

(Mr. CRAMER) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. TANNER) and many others. The leadership of the Blue Dog organization has been right on target and made me feel very comfortable in being a part of the membership. I have learned a lot as a new Member in looking at this budget.

And I want to thank the Blue Dogs for being consistent. To me that is very important. My father gave me some advice a long time ago. He said, "Don't reject an idea just because it is not your own." I think that is what we are coming down to here.

Mr. Speaker, as the budget discussions continue, I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to look at the Blue Dog budget framework as a workable fiscally sound solution. This budget framework shows that it is still possible to responsibly pay down the debt while providing critical funding for education and health care programs.

I am pleased to see that both sides are now focused on paying down the debt, something the Blue Dogs have supported from the very beginning. Under the Blue Dog plan, the debt reduction lockbox would be extended 10 years to save 100 percent of the Social Security and Medicare surpluses, plus half of the on-budget surpluses for debt reduction.

We owe it to our children to not squander the surplus but invest it into their future by paying down what we already owe. At the same time, this budget would suggest that 10 percent of the fiscal year 2001 surplus be divided between tax cuts, BBA relief, and discretionary spending. I have favored some of the tax cuts proposed this year, and I will continue to do so, but we must provide necessary funds for the problems we are now facing in health care and education.

In my district these are critical funds. In my district, for example, education funding is critical to providing our students, especially those with special needs, with the education they need to make it in the real world.

In my district, home health and rural health centers are the only point of access to health care for many people. Funding of these programs and providing them with BBA relief, which is included in the Blue Dog alternative, literally can mean life or death for these programs and the patients they serve.

In 1997, with the Balanced Budget Amendment, we asked our citizens to accept cuts to put us on the path to a fiscally secure future. Well, now we are fiscally responsible and we have a surplus. It is our duty to also use the surplus responsibly by investing in our kids' education and providing access to necessary health care for our citizens. The Blue Dog alternative best meets these goals.

It is not too late to come to agreement on a fiscally sound budget that

pays down the debt, gives tax relief, and provides for health and education. I ask my colleagues to use the Blue Dog framework and agreement to come to the end of this budget impasse. I hope that we all are reasonable and will come forward and be sure that we act responsibly on behalf of our citizens.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his contribution.

In closing, I would just say, Mr. Speaker, that we have taken this hour in good faith, in the spirit of which we have spoken. We believe that we have some ideas worthy of consideration, Mr. Speaker, and we hope that our colleagues will give them their just due.

#### HUNGER

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. NEY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, hunger is an issue that many in America would prefer to ignore, and I perhaps wish I did not have to speak on it. I have spoken on this before and have said many of the things I must repeat again.

The economy is soaring for some. In fact, it is good for most. Unemployment is at a 30-year low. Welfare rolls have been slashed. Still, every day in America, 31 million Americans, 31 million Americans, are either hungry or living under the specter of hunger. The economy is sinking for far too many of our citizens: Those who are hungry.

There is evidence of hunger in 3.6 percent of all households in America. Close to 4 million children are hungry. Fourteen million children, 20 percent of the population of children, live in food insecure homes. In food insecure homes, meals are skipped or the size of the meal is reduced. More than 10 percent of all households in America are food insecure.

Because there is such hunger and food insecurity, there is also infant mortality, growth stunting, iron deficiency, anemia, poor learning, and increased chances for disease. Because there is such hunger and food insecurity, the poor are more likely to remain poor and the hungry more likely to remain hungry.

It seems strange that we must fight for food for those who cannot fight for themselves. It really is time to stop picking on the poor. Less than 3 percent, less than 3 percent of the budget goes to feed the hungry. It is for those reasons that Congress should, Congress must pass hunger relief legislation. If we do, we can achieve several important goals: We will build on the bipartisan progress we made in 1998 with the passage of the Agriculture Research Act. In that act we restored some benefits for legal immigrants.

In legislation I have co-sponsored in this Congress, we restore food stamp benefits for all immigrants, including the working poor, families with young children, and needy seniors. With the Hunger Relief Act of 1999, we also seek to update the food stamp rules.

We change the vehicle limit so that families can retain a reliable car without losing food stamp benefits. We change the shelter cap, raising it from \$275 to now \$340 over the next 4 years, and then we index it to inflation. Finally, the Hunger Relief Act authorizes another \$100 million over 5 years for commodity purchases and food distribution.

With the will, we can pass this act this Congress. We cannot move from poverty to progress without a fair chance for all. We cannot prepare our children for the future if we insist upon policies that relegate them to the past. We cannot ensure the quality of life for every citizen if we fail to provide programs for all of our citizens. And we cannot protect and preserve our communities if we do not adequately provide the most basic commodity for living: Something to eat.

Nutritional programs are essential for the well-being of millions of our citizens. The disadvantaged, our children, the elderly, and the disabled, these are groups of people who often cannot provide for themselves and need help for their existence. They do not ask for much: Just a little help to sustain them through the day; just a little help to keep children alert in classes and adults to be productive in their jobs or as they search for jobs.

The Hunger Relief Act provides that help. Food for all is worth fighting for. And as we end this Congress, we have a chance to change this shocking and the scandalous situation. I am so proud to have joined 181 of my colleagues in the House and 38 Senators, Republicans and Democrats, in support of legislation that focuses on food and takes notice of this Nation's nutritional needs.

The Hunger Relief Act, H.R. 3192 in the House and S. 1805 in the Senate will help the one in ten families in our Nation who are affected by hunger. Mr. Speaker, let us pass this act before we end this Congress.

#### VICE PRESIDENT'S ECONOMIC PLAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARMEY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, a few of my colleagues will soon be joining me and we will be spending the next hour discussing the details of the Vice President's economic plan. Certainly during that period of time we will have a broad overview, but at this point I