Address that the era of big government was over.

If only that were true, Mr. Speaker. We can see now that this declaration was nothing more than words. Big government is alive and well, and it is bigger than ever. In fact, the Democrats have come back with still more ways to increase the size and power of government every year since.

While we can say that government is not quite as big as it would have been if the Republicans had not taken control of the Congress in 1995, the truth is that government continues to grow, and any attempts to cut government, no matter how wasteful and counterproductive the program may be, the liberals will immediately attack our resistance to more and bigger government as being extremist or mean-spirited.

It has never occurred to them that it is perhaps mean-spirited on the part of a Federal government to have so little respect for the working men and their labor that Washington takes between one-quarter and one-third of their precious money every month from their paycheck.

So that still leaves us with the very important question, how did we go from $200 billion deficits, as the President had proposed, as far as the eye can see, only 2½ years ago, to the budget surplus that we now enjoy?

Let me tell the Members, remember, it is true that there have been some reductions in spending, but almost all of them have come out of one place it should not have come out of, Mr. Speaker. That is the Pentagon. Defense spending is now dangerously low, and our military forces are not what they should be.

Mr. Speaker, we know that to be the truth, but our Democrat colleagues, in their boundless faith in human nature, ignore history and simply do not believe in the fundamental precept that America must achieve peace through strength.

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As for other spending, Republicans did manage to limit the number of new spending initiatives of President Clinton and the Democrats over the past few years. But the primary reason why the budget is in surplus today is because revenues are way, way, way up. Liberals will point to the President's 1993 tax increase as a reason why revenues are up, hoping that we will not examine the budget tables ourselves to see if, in fact, this is true.

Revenues are up primarily from the number of people who are taking advantage of low tax rates on capital gains, the part of the economy that is the lifeblood of any dynamic growing economy.

President Reagan cut the tax on capital gains, and the Republicans cut it again just last year. Savers, investors, entrepreneurs, and other job creators are taking advantage of that, and the economy is benefiting from that. Jobs are being created, and revenues have soared. That, Mr. Speaker, is primarily the reason why the budget is now in surplus when it was in deep red only a few years ago.

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. GEJDENSON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take the time previously allotted to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. SMITH).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Connecticut?

There was no objection.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

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

Mr. GEJDENSON. Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that, if we go back before the battles that have raged in the last several weeks, there has to be a fundamental question of why we came to Congress.

I grew up in the town of Bozrah, a town about 2,400 people. I knew that, oftentimes, those neighbors of mine could not compete when they were trying to deal with large corporations or an oppressive government. It seemed to me the obligation of an elected representative is to come here and be their voice, to fight for our friends and neighbors when they cannot do it on their own.

What is our answer to what is happening to seniors on Medicaid HMO programs? What is our answer to the average family that lives in fear that the health care program they have paid for will not protect them when it is necessary?

My wife went in for a 4½ hour operation. They removed a disk from her neck. They took a piece of bone from her hip. They put it back into her neck. A 4½ hour operation. She gets back to the hospital room around 5 o'clock.

The doctor comes by 6:30 and says, you know, I would really like to keep you here, but I know the insurance company is not going to pay. But I am going to try. You will probably get stuck with a bill. She was all wired up with all the things that kill pain and what have you that you need after an operation. So she said fine.

The next day, of course, the claim was rejected by the insurance company. That did not shock us, frankly, because we thought that was going to happen. What shocked us is what happened to the doctor. The doctor got a letter from the insurance company saying do not try to do this again. Do not worry about what your patient needs or what the long-term impact is. Just dump them out on the street.

My wife would get along. We have got family. We would find a way to help her. But there is some people that do not have a lot of family. When we were going back for a checkup, we saw this woman. She could not have been 4-foot tall. She had a piece of metal in the front of her chin and two pieces on the back of her head. She had the marks from that halo when you have a serious neck operation.

My wife said to her, ''What happened to you?'' She says, ''Oh, I came in for a hernia operation. I am 76 years old. It is same-day surgery, you know. As soon as I had the surgery, they sent me home. I walked in the door, passed out, and broke my neck. I spent the last 4 months in the hospital.''

Most times, when we are dealing with an issue, it has such a limited impact that we have to seek out those who have been victims. We have to go out and hold hearings. These just come at us from our family and everybody else.

My brother runs the family dairy farm. One night, Ike felt his entire right side of his face losing all muscle control. He is 40-some years old. That kind of thing scares people. I do not know if it would scare a doctor, but it scared the heck out of me.

Ike thought it was serious. He drove down to the emergency room. The insurance company said, ''No, no, just because you lost all sensation in the right side of your face, that is not serious.''

I am not a doctor. Again, I cannot tell my colleagues what would have happened to my brother's girlfriend had she had a real medical system. She was 38 years old when she died after they refused to look at her tumor, after they refused to test her tumor.

What is this Congress doing? This Congress is sitting around here, and its leaders are fighting about whether you can fire or prevent the hiring of a former Democrat for a job downtown. Is it not wonderful, we have a fight where the Republican leadership is trying to tell public corporations they are not supposed to hire Democrats.

If you have been a Democrat, the rule is you cannot have a job. Do my colleagues know what? If this was organized crime, we would call it a RICO operation. My colleagues are out there trying to deny people health care; and when people want to work here, they want some kind of sign-off from the Republicans.

I am telling my colleagues this country needs health care reform. This is not about good politics, which it is. It is about people's life and death.

The leadership of this Congress is spending more time trying to make sure somebody does not get a job downtown than taking care of the health care of people of this country.

The same goes for education. The same goes in 100 different areas. We have not done the work we ought to do on pensions. In my district, a company closed, and the same day 100 people were notified they had no jobs. They found out their pension had been absconded with, been stolen or lost by the individual who managed it.

We need to make some changes to make sure that will not happen again. But not this majority Congress. They are worried about whether Dave McCurdy, former Congressman, can get a job downtown.

It started this way when they took over. The first thing they told people was fire the Democrats. They got rid of all the assets that poor people and workers had to gather information here. They want to represent powerful people, and that is just fine, but do not kid the American people. Do not go into that well and tell me you care about health care.

COME HOME, MR. PRESIDENT

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

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I think it would be very helpful to all of the constituents in my district to sort of cut through the shrill rhetoric on the other side of the aisle today and kind of get behind what is driving all of this political force.

See, it appears to me that the Democratic leadership and the President have placed petty politics above the interest of American children, America's veterans, America's seniors, and recently America's farmers.

The farm bill that was just vetoed recently had more money in it than the President's request, but it did not spend it on the programs that the Federal Government and the President wanted, so he vetoed it. It was not that it was anything in the best interest of America to do, but he vetoed it for politics.

Let us just take a look at what is behind this injustice to the American people. The principal motivation for the President and the Democratic leadership's intended shutdown of government is sort of to take the spotlight off the scandals that the President has gotten himself into.

It is also evident that the President has been AWOL, absent without leave, from his duties during most of the year. Let us consider this. The first 282 days of 1998, Mr. Clinton spent 45 percent, or approximately 127 days, working for his employer, the American taxpayer.

So what has he done with the majority of his time as President this year? Let us take a look at that. Fund raising. I think the new motto of the White House ought to be ''Show me the money, Mr. President.''

Mr. Clinton has spent 56 days away from his job raising money, gaining millions and millions of dollars from wealthy elitists, big business tycoons, liberal special interests, and media moguls.

Note that most of these fund-raisers, of course, were outside of the Washington, D.C. area. All totaled, Mr. Clinton has attended 97 today. Tomorrow in Florida will be number 98. Special interest fund-raisers gathering up those millions and millions of dollars, rather than working with Congress on problems facing all Americans.

The ''Show me the money, Mr. President'' ought to be here working with the working Congress. Let us take the vacations that he has had. Please do not get me wrong. There is nothing wrong with a much-needed break from a hectic work schedule. But there is something wrong when the vacations start interfering with the job of being President of the United States.

Not many hardworking men and women around this country have the luxury of working only 127 days and getting 32 days vacation, paid at that by the taxpayers of the United States.

Let us see, that would include 13 days at Martha's Vineyard, 9 days in Camp David, 5 days in the Virgin Islands, 4 days at a Utah ski resort, and, oh, yes, 1 day in Aspen, Colorado. Obviously, the only thing that got in the way of all of these vacations was his fund-raising schedule.

All this is bad enough, but it does not end there. Let us take the travel abroad, overseas junkets. During this time frame, the President spent 45 days abroad visiting 13 different countries, including Ghana, Chile, Uganda, Senegal, Germany, Rwanda, England, Ireland, Russia, Northern Ireland, and, oh, yes, a $50 million trip to China just to pay homage and tribute to the barbarians of Tiananmen Square.

But, my colleagues, that is not all. Outside the fund-raisers, vacations and expensive junkets abroad, the President has spent an additional 22 days on the road at photo-ops in telegenic settings outside of the Washington area. Most of these photo-ops were strategically placed with an eye to upcoming elections like New York, Illinois, Wisconsin, Texas, and even the scenic area of Lake Tahoe.

Mr. Speaker, it is very obvious that the duties of the President are being pushed aside at a time when there are critical issues facing America's children, veterans, seniors, and, yes, even farmers today.

Even as we speak here today, Congress is in session working, doing its job to help save Social Security, promote and improve our children's education, and to provide for America's veterans.

Yet, the President is once again preparing to go to another fund-raiser tomorrow in Florida. That is right. The President is once again planning to be AWOL while we here in Congress are hard at work solving our Nation's problems.

Clearly, it is time for America's part-time President to clear his travel calendar, clear his fund-raising calendar, clear his vacation calendar, and stay home so that we can get the Nation's work done.

INVEST IN AMERICA'S CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

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

Mr. SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, American children, American education, what better investment could we make? What higher priority could we have in the United States Congress than in our children?

Mr. Speaker, today, we have heard a lot of talking back and forth about the name of this Congress. I do not know about that, and I do not particularly want to get involved in that, but I do know this, we have an opportunity today to be known as the ''do something good Congress,'' because we can take one vote, take one day, and we can invest in America's children, and we can invest in education.

We have had a lot of talk today about who controls education. Education is properly controlled at the local level. In Texas, local citizens elect a local school board that hires a local superintendent, and they have local teachers that teach local children of local parents that support our local schools.

But that does not mean that the Federal Government cannot be helpful. We can be a junior partner in education. We can help provide the tools and the capital that our local communities need to address local problems and educate local children.

A junior partner is not controlling, but he is important. We need to meet our important responsibility and obligation to America's children by joining with local communities in education.

Let me talk briefly about four areas of concern. Number one, smaller classes. Studies confirm that young students in classrooms between 15 and 20 students learn more rapidly, and they learn better than other children.

The Federal Government, as a junior partner, can make capital available, can make funds available to help communities hire more teachers on a cost-shared basis, on a cost-shared basis. $7.3 billion over the next 5 years would put us on track to hiring 100,000 new teachers to spread across this country in grades one through three and will reduce the class size to 18 children.

If we ask teachers how best to bring down violence in school and how best to teach children, they say bring down class size.

School modernization. In order for our students to learn and compete in the economy of the 21st century, schools must be well equipped. A 1996 GAO study found that, over a quarter of Texas schools have at least one building in need of extensive repair, and over half of the schools in Texas have schools with at least one major building feature that has to be replaced, such as all of the plumbing, all of the air conditioning. There are similar problems across the entire United States.

To address this shortfall, the Federal Government can provide tax credits. We can give credits to folks to pay interest on nearly $22 billion in bonds to build and renovate public schools. We