□ 1345

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. NUSSLE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H. Con. Res. 393.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BONNER). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Iowa?

There was no objection.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON THE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2005

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of Tuesday, March 23, 2004, and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the concurrent resolution, House Concurrent Resolution 393.

The Chair designates the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON) as Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, and requests the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) to assume the chair temporarily.

□ 1348

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 393) establishing the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2005 and setting forth appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2004 and 2006 through 2009, with Mr. MILLER of Florida (Chairman pro tempore) in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the concurrent resolution.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of Tuesday, March 23, 2004, the concurrent resolution is considered as having been read the first time.

General debate shall not exceed 6 hours, with 5 hours confined to the congressional budget, equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking member of the Committee on the Budget, and 1 hour on the subject of economic goals and policies, equally divided and controlled by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) and the gentleman from California (Mr. STARK).

The gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE) and the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT) each will control 2½ hours of debate on the congressional budget.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE).

Mr. NUSSLE. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the chance to come before the body to debate yet again the budget for this next fiscal year. Before I start with that debate, let me compliment my ranking member and friend, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT), on the way that we have moved this budget through committee and moved it to the floor. The gentleman from South Carolina will be offering a substitute budget tomorrow as part of this debate.

While people who are watching this are going to see us argue today, we are going to argue about priorities, we are going to argue about deficits, we are going to argue about taxes, we are going to argue about just about everything, it seems, but one thing we do not argue about is the importance of this process.

Those who are watching may wonder why it is we are going to be spending 6 hours of general debate over the budget. Let me tell you why. If you have ever built a house with your wife or your husband and you had to go visit the architect, you will discover very quickly why it is important you have a blueprint that you can agree on before the carpenters show up or the plumber or the heating and air conditioning people or the roofer or anybody else, because if the blueprint does not work, if it does not fit, if there is not agreement on that basic foundation, the rest of the process is not going to work very well. The carpenters show up to do their work, they do not have a blueprint, and what you have on your hands is a mess.

The reason that we have gone through this process since 1974, every year, is because we believe in the fundamental decision that is made as part of this budget for spending, for taxes, making so many decisions that flow from this process.

We are going to have some good-natured debate today. Democrats will be arguing with Republicans and Republicans will be arguing back. But when it comes right down to it, we believe in our country, but we believe that we need a blueprint, we believe in this process and as I said to start with, I thank the gentleman from South Carolina for his partnership in working through the process even though we have not come to a bipartisan agreement.

I would also like to thank our staff. When you are going from the beginning of the Federal budget and $2.4 trillion line items here and there, you have got to count on some good people. I want to thank them for the work they do in getting us to this point because, just like any good architect, they need the engineers behind them to make sure that the structure is sound. I want to thank our staff on both sides for the work that they do.

Even before the end of last year, we kind of had an idea of what the must-do list would be in writing this year's budget. It was already becoming very clear that this budget has got to get spending under control, and it had to begin the work of reducing our deficit. I heard that message from every Member, from our President and from just about every constituent that I visited with back home in Iowa.

It really did not matter where you went. People said, out in Washington, you're spending way too much money. Even worse than that, you're wasting a lot of money. It did not matter, almost regardless of the topic, regardless of the department, regardless of the program, people said you have to control spending.

Even the administration was clearly hearing the exact same thing. As far back as last July, the President of the United States was proposing that cutting the deficit in half within the next 5 years would be one of the most important cornerstones of the budget that he presented to Congress this year.

We all know and we take pause at a time like this to remember the extraordinary circumstances of the past few years. Our country has hardly ever seen the kind of difficulty that we have had to face during these past few years. We had a growth deficit in the economy that produced a slowdown, a recession, of 2000 and 2001. The economy was not growing. We had a growth deficit.

We learned painfully, as well, that we had extensive deficits in our defense and our homeland security. We knew that we were not protected as well as we could be or should be as a Nation, and we made immediate plans to improve that.

We also had a Medicare deficit. A 40-year program that our Nation's seniors had depended on had really failed to keep up with the times, and as a result, we had a deficit in the way that that program was providing help to seniors across the country, particularly with regard to prescription drugs.

All of these were large and important problems and challenges, and I doubt that anyone on either side would have recommended that we ignore them. In fact, no one did. We all decided the economy was important. We all decided Medicare was important. We all decided that security and homeland security and national defense were important. But in addressing them, we took large initiatives and the result was a budget deficit. We made deliberate decisions that drove us to borrow money in order to meet these short-term challenges.

Correcting that budget deficit and getting us back on a path to balance is our next major challenge, and it is one that this budget tackles. We had a growth deficit, a security deficit and a health care deficit that we have dealt with. Now we have to deal with the Federal budget deficit.

At the same time, however, this was not a green-eye-shade exercise. It is not just a matter of getting a bunch of numbers to add up. The budget also has to support an agenda that reflects our principles of governing, which is to advance our Nation's strength, growth and opportunity. I will briefly review each of these principles and then turn it over to colleagues from my committee who will discuss these even further.