

now Congress's duty to step up and take the lead.

We have an obligation to be straightforward and honest with the American people about the financial challenges America faces. There was a furor over our continuing plunge into debt and deficit starting in 2009 and 2010 as we saw the spending explode with stimulus plans that didn't work and other policies that continued to drive us into debt. Unfortunately, that level of intensity and displeasure over all that was happening has subsided, but the problem hasn't gone away. It needs to be addressed, and it needs to be addressed now.

As I said, we have an obligation as Members of this body and of the Congress to be honest and straightforward with the American people about where we stand and what we will do about it.

I received a letter from one of my constituents, Steven of Martinsville, Indiana. Steven wrote to me to describe his concerns about our national debt and spending. Let me quote from his letter:

As of today, the outstanding national debt is over \$18 trillion. That is an overly exorbitant amount of money.

It certainly is, Steven. You are right. It is an exorbitant amount of money—one we can hardly even get our minds around in terms of what \$18 trillion means.

Steven continued:

Therefore, I would like to know our options in America.

I think we as elected officials have an obligation to list those options and describe what we would do about it if we had the opportunity and the support from the President, which is not forthcoming, but perhaps it will be. Surely even the executive branch and the President have to understand the situation we are in and the consequences of not doing something about it.

I am sure my colleagues received many letters and information from constituents who are concerned about the health of our Nation, from our mounting Federal debt, to our management—or I suppose I could say mismanagement of the Federal budget. Our constituents want to know what we, as their elected officials, are going to do about it.

What is plain as day to Steven, unfortunately, is not so clear here in Washington because the President says we don't have a spending problem, we have a revenue problem. I can't go home to people in Indiana and tell them that we need to tax more because government is growing and needs their money, and do so without derision coming back my way because people are being taxed to death. This President has an obsession with solving every conceivable problem by asking for more revenue and more taxes. The revenue is increasing; yet we have not placed the necessary spending restraints to control this ever-growing dilemma of deficit spending.

I think there is only one real solution to our problem—a solution that is

absolutely necessary because we literally have tried everything else and come up short—and that solution is for this body to pass a balanced budget constitutional amendment. That is why I am cosponsoring an amendment to the United States Constitution that forces the Federal Government to balance its budget, limits the growth of government spending, and that requires a supermajority to pass any tax increase. Without these measures, we will not successfully deal with this problem.

This is not a new idea. I served here in 1995 and again in 1997. I voted for a balanced budget amendment to limit spending and require the Federal Government to balance its checkbook. Both times, the Senate came one vote short of the necessary two-thirds to pass the constitutional amendment and send it to the States for ratification. One vote—one Member out of 100—could have voted with us, and we would have put ourselves on the path towards a balanced budget. We would not have begun to have the problems of ever-increasing debt, ever-increasing new taxes to cover that debt, and constriction in terms of spending for national priorities, such as defense and health research. Unfortunately, it didn't. When the amendment failed in 1997, our nation's debt stood at \$5.36 trillion. Our debt is about three and a half times larger today. If we had had the political will to act then, we would not be faced with the financial challenges that exist today.

By passing a balanced budget amendment, we can send to the States not just a message that we are serious about addressing our fiscal woes, but that we are giving them a voice, we are giving people a voice, and we are giving them the power to hold Federal spending accountable. It would be a unique opportunity to right a wrong and begin restoring our fiscal house by making the Federal Government accountable for its spending.

In March of 1997 I stood on this very floor and warned about the dangers of operating outside our means. I said it then, and I would like to say it again today. I am quoting from what I said in 1997:

There is no reliable check on this process of intergenerational theft. It is politically prudent, even popular, and this political calculation will not change, will never permanently change without some kind of systematic institutional counterweight, without some measure to give posterity a voice in our affairs. Nothing, in my view, will permanently change until the accumulation of popular debt is a violation of our oath to the Constitution. Perverse incentives of the current system will not be altered until the system itself is altered, until our political interests are balanced by the weighty words of a constitutional amendment. It would be a much needed balance.

We need to come to this body at the beginning of each session and put our left hand on the Bible and our right hand forward and swear to uphold the Constitution, which would involve re-

sponsible spending to keep us from plunging into disastrous consequences.

I mentioned earlier that Steven from Martinsville, IN, sent me this letter. What I did not mention is that Steven is a Boy Scout working toward his Citizenship in the Nation merit badge, which teaches Scouts how to become active citizens who are aware of and grateful for their liberties and their rights.

We all know that Boy Scouts take this oath—the oath to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, brave, clean, reverent, and thrifty. If we just take one of those principles, thrifty, and apply it to our governing, then America would be in a better place.

We cannot fail Steven, and we cannot fail his generation. His share of the debt will amount to more than \$62,000 in 10 years. Let's not keep shifting the hard choices to our children and grandchildren. Let's not deny them the opportunity at the American dream that all of us in my generation have enjoyed. The opportunity that comes with responsible spending and a responsible government. Opportunity that comes to few people in the world. We are so privileged as Americans to have that, and we are denying that to the future. By passing this balanced budget amendment, we can honor the moral tradition of sacrificing for posterity instead of asking posterity to sacrifice for us.

With that, I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF ASHTON B. CARTER TO BE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Ashton B. Carter, of Massachusetts, to be Secretary of Defense.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 2 p.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

The Senator from Maine.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS and Ms. KLOBUCHAR pertaining to the submission of S. Res. 74 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Submitted Resolutions.")

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RUBIO). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.