future, is this the pattern of development that we want for our country? Do we want to live this way?

□ 1245

Increasingly, Americans from coast to coast, border to border are speaking out and suggesting that is not their desired approach. Citizens are taking matters into their own hands on State and local levels with initiatives to try and improve the quality of life. They know that there are better ways of spending our tax dollars, that just because we have failed in the past in comprehensive planning is no suggestion that we should not try and do a better job of planning in the future, and just because the government has not always been constructive in efforts that it has undertaken does not mean that there is not a role for the government to be a constructive partner in the future.

It does us no good to pretend that we do not have problems of growth and quality of life in our communities. The citizens know that that is the case. The evidence is overwhelming. Now is the opportunity for us, under the banner of making our communities more livable, to engage the government as a constructive partner, to plan thoughtfully for the future involving our communities, spending our infrastructure dollars more wisely and engaging in a new generation of environmental protection that is performance driven.

I look forward to the day when we can get away from the wrong turns of this debate and get back to a productive discussion of how we can work together to make our communities more livable.

IN SUPPORT OF REPEALING HOUSE RULE XXIII

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

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, today I will be introducing legislation to require a separate vote before we raise the debt ceiling.

A lot of my colleagues will ask, why is this legislation necessary? Because often we allow the practice of raising the debt ceiling, the debt limit, to continue without a recorded vote. It is hidden within the budget resolution and passes without notice and, of course, without a vote.

Initially, this rule was added in the 96th Congress by public law and was originally applicable to concurrent resolutions on the budget for fiscal years beginning on or after October 1, 1980.

The rule was amended in the 98th Congress to reflect the enactment into law of a new permanent rather than temporary debt limit. The rule ties a passage of a concurrent budget resolution to an increase or a decrease in the limit of the public debt.

Legislation to repeal Rule XXIII would simply force Congress to vote separately on any increase in the public debt limit. Repealing this rule would simply force a floor vote on an increase or a decrease in the public debt; and this is a positive move, I think, for all of Americans.

Again I pose the question: Why is this so important we have such a vote? If we do not pass and repeal this Rule XXIII, we will continue to raise the debt limit with no type of accountability.

I would like to share with my colleagues some statistics that I think will help them to understand the relevance of what I am talking about.

In 1994, the debt ceiling of the United States Treasury was about $49 billion, and we had a population then of about 132 million people. That is roughly about $370 per person. Our population today is about 276 million people, and our debt now is approaching $6 trillion. That is about $22,450 per person.

In the 58 years since 1940, the U.S. population has doubled. Yet the debt ceiling has risen to about 121 times its 1940 level.

Now, when we start to talk about almost $6 trillion, that kind of figure is beyond the understanding of most of us. If we put it in inches, it is the distance from the earth to the sun. In terms of the population of all of the earth, it is about $1,000 for every person. It is a huge amount of money.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues know, House Rule XXIII stipulates, ''upon the adoption by Congress of any concurrent resolution, the enrolling clerk of the House of Representatives shall prepare an engrossment of a joint resolution, increasing or decreasing the statutory limit on the public debt.''

In other words, simply passing a budget subsequently raises the public debt limit. There are no votes on the matter, no floor debates, no nothing. Rule XXIII simply states that a vote for the budget ''shall be deemed to have been a vote in favor of'' raising the public debt limit.

It is way too easy here today and far too painless for us on the House floor to raise this public debt. It should not be easy, and it should not be painless, and we should have full debate. In fact, it should be very difficult; and, at the very least, it should be a publicly debated matter with a record vote.

So, Mr. Speaker, to remedy this situation I have this legislation which I will be dropping this morning; and I urge all of my colleagues to support it and just to call my office if they would like to be a cosponsor.

PHONEY POLITICAL DEFINITION OF ''BALANCED BUDGET''

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

Mr. METCALF. Mr. Speaker, we have all heard that we have now done it. We have balanced the budget. We have solved the deficit problem. Lots of talk. No more deficits. Now we have a surplus. Lot of talk. How should we spend it? How should we spend it? Well, we could have tax cuts. We could beef up Social Security. We could beef up existing programs. Several things.

Let us get back to reality, back to the cruel facts. We have a surplus only by using a political definition of ''a balanced budget.'' This definition was designed by the Democrats when they were in the majority to mask the size of the deficit. To our discredit, when we took over control of the Congress, we continued to use a phoney political definition of when the deficit is balanced. And the Republicans continued it, and that is wrong.

From September 30th, 1997, to September 30th, 1998, that is the last fiscal year, the 1998 fiscal year, an honest report showed that that was the first year we said we had a balanced budget. But an honest record shows that we had a $22 billion deficit in that first year that we balanced the budget. Well, we cannot do both. In fact, the balanced budget was a political definition; and we still do have a deficit.

However, we are on target to balance the budget. Maybe this year. I hope we make it. I am not sure we will. But certainly we are on target for the near future.

Now, as people are lining up now as to how to spend the surplus, whenever it happens, there are several things. Safe Social Security is topmost on the list. But any major talk of the surplus that we will have in a few years must include pay down the debt. We must pay down the debt.

We are paying huge amounts of interest every year on that huge debt. In fact, it amounts right now to about $270 billion a year in interest. If we can start paying down that debt, then we can lower the interest payments, which gives us more money to pay down the debt, which lowers the interest payments further, and soon we could have enough money to do the job we are supposed to do properly without the kind of things that we see happening now.

So all I am saying, the point of my talk is, this is the time to pay down the debt just as soon as possible. Start paying on it, just a little bit.

As I mentioned, the fiscal year that we first said we balanced the budget we went further in the hole $22 billion. I called up the Treasury Department and I said, how much does the United States owe on that particular day, September 30, 1997? And they told me. And I said, how much did we owe on September 30, 1998? And they told me. And I used to be a math teacher and I can subtract, even if they are big numbers up in the billions. We over spent by $22 billion in the first year that we claimed to have balanced the budget.

Let us have honest accounting and let us be careful to get into the position of a surplus and then pay down the debt.

IN OPPOSITION OF AFRICA GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

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

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to oppose H.R. 434, the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act. The more accurate name would be the NAFTA for Africa Act.

H.R. 434 does little to improve the lives of people in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, there are no binding labor, environmental, human rights or other public interest provisions in this legislation but plenty of measures to ensure easy access to the region's human and material resources for U.S. corporations.

I understand the frustration of Africa's supporters. We have seen our government side too often with the worst dictators in Africa, respond all too slowly to the evil of apartheid, and turn its back on the victims of genocide in Rwanda.

More pertinent, we have seen Members of Congress who are the staunchest supporters of NAFTA for Africa vote again and again and again against increased aid for that continent.

But a bad bill, Mr. Speaker, is worse than no bill. Last session, this Congress did the right thing in defeating fast track not once but twice, defeated the efforts of some to extend NAFTA to the rest of Latin America. Unfortunately, H.R. 434, NAFTA for Africa, would undo that victory. It completely ignores the all-important test that we established in our fight against fast track: No trade agreement unless labor and environmental problems are written into the core agreement. This bill puts us back where we started.

The supporters of H.R. 434 claim the bill contains labor rights and standards because some of the bill's trade provisions are based on the Generalized System of Preferences, GSP. In fact, GSP labor rights provisions are hampered by weak enforcement mechanisms.

Under GSP, the President merely has to certify that the affected country is ''taking steps'' towards the protection of labor rights. This vague language has allowed notorious labor rights abusers like Guatemala to be certified as eligible for benefits.

Moreover, GSP labor rights cannot be enforced through private action, meaning that when a country is clearly not taking steps to protect worker rights but nonetheless is certified as doing so, no legal action can be taken by U.S. citizens to force presidential decertification. The only alternative is a time-consuming petition process which ultimately results in the rejection of the petition in every case with no right of appeal.

Finally, GSP labor rights provisions impose no obligations on corporations, just on governments. Corporations that violate worker rights will continue, as they have, to enjoy market access benefits just as long as the country in which they are operating in has been certified as eligible for benefits.

A recent amendment to H.R. 434 offered by my colleague, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. GEJDENSON), placed labor rights on the list of criteria that African countries are supposed to meet in order to obtain benefits under this bill. While this amendment was a step in the right direction, it simply does not provide sufficient protection for workers.

There is no labor enforcement mechanism. Instead, the well-being of African workers rests on the President's determination that the country is making progress toward respecting labor rights.

The amendment that I offered in the Committee on International Relations markup attempted to correct this problem by adding strong enforcement language and giving U.S. citizens the right to challenge the President's country eligibility determination in U.S. district court. Unfortunately, because the backers of H.R. 434 opposed this amendment, it was ruled out of order by the chair.

We need trade agreements that act as if people mattered. Considering the devastating effects that NAFTA has had on Mexico's small, independent manufacturing and retail enterprises and on its small agricultural producers and on the country as a whole, it seems less than generous to expand this regime to Africa. It is certainly not in the interest of the African people. It is certainly not in the interest of the American people.

This Congress should not inflict a rejected and backward trade model on the continent of Africa. I urge my colleagues to support this bill, to support the Jackson trade bill for Africa which includes unambiguous and meaningful enforcement mechanisms to protect the rights and the well-being of African workers.

□ 1300

WHO DECIDES: WASHINGTON OR YOU?

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

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I am not certain how many Americans heard well the President's recent speeches, but his comments spoke volumes about his views of freedom. It also addressed the great political debate going on in this country today which has been going on since 1994, and it can be summed up on a bumper sticker: ''Who Decides, Washington or You?''

The President, in Buffalo shortly after the State of the Union address, was discussing the surplus, a huge surplus, nearly $5 trillion over the next 15 years, to be collected by the government above and beyond what we need to spend to continue the government, and this is what he said: ''We could give it all back to you and hope you spend it right, but——''

That says volumes. The President then proceeded to imply he really cannot give it back to the American people because government makes wiser choices than they do. He does not trust the American people to make these choices on their own behalf. He has embraced in whole cloth, it seems to me, the theme of the 1958 book by John Kenneth Galbraith entitled, ''The Affluent Society.''

The entire theme of that book is this: It is not that Americans have too little, they have too much, that they make bad choices with their dollars, and it is the obligation of an educated government to tax those dollars from them and make better choices on their behalf. Who decides, Washington or you?

That is the debate we are in. That is the debate on taxes. Looking at nearly $5 trillion in surpluses over the next 15 years, the President proposed 40 new mandatory spending programs, adding new discretionary spending programs and not one penny for tax relief. Indeed, it does not even protect Social Security because we are increasing the debt to Social Security by about $1 trillion over 10 years that the government will owe it.

In a recent book entitled, ''The Vision of the Anointed,'' Thomas Sowell points out that for so long as we have had free people, we have had among them those anointed with the vision of how to spend their money, how to make their choices for them.

That is the debate we are in. The President would like to shape a future with your money for our children and grandchildren that is warm and secure and fair. Our side says, ''We don't know how to do that.'' I could not satisfy 10 percent of America because everyone comes to the table with different hopes and dreams and aspirations. I can shape a future that my daughter would love and my son would hate.

So our side says, no, leave those choices in your pockets; and you and 270 million other Americans, acting on your own behalf hundreds of times a week, will shape the future. We trust you to shape that future. We believe in the Ronald Reagan principle: It is not the function of government to bestow happiness. That is your job. And if we can get the government out of your way and let you have more freedom and more opportunity, you will choose a future that most of America will not only enjoy but thrive in.

We would like to do that beginning right now by letting you keep more of what you earn, not collecting $300 billion a year more than it takes us to