

A TEST FOR DEMOCRATS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from the District of Columbia [Ms. NORTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this evening to appeal to good sense and good government and accommodation consistent with principle on my side and on the other side. Today there have been requests to the GOP leadership to consider that AFDC checks are due to go out with no one to send them out, to consider that the District of Columbia Government is up and running without the necessary authority. One of the leaders offered that in the State of California it was not clear that Medicaid bills could be paid.

On the Democratic side, occasionally I have heard what the other side has become more closely identified with. That is a kind of all or nothing response. I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, my heart is with the all or nothing response, because my largest employer is the Federal Government and its Federal employees in my own district who are being penalized as they sit home waiting to be called back to work on an involuntary furlough. But at least my Federal employees have been promised by the majority that they will be paid.

What promise has been made to children on AFDC that they will be paid before Christmas or that those on Medicaid will be paid before Christmas and, God help us, that the Nation's Capital will be standing before Christmas?

It is time for cool and mature heads to consider what is at stake. This is a real test for my side of the aisle, I must say, for we have gotten up consistently this year to speak for the poor, to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. I do not see how it would be possible for us to go home for Christmas and tell people that we had said that, if it all does not come through, then no way AFDC will come through, no D.C. will come through, no Medicaid will come through. In that case we have adopted the tactics of the other side.

Both sides need to step back. I appreciate, frankly, that the majority is willing to consider relieving those most in need of relief by some kind of special CR and have only said that this should not be the subject of great contention. This is a test for my side. Do you mean it or not, or is it only the Members of Congressional Black Caucus who mean it or the Hispanic Caucus who mean it, or the women who mean it, or do all the Democrats mean it? Do the Republicans mean it? Can we put aside as Christmas dawns our rancor to say we do not want to go home, and say to poor children on welfare, I am sorry, your check will come sometime in the future?

For us, a missed check may get us over. For people on welfare, a missed check means no food and no shelter for far too many. For the District of Columbia, it is a shameful day when we

have abandoned our constitutional responsibility and said to the District, well, we will reach out and get you when we can. Meanwhile, you are on your own.

Eighty-five percent of the money up here that we cannot get out because no appropriation has been passed is money raised in the District of Columbia from District taxpayers. There is a moral obligation, especially on these three issues, not to say all or nothing, not to get up and make some kind of vein motion knowing it will lose and, therefore, toss us all out.

There is a moral obligation on this side and this side to say, at the very least, we will call a truce when it comes to poor children on welfare who will not be fed and might be put out on the street before Christmas. We will call a truce when it comes to whether or not 600,000 people in the District of Columbia will have a government that is open and collecting trash and doing what government must do for people to keep going. We will call a truce when it comes to Medicaid. Is that what we want? It is not what we want. But if we have gotten the majority to understand that they must consider that, how can we pull back now?

It is a test and we must look at each and every one of us to see whether any of us causes this test to be failed. We must take it into account. If, after all, we have had to say about children and about the poor, we are willing, we are willing to stand here and allow checks to be missed for them, it is a test. Either we mean it or we do not. Whose principles are these? Who do we speak for? Can we pass the test?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. COLLINS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. COLLINS of Georgia addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. MARTINI] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. MARTINI addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

BUDGET NEGOTIATIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. GEKAS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GEKAS. Mr. Speaker, there is not a dime's difference between the two major political parties, was the observation of a political writer some years ago. I think that that description can be in a broader sense applied to the negotiations that are now taking place even as we speak and which have so much to do with the eventual outcome of the cherished balanced budget.

Why do I say there is very little difference in applying it to the current negotiations? If we would recall only in a brief recent history, the President of the United States, when he was candidate Clinton, offered a tax cut and said that, when he became President, he would make certain that the middle class would at his hands receive a middle class tax cut, much needed tax cut.

When the current negotiations began, one of the big issues was whether or not we should have a tax cut. So it seems that both parties, the Republicans, who want this tax cut and who have promised it in the Contract with America, have matched the President, who offered it when he was candidate Clinton in the 1992 elections. So has not the issue of tax cuts been resolved once and for all? Should not the American people expect a tax cut?

If they have agreed on that, what are they arguing about with respect to whether or not there should be a tax cut? President Clinton, after he became the Chief Executive, criticized the Republican tax cut as being unworthy of consideration for one reason or another. Yet he has proposed a tax cut. Now let us skip over to the other big element in the negotiations: Medicare reform.

The Republicans are being excoriated on an hourly basis by the opposition on their daring to try to slow the growth of Medicare. Will we not recall, Mr. Speaker, that it was the President and the President's people who first brought that consideration before the public by offering, in the 1993 session, 1993, the first year of that session, a plan to slow the growth of Medicare? So now the second largest issue which is on the table in these present negotiations is also one on which the major parties show that there is not a dime's worth of difference between them.

The President's people want the Medicare growth to slow. The Republicans offer as part of the balanced budget the slowing of the growth of Medicare. What is left to negotiate? It seems to me that all that is left is proportions of those two elements. We ought to be able to settle it.

My gosh, I would be willing to do anything to have the President actually agree to the balanced budget. Maybe we could offer the President, look, Mr. President, perhaps we, the Republicans, would offer you, you take your choice. Take the Medicare proposals that are offered by the Republicans, and we will give you your tax cut. That way both parties, both sides of the table will have earned something on which they both agree.

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They both want a tax cut, they both want Medicare reform. The President now takes the Republican version of Medicare, and we give him his version of a tax cut.

I know that that will not work, but the point should be made clear to the American people that both sides are

saying the same thing in different ways and that neither side should be accorded more credibility than the other.

I hope that the President begins to reduce his rhetoric against the Republicans who want the same thing he does, and I hope that the Republicans will understand that a tax cut that is offered by the President is not out of consideration altogether. Someplace we should have both a tax cut and Medicare reform.

One final point, Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge here and now that we Republicans have failed the public-relations war to make clear to the American people why we seek a balanced budget, because every time we say we want this cold steel unattractive item called the balanced budget, we are met by the opposition who say, "What are you doing to the children, the orphans, to the disabled," and all of that. They win that battle, but the balanced budget that we seek will bring an era of prosperity in which all the needs of the American people will be met, and the balanced budget that the Republicans seek here and to which the President has agreed over 7 years will reduce the chaos that we have in this country and all the segments of the society.

BASING THE BUDGET ON ITS MERITS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota [Mr. VENTO] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, I take this time to comment on the events concerning the budget and the controversy that has engulfed the Congress and the Nation concerning it.

First and foremost I must say that I think that the contributions, the focus this year and the focus in the past campaign, which was largely due to efforts in 1994 on the part of the Clinton, the Bush, and the Perot factors to focus on a balanced budget, was a good focus for our Nation. I think that that is a desirable goal. In fact I think that in 2 years in the programs that were passed have actually moved us in that direction, probably not as dramatically as some would want, but they have moved us in that direction. But I think that it is very important, as we move toward trying to resolve the budget deficits on an annual basis, and in the long range we hopefully can get there, and I hope and I think that that is possible, I think we have to look also at the fact of what happens in terms of the balance of the programs that we have. Achieving a balance in terms of no annual deficits is important, but we also have to recognize that there is a human deficit that could develop and that is developing in our Nation today as we look at the disparities in incomes and wages that people earn and the unwillingness today in this Congress, largely by the majority party, the Republican majority, my friends, that they are not willing to move on the

minimum wage. I think that we ought to do that, try to address that. More importantly, I think we ought to be working to empower workers and to give them the skills, and the education and the ability in training and skills they need, as I said, so that they can be more productive workers, so that they can earn better wages.

But, Mr. Speaker, as we look at the events that have happened here, the controversy that is going on with regards to plans and schemes to try and achieve a balanced budget, I would just want to remind my colleagues that, having served here through the 1980's, this is not the first plan that we have had with good intentions to balance the budget, no, not at all. In fact I think, as has been mentioned on the floor by both Republicans and Democrats, both President Bush and President Reagan had sought and, of course, pledged their fidelity to a balanced budget, that they were going to attain it sometime in the future. In spite of the fact that that was the goal, and I think many in Congress, some in Congress, with regards to the Gramm-Rudman I, Gramm-Rudman II, they all had plans to achieve a balanced budget. So I think that they had 4-year plans, 5-year plans, but the fact is that what happened is that events in the economy overtook those plans. I think sometimes they were premised on unrealistic tax and unrealistic policy and program changes that did not achieve that, but, too, notwithstanding that, the other major factors, I think, are some of the unforeseen things that happened in the economy.

I note that one of the—throughout this week one of the accomplishments, or goals, or the basis for the balanced budget and the achievement of it is the suggestion that somehow interest rates are going to go down, that that is going to be a big accomplishment. Well, I would suggest modestly to my friends that the Congress of this country does not completely control the economy. We do have a free economy and a global basis. We do not control that economy, nor should we. I do not think that we should. I think we can have an impact on it. Whether it is going to be as dramatic and positive as what my colleagues believe I would very much question. So I think that most of us that have served in this body understand that we are going to have to address this issue of trying to achieve a balance each year. Each year we are going to have to take incremental steps.

Having a plan; well, that is very good. Trying to do this within a certain period of time, 4 years, 5 years, 7 years I think is probably more realistic than trying to do it all at once where we would cause a catastrophic impact on our economy in terms of its performance. But I must say that while we strongly disagree, I strongly disagree with many of the elements that have been put into the reconciliation bill, which is this year's, this 7-year pro-

gram to in fact try to achieve a balance, because I think while it might indeed balance the budget at the end of that given the—if the economic predictions were to hold out, which I think would not hold out, not because of any bad faith, but simply because of the nature of our economy; but I think the programs inherent in that, that make the cuts, that make the changes, are inherently, are inherently unfair.

I think the premise of a balanced budget that is going to work, the programs that are going to work, is going to have to be shared sacrifice. When you start out with half of the reductions taking place in Medicare and Medicaid, and start out with putting in a large tax cut, distributed in an unusual way to those that have higher incomes, I think you start out with a bad premise.

Now the fact is that—the fact is with regard to that type of budget—it simply is not going to do it, it is not fair, it is not going to get the support of the President, and it should not receive the support of the President.

So I would hope that this week we—if you cannot solve it on the merits, I think it is wrong to try to push this down the throats of the American people based in terms of the annual appropriations bills. You have to sell it on the merits. It has failed on the merits, so now we are trying something different, and that is trying to cut off the appropriations in November, and again now in December and through the new year.

So I would hope my colleagues would consider that and consider my words in terms of the decisions they make in the weeks ahead.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington [Mr. METCALF] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. METCALF addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

COMMENTARY ON BOOKS AND MOVIES IS IMPORTANT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. HUNTER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, before I get into my subject, let me just comment briefly on what my colleague just stated in respect to the balanced-budget negotiations. He mentioned, the last thing he mentioned, were the tax cuts, and you know I have looked at the tax cuts, the \$500-per-child tax credits, and I do not think that that is a strange tax cut, and that is, by far, the biggest amount of money that is manifest in the Republican package. That says that you get \$500 credit per child.

Now that means, if you are a person who is a working person who only pays today \$1,500 in tax liability, you have three children, at \$500 apiece your tax