

asked to bear for our military occupations.

Ten billion dollars a month is a lot of money. That's the price tag for the privilege of continuing to wage a 10-year war against Afghanistan: \$10 billion a month. The American people who are writing that check have a right to ask and to get answers to some very important questions: Where is that money going, and what exactly is it accomplishing? What are we getting for our \$10 billion a month? Are we more secure here at home? Is the Afghanistan central government introducing the rule of law? Have we not already defeated al Qaeda? And so who are we fighting and why?

For \$10 billion a month, Mr. Speaker, our expectations as taxpayers, as Americans, and as Members of Congress, should be high. Is it too much to think that \$10 billion a month could buy a stable ally, an ally capable of standing on its own two feet, taking responsibility for its own security, and having respect for the rule of law? Instead, corruption and chaos are ruling the day in Kabul. Basic government institutions are failing to provide services. President Karzai has tried to establish a special court, in fact, for the purpose of stripping 62 members of Parliament of their seats. The financial system is teetering on the brink of collapse with the head of the central bank fleeing the country and accusing Karzai's regime of fraud and cronyism.

And just a few days ago, Mr. Speaker, a brawl broke out on the floor of the Afghan Parliament with one member throwing a shoe at another member when a motion was proposed to impeach President Karzai. For \$10 billion a month, is it not too much to ask that the Afghan Parliament not look like an episode of the "Jerry Springer Show"?

There is so much we could do with \$10 billion a month right here at home, especially at a moment when so many of our people are struggling and so many of our communities so badly need public investment, especially at a moment when the clock is ticking toward a catastrophic default on the national debt. I'm not suggesting that we ignore or that we run away from Afghanistan's deep-seated problems, but I believe we cannot begin to address their needs with a military solution. It will never work. It is time to reinvest at pennies on the dollar in Smart Security efforts, humanitarian and civilian aid, aid that will promote democracy, and economic support to address poverty and to rebuild infrastructure in Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, this is a moment and this is a time where we put our priorities in order, but it's not a job for our troops. They have served with unbelievable valor. Now it's time to bring them safely home and invest in a humanitarian way in Afghanistan.

DEBT CEILING SOLUTIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. OLSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, Congress has a very important decision to make very soon on whether or not to increase the national debt ceiling. Today, our national debt limit is a staggering \$14.3 trillion, and the President is seeking a \$2.2 trillion increase in our debt limit. An increase to our Nation's debt ceiling that is not accompanied by equal or larger spending reductions would be reckless and arrogant.

Speaker BOEHNER was right when he said, "It's true that allowing America to default would be irresponsible, but it would be more irresponsible to raise the debt ceiling without simultaneously taking dramatic steps to reduce spending and reform the budget process."

This debate is a unique opportunity to achieve significant and serious spending reforms in Washington and to prove to the American people that their employees, the Members of the United States Congress, are listening to them.

I believe this is our best chance for the foreseeable future to obtain substantial and credible long-term deficit reductions, to reform the way Washington spends taxpayer dollars, and save America from ruin.

Elections matter. Last fall changed the debate here in Washington. We may not be cutting spending as fast as some of us prefer, and quite frankly, I have been frustrated by the pace. But the discussion has shifted to how much should we cut, not how much should we spend. This distinction is critical to getting our Nation's fiscal house in order and one that has been driven by conservatives in the House.

House Republicans have developed a three-fold "cut, cap and balance" strategy that includes deep spending cuts, enforceable spending caps and a balanced budget amendment with strong protections against Federal tax increases. These proposals will ensure that the Federal Government adheres to the same parameters that families and businesses live with every single day.

The time for irresponsible Federal spending is over. With each passing day, our Nation's fiscal problems only compound, leaving our children and grandchildren with a larger legacy of debt. My colleagues on the other side have advocated an increase to our debt with no strings attached. They continue to stand for business as usual right here in Washington, DC. But we cannot ignore the problem, nor can we simply tax our way out of this mess.

Furthermore, in the event we fully reach the debt ceiling, we cannot trust the White House to prioritize our debt payments, nor can we trust the administration not to default on our obligations. The American people must remember that if we default on our debt, the executive branch would have full

control over what programs get cut, not Congress.

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Mr. Speaker, the only resolution to this problem is to secure trillions in spending cuts and put our Nation on a solid fiscal path to financial sanity, and ensure a strong and prosperous future for our children and our grandchildren.

IMPROVING FEDERAL GRANT SOLICITATION PROCESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, each year, 26 Federal agencies award over half a trillion dollars in grant funding. Earlier this year, Congress significantly changed the manner in which the Federal Government allocates funding. In the past, State and local governments and nonprofit organizations spent a great deal of time trying to persuade individuals Members of Congress to earmark funds to support local projects.

While debate will no doubt continue on the value of congressionally directed spending, the reality is that, at least for the time being, the days of earmarks are over. With a ban on earmarks, a greater emphasis will now be placed on competitive grants, whereby applicants from across the Nation compete for funding made available for different purposes.

In theory, a larger role for competitive grants in the Federal appropriations process holds promise. Under a well-administered grant competition, an application is judged on its merits. In practice, however, an increased emphasis on competitive grants will only improve the overall process if the Federal Government announces and publicizes grant opportunities in a clear and organized manner. Grant seeking will not be a true meritocracy if the process of identifying, applying for, and obtaining Federal grants is clouded in mystery and confusion and understood only by paid experts.

In 1999, Congress created a Web site, grants.gov, which allows applicants to search and apply for grants online. But much more needs to be done to make the grant solicitation process as transparent and user friendly as possible.

Many of my constituents have expressed frustration with the manner in which the Federal Government makes grant opportunities known. Often, a potential grantee will seek to apply for needed funding only to learn that the deadline for the most relevant grant passed days or weeks earlier. In other instances, prospective applicants will search grants.gov, but become frustrated upon finding that they need to scroll through pages and pages of grant listings, some of which are outdated or have not been funded by Congress.

To address these problems, I recently introduced H.R. 2393. This bipartisan