

farm families from Arkansas. Even if a disaster bill was passed today, it would be too late for these farm families and many others who are trying desperately to avoid bankruptcy. Every day that passes without providing disaster assistance, more families are auctioning off their farms.

I am a cosponsor of H.R. 3702, an agriculture disaster assistance bill which was introduced in September of last year.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here tonight urging the Republican leadership to give us a hearing and a vote on this bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURGESS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### CONGRESSIONAL CONSTITUTION CAUCUS' CONSTITUTION HOUR—CONSENT DECREES

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise to claim my time out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. I do thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tonight, I come here as we do each week as members of the Constitutional Caucus come here on a regular basis to present a series of 5-minutes following the day's activities and the day's votes. We do so tonight to focus on really one of the most important and significant issues dealing with our Constitution and threats to our constitutional rights as well.

Before I do that, let me just say this, that I wish to show my utmost appreciation earlier this evening for the majority whip coming out and joining us to discuss a piece of his legislation that goes to this very fundamental issue and also for his efforts to work to protect those basic liberties of every American.

The threats that I am referring to is our Founding Fathers' principles of self-government and the jeopardy that comes in the form of consent decrees. For those of you who are not familiar with exactly what consent decrees are, in essence, they are simply this. They are judicial actions that are entered into between opposing parties, in this case by the party bringing the action, private individuals, usually, and State or local entities. State or local governments are basically compelled at the end of a court case to enter into these agreements. They are then, therefore, called consent decrees. In their name and on their face, they sound innocent enough. In reality, they simply can be because they are protecting rights of some sort or the other. But they can

also have in the long-term a cumulative effect, a threat to the legislative process and also to the hardworking American taxpayer who supports it as well.

These decrees have resulted in judges engaging themselves in affairs outside of their constitutional job description, outside of the very framework of the protections that we have established in our documents of checks and balances. I say that their intents are noble and good in many cases, and that is to protect our rights, but by engaging in such blatant activism, they are actually threatening self-government itself, rights outside what our Founding Fathers intended.

I agree with what the majority whip had indicated before. This is not simply a case of dealing with judicial activism because it really goes beyond that and does not engage in that at all times. It is an understanding that our Founding Fathers had, and we have reminded those who have listened to these programs, listened to us coming to the floor each week to discuss constitutional issues, that we must be very mindful always of protecting those rights set forth by the Fathers, especially the rights of States as established in the 10th amendment. All rights not specifically delegated to the Federal Government are retained by the people and the States, respectively.

Consent decrees, therefore, can place an undue burden on the States and local officials. They can last literally for decades, long after the local officials or State officials who may have been involved with those cases in the first instance have long since left office. Newly elected officials may have come into place to find they are bound by those previously entered into decrees. They are now unable to place in policies that could rectify the situation, unable to put in policies that could solve the situation for future generations, and unable to put in policies that basically could save the taxpayers money at the end.

Judges have already tried to engage in other ways in activism, obviously of taking away our rights as we have discussed before, taking away our property rights and the democratic right to construct our marriage institutions.

But consent decrees go one step further. They chip away at the authority of our local officials, allowing judges and not the people who were democratically elected to represent them. This is not just a decision and opinions of Members of Congress. The Supreme Court has also spoken on this. In fact, in a unanimous decision back in 2004, the U.S. Supreme Court called for limiting these types of decrees in the case of *Frew v. Hawkins*. The court proclaimed there that Federal consent decrees could encroach on State and local power. They continued that these decrees may "improperly deprive future officials of their designated and executive powers." They may also lead "to Federal court oversight of State pro-

grams for long periods of time even absent an ongoing violation of the law."

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons, I am more than proud to support my good friend from Missouri and his legislation, H.R. 1229, the Federal Consent Decree Fairness Act. This is legislation that would provide relief to newly elected mayors and other State officials who inherit these overly broad and outdated decrees. It would limit their ability to govern. And it would be able to respond to priorities of their constituents for the future.

This legislation will put term limits on existing decrees while setting out guidelines for the future. We must ensure that they are limited in nature, not opening the doors for future violations. Again, I commend the gentleman from Missouri.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. EMANUEL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### RED INK CONTINUES TO PILE UP

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to reclaim my time and to address the House for 5 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentlewoman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, the red ink continues to pile up, both in our budget deficit and in America's trade deficit. The Commerce Department reported on Friday that the trade deficit is rising again, pushed up by oil prices and a flood of more imports from China. With oil imports over \$70 a barrel, we know this trade deficit is going to swell as the year proceeds. The Commerce Department reported that the gap between what the United States sells abroad and what it imports rose to \$63.4 billion in April, 2.5 percent higher than the March imbalance of \$61.9 billion. We know that the trade deficit in both February and March just fell a tad, but it had hit an all-time high this January of \$66.2 billion. And while economists noted that the April deficit was smaller than the \$65 billion that had been expected, it is still the sixth largest trade deficit on record.

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This is a chart that takes a look at what has been happening ever since this Congress unfortunately passed NAFTA back in the early 1990s, followed by permanent normal trade relations with China, and what could be normal about that? Every single year the red ink gets deeper.

Through the first 4 months of this year, the trade deficit is running 1.9 percent above the same period a year ago putting our country on track to