

CONGRESS' MOST IMPORTANT TASKS: TO BALANCE THE BUDGET AND PAY DOWN THE DEBT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BALLENGER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. SMITH) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Washington. Mr. Speaker, as I went around my district during the August recess and listened to my constituents about what their primary concerns were, I heard the same statement, the same issue, over and over again in different forms but with the same message. That is that the single most important thing the Congress can do is balance the budget and pay down the debt.

As we head into September and October, the last 2 months of our session, that should be our number one priority. The budget is on the table. It is up for us to negotiate it and figure out what we ought to do with it. But the top priority in that process ought to be balancing the budget and paying down the debt.

We have an incredible opportunity to do this. When we think about where we were 5 or 6 years ago, the fact that deficits were over \$200 billion, approaching \$300 billion, with projections that they would get as high as \$500 billion, running the overall debt up over \$7 or \$8 trillion, to have us down to the point where we are just this close to balancing the budget is a tremendous accomplishment.

I rise today primarily to urge this body to not snatch defeat from the jaws of victory as we negotiate this issue and all of the issues that have to do with government spending over the course of the next 2 months, let us stick to that goal of making sure that we balance this year's budget and get ourselves in a position to start paying down the debt.

There are a couple of issues that always challenge us on that. I think the biggest one is the so-called surplus. I saw ads on television over the break brought to us from Washington, D.C. talking about how there is a surplus in Washington. I hear this conversation continually.

One of the rules that I think we should pass in this body is to require all Members to accurately state the budget situation before they talk about any subject, any spending program, any tax cut. The budget situation is basically we have a \$5 billion debt or deficit for the year, the fiscal year that will end on October 1. In fiscal year 1999 we are looking at a \$5 billion deficit.

As I mentioned, that is a significant improvement, but it is still a deficit. All of those surpluses that we are talking about are projected out into the future. So let us not spend them before they actually show up, let us give an accurate picture of where we are at in the budget process, because if we go around telling people that we have

some \$6 trillion in surpluses, there is going to be momentum built to spend money. I think we need to give an accurate picture of where we are at fiscally.

Paying down the debt is the best thing we can do for this country. It can reduce interest rates, which will help business and individuals alike. All we need is the discipline to do it.

What I am asking in the next couple of months is that we actually do something historic and change the culture of this place. For too long people have looked to Congresspeople, or Congresspeople have thought this, anyway, and thought, the way I please my constituents is by passing out something to them, a program, a check, a tax cut, something. Whereas I think the single best thing that a Member of Congress can give to his or her constituents is a fiscally responsible, efficient government.

Let us make that the standard by which we judge our Members of Congress. Let us not do it program by program, check by check. Let us do it by the overall competence with which we run our government.

I will tell the Members, after having talked to my district and listened to my district for the last 3 years, there is a hunger for that type of leadership in this country. People want a Congress that talks to them straight about the fiscal picture, that performs their job in a responsible and efficient manner, does not simply come along and promise big, grand, high things for all the years to come. They are looking for that efficiency, for that responsibility.

As a Democrat and as a member of the New Democrat Coalition, I want my party, obviously, to be the one that gives it to them. But actually, my biggest hope is that both parties will recognize the desire for that and we will both give it to them, as we head towards the October 1 deadline for the next budget.

We have a great chance to get there. We have a strong economy, high growth, low unemployment, low inflation. We are headed in the right direction. I urge this body and my colleagues to do the work over the course of the next 2 months that gets us there, so we can all go back to our constituents and I think give them the most significant thing that any congressional body has given their delegation in years, and that is a balanced budget and a step towards paying down that huge Federal debt that many of us thought we would never have a chance to pay down.

Let us seize this opportunity and do what is right for the American people: balance the budget and pay down the debt.

THE SENATE GOP'S PROPOSAL FOR A 13-MONTH FISCAL YEAR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from

Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, there are some times when we pick up the paper and we cannot believe what we are reading. I am looking at the Washington Post. The article is called: GOP Seeks to Ease Crunch With a 13-month Fiscal Year.

I came over to this floor because I want to put my name on record right here and now against this. I will tell the Members why. This is *deja vu*, for me. I was in the Washington State legislature in 1972 when they did what we call the light bulb snatch. We took the first month of the next year and pulled it into this year and said, now we have 13 months of money to spend in 12 months. That is exactly what some brilliant theorist over in the other body has conceived of as a way of avoiding being honest about this budget.

What happened in the State of Washington was that ultimately we lost our bond rating, and when I became chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means in 1983, I had to raise taxes to pay off this 13-month so we could get our bond rating back. When I read that they are going to do it in the United States Senate, that Republicans, the party of fiscal responsibility, those people who are really close with our money, they want to give it all back to us, are now going to create a fictitious, that is the word they use, "By creating this fictitious 13th month, the lawmakers would be able to spend \$12 to \$16 billion more."

This is Alice in wonder land run by the Republican party. When the Committee on Ways and Means in the year 2001 is in Democratic hand and I am sitting there, I do not want to have to clean up a mess created by people who will not be honest about the budget process.

I just was in my district, like the gentleman from Washington before me. I went to a liberal church talking about violence, and we talked about a variety of things in a forum. I asked them, how many of you want a tax break? Not a single person raised their hand, out of 150 people. They began to talk about it, and what 90 percent of them wanted to do was to pay down the debt. But no, what we see in the Senate is we do not want to be honest about doing what the President said, pay what we need in social security first, then strengthen Medicare, and then deal with whatever else we have to deal with.

I personally think the American people are ready to pay down the debt. They all understand that when they get additional money and their credit card is at \$5,000, they do not go out and buy more, they pay down that credit card debt.

We have an enormous debt, and yet what we are doing here is like the county fair. There is a guy there with three walnut shells and a pea, under it