

House, and I want to associate myself with the comments made by my colleague, the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. FOWLER).

But tonight I want to address this body with regard to something that is nonpartisan that requires bipartisan support, and that is asthma awareness.

This is Asthma Awareness Month, and I want to focus attention on the asthma epidemic in our country today. This is an epidemic that cannot be cured, but through better education and awareness, it can be a manageable part of one's life.

More than 14 million people in the United States have asthma, and of these, almost 5 million are children. One in every three children with asthma had to go to an emergency room because of an asthma attack in the past year.

Asthma is a problem among all races, but the asthma death rate and hospitalization rate for African Americans are three times the rate of white Americans. Asthma is a serious lung disease. Forty-one percent of all asthma patients, an estimated 6 million Americans, were hospitalized, treated in emergency rooms, or required other urgent care for asthma in the last year.

Madam Speaker, this Nation is falling far short of meeting new government guidelines for asthma care. Failure to meet these basic guidelines means that a generally controllable disease quickly spirals out of control. Asthma cannot be cured. Having asthma is a part of one's life. However, with proper medical care, one can control one's asthma and become free of symptoms most of the time.

But asthma does not go away. We must renew our commitment to our national goals for asthma care, goals established by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute at the National Institutes of Health.

These goals include:

No missed school or work because of asthma. Forty-nine percent of children with asthma and 25 percent of adults with asthma missed school or work due to asthma last year;

No missed sleep because of asthma. Almost one in three asthma patients, 30 percent, is awakened with breathing problems at least once a week;

Maintain normal activity levels. Forty-eight percent say that asthma limits their ability to take part in sports and recreation, 36 percent say it limits their normal physical exertion, and 25 percent say it interferes with social activities.

All too often the severity of asthma is ignored or goes undiagnosed. When this happens, adults as well as children find themselves rushing to the hospital and many times having to give up activities they love. They do not understand how treatable asthma is. We must increase awareness, education, and most of all, communication on how

to best control the disease and how to control those things that make asthma worse.

Proper asthma care is crucial. America needs better asthma education and treatment, and especially in the hardest hit inner cities. We must all work together as parents, teachers, and public officials to ensure that all Americans, especially our children, have a basic knowledge and understanding of how to diagnose and how to control asthma before it becomes a life-threatening condition. We should do no less.

#### A CRISIS IN AGRICULTURE, AND THE NEED FOR BUDGET REFORM

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

Mr. THUNE. Madam Speaker, agriculture is in incredible crisis. Earlier today we voted on a number of amendments to the agricultural appropriations bill, and the bill funds programs that are very important to my constituency, programs that provide credit, dollars for conservation, income support for our farmers and ranchers.

For that reason, I have been very frustrated as I have watched this process and the tactics that have been employed here on the floor to try and slow this process down. It is a bill that is important to me, it is important to those I serve, and so I would hope that we can move this bill forward in a timely way.

Even though the spending does not take effect until October 1, the next fiscal year, we need to get these appropriation bills done. It is the work that the American people sent us here to do.

I appreciate what the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. COBURN) is trying to do. I do not believe he is taking issue with the agriculture bill itself, with the spending in the agriculture bill, as much as he is with the process by which we accomplish our work here.

On that point, I believe he happens to be right. We need budget process reform here in Washington. This process is an embarrassment to the people of this country. It is an embarrassment to me, and it ought to be an embarrassment to every Member who serves here in the House or in the Senate.

There is a bias in the budget process toward higher spending. I want Members to think about what the current budget process has given us. We have \$5.5 trillion in debt, or \$20,000 for every man, woman, and child in America today.

In fact, people have a hard time grasping what \$1 trillion is. We are \$5.5 trillion in debt. If you started a business on the day that Christ was born and lost \$1 million every day, every day up until the present, you would not even have lost \$1 trillion. We are \$5.5 trillion in debt. That is what this budget process has gotten us.

The other thing it has gotten us is a \$1.7 trillion annual budget because of a Washington gimmick known as baseline budgeting, where every year we have increases that are built into the budget. Nobody else in America has to get the budget that way, but here in Washington, that is what we do.

The tax burden in this country is at the highest level since any time since 1945, where every American essentially works 2 hours and 51 minutes of every working day just to pay the cost of government.

Last fall we had a debate here as we got to the end of the year, and of course, as usual, we had not done our work. We had not completed the appropriations process, so everything was wrapped into this huge omnibus continuing resolution which was some \$600 billion, a bill most of us had not even seen, let alone read, done in the middle of the night with a handful of people, and we are asked to vote on it.

This is a process which begs and cries out for reform. We are the guardians here of the public trust in Washington. This is a national tragedy. The American people ought to get engaged on this issue, because there is nothing that we could do that would more fundamentally change the way Washington operates and the way the taxpayer dollars are spent than for us to reform the budget process.

The American people need to be engaged, because it is their money we are talking about. We go about it with the process that we have in place today, and frankly could make the argument that if we had the political courage to make the hard decisions we could get it down, and we could.

But the fact of the matter is that the process lends itself to the very worst instincts I think of all of us here in Washington. There is a bias towards higher spending.

There is a proposal on the table this year to reform the budget process. The gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE), this is a bipartisan bill, and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN) have come up with a proposal to reform the budget process. Last year I was a cosponsor of the bill of the gentleman from California (Mr. CHRIS COX) that would do the same thing.

But we need safeguards that protect the American people. We need to see that we have an emergency reserve contingency fund, so we do not end up at the end of every year having to come up with an omnibus emergency disaster bill and not get the process done or the bills done in a timely and orderly way.

We need to have some enforcement in the budget process, so that when we pass the resolution, that it is binding, not only upon us but upon the administration.

We need to have this debate about the budget earlier in the process, so we