CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—HOUSE
March 28, 2001

We need a clear, consistent policy, one that backs up diplomacy, international intelligence, international cooperation, national policies in reprisals, with the military readiness and forces to make them a sure and deadly deterrent.

One thing should be absolutely clear. If we make the decision to commit our troops overseas to an armed conflict, we must give them the means and support to win.

Flying over our soldiers is the American flag. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have died in battle under the Stars and Stripes. The flag is a symbol of freedom and democracy. It should be protected from desecration. I favor a constitutional amendment that would protect it from being defiled and degraded. Surely it is not too much to ask that the activities of service members be something special to me. That is why I think we should pass an amendment to protect the flag.

Let me close by saying something about our veterans. Congress today recognized their sacrifices. Today the House passed a budget which includes a 12 percent increase for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The budget calls for a $5.6 billion increase over last year's budget for the VA, including an additional $1 billion above that which was proposed by the administration. The funding increase is needed due to underfunding by the past administration.

I believe the increase will allow the Veterans Administration to begin to address a backlog in cases and to provide funding to cover unmet services for our Nation's veterans.

I also recently cosponsored legislation to improve outreach programs carried out by the Department of Veterans Affairs by more fully informing veterans of benefits available to them. The legislation would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to prepare an annual plan for the conduct of outreach activities to provide veterans and dependents information concerning eligibility for Department benefits, health care services, and application requirements when they first apply for any such benefit.

It is very important that we make our veterans aware of the assistance that is available to them. The bill is appropriately called the Veterans Right To Know Act, and I call upon my colleagues to support it.

Just last week the House passed the Veterans Opportunities Act of 2001. The legislation also seeks to inform service members of the benefits that are available. The bill requires that before an individual leaves the service, they are counseled and educated regarding the programs available to assist veterans. This program will help make service men and women more aware of the opportunities which are available to them in civilian life.

The legislation also expands the Veterans Administration's current work-study program and increases the maximum allowable annual ROTC award for benefits under the Montgomery GI bill. For the first time, veterans will be given financial support in pursuing education in the private sector. In today's world, the best technological training is not always in the traditional college setting.

I have also joined more than 70 of my colleagues in cosponsoring the Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2001. This is legislation that would allow retired individuals who suffer from a service-connected disability to receive their disability compensation without having it deducted from their military retirement pay. The plan is supported by the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Retired Officers Association, the Retired Enlisted Association, the Uniformed Services Disabled Retirees Support the Military Order of Purple Heart; also the Non-Commissioned Officers Association, the Jewish War Veterans, the National Association of Uniformed Services, AMVETS, and the Military Family Association.

For heaven's sakes, let us pass this too. It is essential to the vitality of American democracy, the most successful experiment in self-government in the world's history, that we remain vigilant of our freedoms and that we have the proper respect for our fellow citizens in the armed services. So I take this opportunity to offer my thanks to the men and women in uniform.

ARTWORK COMMEMORATING WOMEN IN THE CAPITOL COMPLEX

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CRENSHAW). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, during this women's history month, it is with great pleasure that I rise to announce that I have today introduced a resolution expressing the sense of this House of Representatives that artwork displayed in our Capitol, the upcoming Capitol Visitors Center and the office buildings of the House of Representatives should better represent the contributions of women to American society. I am pleased to be joined by 16 of my colleagues as original cosponsors and encourage all of our other colleagues to join in this effort.

Mr. Speaker, the majority of our Nation's residents are female. The mothers and grandmothers of America have carried life forward in our Republic now for over 2 centuries. Females, in the 2000 census estimates, by 6 million: 140 million women, 134 million men.

The statue of a woman called Freedom crowns the dome of our Capitol building. Sixty-four Members of the House and 13 Members of the Senate are now women. We pledge allegiance to a flag that was designed by a woman. Sojourner Truth was committed to freedom and the abolition of slavery in the mid-1800s. Rosie the Riveter symbolized the contributions of women to our victory and the victory of freedom in World War II. Rosa Parks has been a major inspiration of every American concerned about civil rights.

One thing should be absolutely clear. If we make the decision to commit our troops overseas to an armed conflict, we must give them the means and support to win.

One would think that given the contributions that women have made to the world and to our Nation, as mothers, educators, scientists, political leaders, mentors of our youth, having artwork in our Capitol that commemorates their contributions would be automatic. But sadly, in this year of 2001, this simply is not the case. In fact, less than 5 percent of the artwork displayed in all of these buildings displays or honors the contributions that women have made to America. It really is a shocking figure.

In 1985, I sponsored a resolution to establish a Commission on Women's Art in the Capitol. Then in 1997, I sought to include a directive in the report on the fiscal 1999 legislative branch appropriation bill to direct the Architect of the Capitol to prepare a plan for the procurement and display of art that is more fully representative of the contributions of American women to our society. I was told by then chairman of the Committee on House Oversight, the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMAS), that he believed this language was not necessary and would usurp the authority of the Joint Committee on the Library and the Fine Arts Board, and nothing happened.

In 1998, I was successful in getting a similar statement of support included in the House Appropriations Committee's report on the fiscal 2000 legislative branch appropriations bill; and then in 1999, I similarly introduced House Resolution 202, a resolution virtually identical to the one that I am now introducing in this new 107th Congress.

Mr. Speaker, our parents have taught us that those things worth having are worth fighting for. Today we renew that fight. We renew this fight with the recognition that we are planning on constructing a new Capitol Visitors Center that should reflect the contributions of women, as well as men, from the very beginning of that annex's construction.
So often in the past we have been told that it is difficult to find space in the Capitol, or in the House buildings for additional artwork commemorating women. So adding pieces to commemorate the contributions of women has been limited. That argument will not be valid with respect to the new Capitol Visitors’ Center, where we will have an opportunity to get it right from the beginning.

As our constituents, especially our young constituents, come into this Capitol they should be impressed with a sense of inclusion. America is made up of both men and women, mighty in strength and mighty in spirit, of Native Americans, of pilgrim Americans, of immigrant Americans and of recent Americans. Each and every one of these groups deserves to be recognized and celebrated for the contributions they have made to building this magnificent Republic.

Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere hope that at long last we can consider this resolution this year so we can begin to provide the level of recognition that the contributions of women to American society deserve, and I would implore my male colleagues, this is not a heavy lift. This is actually a fairly straightforward initiative that can be accomplished in regular order. Please give the women of America the recognition that they rightly deserve in these important buildings.

COMPARISON OF THE REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC BUDGETS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BENTSEN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, the House today adopted a budget which is pretty much in line with the budget that President Bush sent up to Congress just a few short weeks ago.

This budget, while it is a budget for one year, it would set America on a fiscal policy course impacting us for 10 years and really, quite frankly, impact us for many years beyond that. As it relates to very important and successful Federal programs, the Medicare program and the Social Security program.

Now, there is a clear divergence on which path to take between the Democrats and the Republicans. While there is commonality between the two parties in terms of many of the spending priorities on the discretionary side and, I would argue, commonality between the two parties in saying that there should be a tax cut, the diversion occurs really in two areas. It occurs as it relates to how much or what we will do with respect to Medicare and Social Security; and it occurs in what we will do with respect to paying down our obligations, that is, the publicly held debt.

The Republican-passed budget is predicated in large part, if not in total, on funding a very large tax cut on the basis of 10-year economic assumptions, which I will talk about shortly. But the tax cut that the Republican budget assumes starts out at about $1.6 trillion, the figure that the President used during the 2000 Presidential campaign. We know now that that tax cut is more around $2 trillion to $2.5 trillion before we include the additional interest on the debt associated with it. Because we know the income rate tax portion which the House has already adopted exceeds what the President assumed by about $150 billion over 10 years, and we also know the estate tax provision, the estate tax phaseout that the President proposed, is now estimated by the Joint Committee on Taxation, the nonpartisan arbiter and scorer of tax bills for the Congress, that bill is now estimated not just to get a $710 billion over 10 years as opposed to the $250 billion that the President proposed. So already, we are seeing that the upper limit of the tax cut is increasing.

But what is important between the two parties is that the Republican budget not only does nothing to extend the solvency of Social Security and Medicare; in fact, we would argue that the budget proposal will hasten the insolvency of Social Security and Medicare. Let me start first with the President’s and the Republicans’ plan for Social Security.

The projected surplus for Social Security is about $2.5 trillion over the next 10 years. Now, the Republicans and the Democrats agree that we ought to dedicate that to pay down the national debt, but the difference occurs in that the Republicans do not believe that we can pay down as much debt as the Democrats do. In fact, nobody really knows how much debt is payable. We would argue we ought to keep paying it down until we cannot buy any more bonds in the open market at a fair price. But nonetheless, the President’s budget and the Republicans’ budget assumes this would take about $600 billion in the projected Social Security surplus and would use that for some form of privatization of the Social Security system.

Now, the problem is that any scheme which we have to privatize or reform Social Security is going to cost money on top of what is already projected to be spent on the program, because we have to make up for any changes that might affect current and what are called “near future” retirees, or near future beneficiaries. Those would be people who are about 50 to 55 years old who might be affected by the privatization plan. All of the proponents of privatization, as well as the opponents, have come to the conclusion that the cost of a privatization plan much like what the President proposed during the campaign of diverting 2 percent of the FICA payroll tax to private accounts would cost about $1 trillion on top of what is already obligated to the system.

Now, the President proposes in his budget that he is going to take $600 billion of the projected proceeds under the current FICA tax scheme and use it against that $1 trillion cost. The problem is, we can only spend that money once, we cannot spend it twice. So if we take the $600 billion and we use it for something else, we end up taking money out of the Social Security revenue stream, which would cause the Social Security system as we know it today to incur a shortfall as much as 10 years earlier than what was projected just last week. That is, by taking the $600 billion out of the Social Security trust fund and using it for privatization, we shorten the life span of Social Security as we know it.

The only way that we can make up that $600 billion is through benefit cuts in the Social Security system, which I have not heard anybody saying they want to do that; through raising payroll taxes, which I have not heard anybody say they want to do that; or incurring even additional debt on top of the debt that is already outstanding.

So this is the first problem that we have with the Republican budget.

The second problem that we have with the Republican budget is that they take about $400 billion of the projected Medicare hospital insurance trust fund, the part A portion of Medicare, the end-patient portion of Medicare for when one goes into the hospital, and they take $153 billion of that and use it for their prescription drug program. They take the remaining $240 billion of it and use it in some form of Medicare modernization.

Now, we do not know exactly what that means, but we are told that that is some form of a privatization insolvency. Again, the same problem that would occur with the Social Security trust funds occurs with the Medicare trust funds. Because even if we take Medicare trust fund dollars and spend them on a new benefit within the Medicare system like the proposed prescription drug plan of the President, which is unworkable in any event, but if we spend it on that, we are not spending it on the benefits for which it is already obligated. As a result, we have to make up that $150 billion; and we have again hastened the insolvency of the Medicare trust fund, and we have a chart to show that.

Again, like the Social Security, where just last week the actuaries for the Medicare trust fund said that Medicare hospital insurance, part A of Medicare, would be solvent until about 2028, this proposal, the Republican proposal of cutting out at least $150 billion...