate Members, are also responsible for the spending that we have approved. Also, those people who serve in the executive branch of government are also responsible.

Just to give you a few examples, 9 or 10 months ago, the Department of Energy built about 12 new buildings over here on The Mall, across from the Jefferson Memorial, for a solar exhibit. It stayed there for about 10 months, and then it was torn down. No one really knows how much the debt cost.

EPA, each year, gives grants to other countries, including China, to help them with their environmental problems at a time when we have to borrow money from China to meet our obligations. And then, as Mr. JONES mentioned earlier, in Afghanistan, we're spending \$28 million a day.

So I think it would be beneficial to the American people to prepare an annual declaration of the national debt to be made available to the Congress and the public. This would show the American people how much we owed last year, how much we owe this year, and what the projected debt is for the future.

THE BLAME GAME

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

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, tonight, the President will once again walk into this Chamber and lay out a vision for how to strengthen America in the years ahead. Properly, part of that vision will include the need to solve our deficit challenge and address the looming sequester. That dangerous set of automatic and indiscriminate spending cuts is due to take effect in just under 3 weeks. But instead of working with Democrats to avert the sequester through a big and balanced solution—or, frankly, even a short-term balanced proposal—a growing number of House Republicans are, instead, engaged in a dangerous blame game.

Majority Leader CANTOR joined in that this weekend, claiming that the President is the one who proposed the sequester in the first place. What he didn't say was, of course, the Republicans offered a piece of legislation called. The sequester was an integral part of their policy proposal. In fact, the sequester was part of a bipartisan

agreement instigated by Republicans, which we supported. Let us not forget, Mr. Speaker, that it was Republican hostage taking of the debt limit in 2011 that brought about the Budget Control Act, which created the sequester.

Speaker BOEHNER himself, after the deal creating the sequester was struck, said about the Budget Control Act, which included the sequester which faces us at the end of this month:

When you look at this final agreement that we came to with the White House, I got 98 percent of what I wanted.

Now, let me again stress that many of us voted for this. For the past 2 years, however, the Republican majority in this House has had our country lurching from one fiscal crisis to another. Repeatedly, they have threatened to default on our obligations, shut down government operations, and to slash spending in an irrational, meat-ax way.

They have shaken the confidence of our people and of all those throughout the world who look to America for security and stability. They have undermined, in my view, the growth of economy and jobs—and that's the view of CBO as well—and have put in question our commitment to investing in our defense and in job creation.

In short, the Republican majority, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, in this House has given us the most chaotic and confidence-destroying leadership I have seen in my 32 years of service in this House. And now, many of them suggest the sequester that is scheduled to occur on March 1 is an acceptable way forward. Mr. Speaker, I will not take the time to quote the number of Republicans who have said that, but I believe all of them are profoundly wrong.

Sequestration will have a devastating impact on both domestic programs and on our national security. If the sequestration were to take effect, it would mean 70,000 children dropped from the Head Start program; loan guarantees to small businesses would be cut by as much as \$540 million; and just as we are engaged in a national discussion about how to address mental health, up to 373,000 people suffering from mental illness could go untreated.

□ 1220

That is not the President's vision for America, nor is it the vision of Democrats in this House. Now, here we are at the 11th hour once again.

First, House Republicans walked away from the Simpson-Bowles recommendation to adopt a balanced way forward; then they refused to compromise on a balanced alternative to the sequester, starting the clock of sequestration. Then we came down to the wire on the fiscal cliff and delayed sequestration for 2 months, and here we are, once again, with Republicans continuing to cast blame on others.

Mr. Speaker, the blame game must end by us and by our Republican colleagues. The issue is not who is at

fault. As the previous speaker indicated, we're all at fault; we're all responsible; we all serve in this House. Many of us voted for policies that spend money. Some of us voted for policies to pay for what we bought. Others voted against policies for paying for what we bought. Here we are, once again, on the brink of a fiscal meltdown.

It's a game that has no winners, only losers, like the 14,000 teachers, teacher assistants, and other education staff who would lose their jobs; or the 125,000 families who would be at risk of losing their homes when our rental assistance program is cut; or the thousands of civilian defense personnel, in my district alone, and throughout this country who would be furloughed for up to 22 days during the year; and the hundreds of thousands around the country across every service branch, not to mention the tens of thousands of defense contractors critical to our national security, who would be at risk of losing their jobs.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, we need to get serious and work together to avert a sequester that could stop our recovery in its tracks and defeat our common goal of helping America's economy grow and its businesses create jobs.

Reducing spending in a rational way is important for us to do, let there be no mistake. Considering additional revenues will be essential—every bipartisan group has said that—if we are to get on a sustainable financial footing. The sequester, however, Mr. Speaker, is dangerous and unacceptable. We must stop simply fiddling while the sequester's flames threaten to burn our economy, our national security, and our people.

Mr. Speaker, we have no time to waste. I would urge the majority leader to bring a bill to the floor today that would comply with what Mr. LANKFORD, who chairs the Republican Study Committee, said that we ought to pass things that we think the Senate can pass, not just messages, not just political spin, but we ought to pass things that can actually be passed through the United States Senate and signed by the President.

Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM has said:

We have our fingerprints as Republicans on this proposal, on this sequestration idea. It was the President's idea, according to Bob Woodward's book. But we as the Republican Party agreed to it.

Let's make law and make policy so that America has the confidence that its Congress can work. It must work. America needs it to work.

AVIATION

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

Mr. POMPEO. Mr. Speaker, when I go around in Kansas and talk to folks and talk to them about a business that supports 1.2 million American jobs and over \$150 billion of wealth creation

across the U.S. economy and ask, "What do you think a President would do if they knew about an industry like that?" They'd all say the same thing folks all across the country would say. They'd say that the President ought to encourage that, ought to thank the people that work in that industry, and ought to promote that industry all across the world, a great American-manufactured product doing great things in America.

Yet, that industry, the general aviation industry, is used by our President as a rhetorical punching bag. Everywhere he goes, he talks about corporate fat-cat jet owners and those rich, wealthy people flying around in corporate airplanes.

Well, I know what this industry does. I came from this industry. I know precisely who these people are. When you use language like that and you talk about an American manufacturing industry in that way, you're talking about welders, you're talking about union mechanics, and you're talking about all the support people that work at fixed-base operations all across the country. You're talking about good, hardworking Americans, not corporate fat-cat jet owners.

Yet this President continues in the same way that he has. I had hoped that I wouldn't have to come back and talk about it again, but I anticipate that tonight, from this very Chamber, we'll hear about those same corporate fat-cat jet owners yet again.

The general aviation industry doesn't ask for a handout, and it doesn't need what Detroit received. It only asks that a President acknowledge and recognize the importance of this industry. It creates aircraft that are used by small businessowners all across the Nation to get to places they need to be. Every week, I fly on commercial aircraft from here back to Wichita, Kansas. It's no easy task. If you want to get to two or three of your suppliers or four or five of your customers in a day located all throughout the heartland, the most efficient tool to use to do that is a general aviation airplane.

And, of course, we know the President understands that, Mr. Speaker. He flies around in the nicest personal aircraft in the history of the world, actually built in Wichita, Kansas. And government employees use general aviation aircraft to travel all around the country. They do so because it is an efficient means of conducting their business.

Now, when the President talks about these corporate fat-cat jet owners, he's doing so because he says he wants to close a loophole, he wants to generate more money coming to Washington, D.C., and he talks about this subsidy. We looked long and hard to find out what subsidy it was he was referring to. Frankly, we think it is a depreciation schedule—a depreciation schedule—something that every asset in America is subject to. Yet, somehow,