

bankruptcy and there is a demonstrable ability to repay some of the debt, even if not all of it, even if only a small proportion of it, that that moral obligation is in the forefront, they should be given the opportunity and, yea, they should be mandated to repay some of that debt.

So we have a formula that would go into place; and when we determine that after all the bills are lined up and a person's ability to pay is gauged, if we determine that, indeed, some, maybe 20 percent, of the total outstanding bills could be paid in 5 years, over a period of 5 years, then that individual should go into what we call Chapter 13 in order to enter into a plan whereby they can begin to repay some of the debt that they have built up over the years.

Now, many will blame the rash of credit cards that seem to be floating around and that, therefore, we ought to have credit companies withhold those credit cards so that the people will not be overcharging and overdebiting themselves. But we do not know if that is the answer or not. We will be looking into that. Is there a predator creditor in the picture? If so, we have to make sure that that does not happen.

But, by and large, it is still a question of personal responsibility. If I am given five or six credit cards, does that mean I have to use all of them, exhaust the limitations of all of them and knowingly put myself into debt? And, if I do, should I then be excused from paying the debt because of the temptation of having four or five plastics in front of me?

These are the questions that we have to pose and we have to answer as judiciously as possible in the forthcoming weeks. The way we have planned this is to end this debate.

#### ELDER ABUSE IN THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, over the past few weeks there have been several news reports about one of the most rapidly growing crimes in our communities. In fact, the Los Angeles Times and the Orange County Register have both reported a rise in physical and financial abuse against senior citizens.

As our population continues to grow older, we must be prepared to face the reality of these horrible crimes. As leaders in our communities, we must be prepared to deal with this growing problem of elder abuse.

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All too often seniors are taken advantage of in their own homes. Many perpetrators see senior citizens as easy targets who are both vulnerable and oftentimes unable to defend themselves. It is our responsibility to help protect

our elders from these criminals and to ensure that they feel safe within their own homes. I have been working closely with the local agencies, law enforcement agencies and the FBI to develop legislation that will effectively protect senior citizens from abuse.

H.R. 3181 does this. H.R. 3181, the Older and Disabled Americans Criminal Protection Act, authorizes shared housing agencies to run background checks on potential caretakers. Shared housing agencies give seniors the opportunity to remain within their own homes by matching them with a caretaker who cares for them in lieu of rent. Unfortunately, shared housing agencies do not have the proper tools to help ensure the safety of these senior citizens. H.R. 3181 gives shared housing agencies the proper mechanism to run State and FBI background checks on potential caretakers before placing them in the home of a senior citizen. The local police departments in my district along with the FBI have commended H.R. 3181 as a proactive effort to prevent crime. They recognize the growing problem of elder abuse and realize that my bill attacks these crimes by lessening the chance that they will ever occur. As people grow older, remaining in their homes should increase their level of comfort and security, not threaten it. I urge all of my colleagues to join me in this effort to protect our loved ones and to battle the growing problem of elder abuse. It is our responsibility to give our communities the proper tools to battle crime. Cosponsor H.R. 3181 and protect our senior citizens.

#### SOCIAL SECURITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I am going to talk for a few minutes about putting Social Security first. The challenge is, what the President can do and what Congress might do to give a higher priority for saving Social Security.

For review, this is a pie chart of Federal Government spending for this year. As we see, one of the largest pieces of the pie is Social Security that takes 22 percent of the total Federal budget. Social Security right now, sends out \$660,000 a minute in Social Security benefit payments. But by 2030, we are going to be spending almost \$6 million a minute for Social Security benefit payments. An 866% increase.

That represents part of the problem. The fact that there are relatively fewer workers paying their Social Security taxes to finance these increasing benefits represents the other part of the problem. It is probably one of the most challenging problems facing Congress and the White House. Yet politicians in Washington have avoided dealing with

this very important issue because of the potential political demagoguery. We have to deal with the hard facts of how we are going to make Social Security continue for those that are now retired, for those that are going to retire in the near future, as well as our kids and our grandkids.

Let me just give my colleagues a quick review. In 1935, the Social Security system was devised and passed into law. It has always been a pay-as-you-go program. In other words, existing workers pay in their taxes and those taxes are immediately sent out in benefit payments to existing retirees. So it is sort of a Ponzi game, sort of like a chain letter. Early retirees made out very well. Taxes started out as 1.5 percent of the first \$3500 of payroll. Now it is 12.4 percent for the employee and the employer's share for the first \$65,000. Over the year we have continued to increase taxes on workers. In fact these taxes have been increased 36 times since 1971.

This next chart shows the dilemma for Social Security. The red part represents how much in debt Social Security is going to be in the future. If nothing is done, eventually Congress must provide an additional \$400 billion a year to cover promised benefit payments. This little blue blob on the top left is the short-term surplus that is in the Social Security trust fund. Congress supposedly fixed Social Security in 1983. What they did is substantially increase taxes on workers. But this fix was short-lived. By 2011 there will again be a cash shortage. Dorcas Hardy, a former Social Security Administrator, is estimating that we are going to run short of money as early as 2005. But even in the scenario of 2011, what does Congress do to come up with the money to meet their obligations of paying back the \$600 billion borrowed from the trust fund. Well, Congress can cut spending someplace else, they can increase taxes like they have been doing for the last 40 years every time Social Security was a little shy. They can borrow more money from the public and disrupt some of the downward pressures on interest rates that we have achieved so far.

I think it is important, and just for a minute, allow me to say that we do not have a balanced budget. We are not going to have a balanced budget this year, next year, any year for the next 5 years of the President's budget, because every year all the surplus coming into the Social Security trust fund is used to balance the budget. So every year, the national debt increases between \$120 billion and \$170 billion. Every year. That is how much more the national debt is going to increase. I think it is interesting to note that one of the dilemmas of this Congress is the fact that now 15 percent of the budget is required to pay interest on the debt. So if we can pay some of that debt back and start paying down that debt, we reduce interest cost. Let me just briefly run through these charts.