point, briefly, it makes no difference what the President says on additional spending, because on the budget Rules of the House, if we spend more than $645 billion, we will have to sequester next year in order to bring the spending back. That is the discipline that we used to have in this body, but we have thrown it out the window for the last 3 years.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to close on my story about the State legislature and about how virtually every governor works with their State legislature. At the end of the session, the legislative leaders and the Governor sit down and they decide how much the pie is going to be, how much the State is going to spend. And once that decision is made and there is an agreement made, it takes a matter of about 48 hours for the various committees to work out how much goes to transportation, how much to education. That is what we need to do here at the Federal level; and hopefully, we can have better bipartisanship next year.

A CONTINUATION OF HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH

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

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, how much is enough?

When we talk about education, it is about where the decisions are going to be made. There are those in Washington who would like to take primary responsibility for building our local schools, wiring our local schools, buying the technology for our schools, hiring our local teachers, developing our curriculum, testing our kids, feed them breakfast, feed them lunch and develop after-school programs. When they get done with taking that decision-making to Washington, they are very willing to step back and say, the rest is now under your control. But in fact, what they have done is they have moved the focal point from our local teachers and our local administrators from taking a look at the needs of our children to taking a look at the bureaucratic requirements coming out of Washington.

How much is enough? We have enough. Local schools get 7 percent of their money from Washington, 50 percent of their paperwork. That paperwork goes to an agency here in Washington that cannot even get a clean set of books, that every time we give them $1 for education spending at a local level, they consume 35 cents of it before it ever gets back to a local classroom.

I yield to the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I want to point out two things. One of the reasons I think we cannot get an answer to the question of how much is enough is because the President is no longer in town. We know that part of the strategy seems to be keep Washington tied up, keep Congress in Washington, and then I will hit the campaign trail. The President is on his way to Kentucky to campaign against the gentlewoman from Kentucky (Mrs. NORTHUP). Now, that must feel great if one is the President of the United States, but we are talking about children here. We are talking about real business here, and we are talking about, it is time to put people in front of politics.

The gentleman knows, since he has worked real hard on the dollars to the classroom bill by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS) that said our efforts on education would go to the teacher closest to the student in the classroom and not Washington bureaucrats. Right now, when we spend $1 on education, 50 cents never gets out of town. That is not acceptable.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I yield to the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE).

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I would just say to the gentleman from Texas, as a past supporter of the Blue Dog budget as well, and someone who did not vote to raise the caps to the $645 billion level, that I think if the Blue Dog budget had been the one adopted by the House, it would have met probably the same fate that the budget today has met.

We did our work in the House. We passed bills at a $602 billion level; and the President, as is customarily the case at this point in the legislative process, is extorting us or using I think his leverage at the end game to try and get more money out of the Congress. So that is why this thing keeps getting bid up and bid up and bid up.

We have, in fact, in the past, done some good things here. We balanced the budget. This will be the 4th year in a row. We have stopped the raid on Social Security. We have been paying down systematically the Federal debt over the past 3 years. But all that good work could be for naught if we give the President everything that he wants and everything that he asks for, which, as the gentleman noted, also includes a number of things that we just fundamentally disagree with, like putting more power in the educational bureaucracy here in Washington instead of getting it back in the classroom.

So I appreciate the issues that have been raised by our colleagues on the other side here about the budget; but the reality is, we are still going to be in the same positions that we are in today when it comes to negotiating with the President who wants to spend more and who cannot answer the very simple, fundamental question, and that is, how much is enough?

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. HOEKSTRA. I yield to the gentleman from Colorado.

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting question, and it is a sad commentary, I think, on the legislative process in Washington to just see what is taking place here. We have Democrats and Republicans essentially agreeing that we are spending too much money. Why is that?

At this point in the game, it would seem that if we agree we are spending too much money, it seems logical that maybe a few months ago, a few weeks ago, we might have been able to agree on spending less. But we do have to compromise not only with Republicans and Democrats, but we have to compromise with the White House as well, and we have compromised and compromised and compromised, trying to, in good faith, reach agreement with the White House, the President's liberal spending habits, and yet as a result of our efforts, there is a point in time when it is a legitimate question to ask, how much can we spend? How much is enough? That is the point we are at now. We have conceded on issue after issue after issue with the White House.

A CONTINUATION OF HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH

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

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, we have to wonder, when is it going to end? That is the question that is on the minds of all of us here. We are here in Washington on a Sunday night, which is completely out of character, first and foremost, but 3½ weeks beyond the beginning of the new fiscal year. We have debated with the White House so long now that the fiscal year has already started, we are passing these 1-day continuing resolutions, and I am afraid, I would say to my colleagues, that what really seems to be driving the agenda down there at the White House is not a real sincere effort to try to come to some resolution on this budget, I think it is motivated by a political ambition to try to scare the American people to believe that we are not paying enough, that we are not spending enough. I hope that we can send the message down to the White House that we have spent enough, that we have already reached enough.

Before I yield to some of my colleagues, I want to reflect on the comment of a 16-year-old girl that I just met back here in the back of the Chamber. She is from Albert Lea, Minnesota in the gentleman from Minnesota's district, and her name is Sara Schleck, she is a page back here and working for the House. I said, you are here on a Sunday night; what do you think about being here on a Sunday. She said to me, she said, Congressman, is not our Government big enough already?

Mr. Speaker, that is the question most Americans should be asking, and a 16-year-old girl certainly is perceptive enough to realize that we are here because there are people who just want

to spend more and for Sara's sake and the sake of my five kids we are willing to stay here as long as it takes to come to the right agreements with the House to make sure we do not spend the country into oblivion. But my goodness, we have answered this question. We have spent more than enough already. The White House wants more, and I just hope that we can come to an agreement that still leaves Sara's future in tact and her debt certainly no greater than it is today.

I yield to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. HOEKSTRA).

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, I think we need to build on the progress that we have made. I think we would all agree that getting to a surplus for 3 years now and on our way to a 4th year of a surplus is great progress and great work. Having worked on the Committee on the Budget, if we had said that a few years ago, we would have said, by the year 2000, if we would have gotten that kind of track record, people would have said, no way. But we have done that. So we need to build on that record. We have stopped the raid on Social Security and Medicare, so let us focus on the good things that we have done here as well. Let us build on those things.

The same thing for education. Let us build on the positive progress that we have seen at the local level and then at the same time on a parallel track, let us fix the broken bureaucracy here in Washington.

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, I would say one of the good things we have done, we passed a Medicare package here last week; and it included some tax relief for people around this country too, a lot of things that I think many of us agree on, and I hope the administration agrees on as well. But the veto is threatened, and that is unfortunate, because we have a lot of rural hospitals and home health care agencies and nursing facilities that are really struggling out there. I think the President needs to explain to the American people and to all of those organizations who are supporting this legislation why he is going to veto it.

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This is something that in rural areas like South Dakota is very, very important to the people of my State to make sure that we provide quality health care.

In a bipartisan way we have come up with a package that addresses a lot of those issues for rural hospitals, for skilled nursing facilities, for home health agencies and where we have addressed also some other things that I am very interested and allowing technology to better serve rural health care needs through telehealth. Those issues are included in this package.

The President is going to veto it. That is the wrongheaded thing to do, and that is putting politics in front of people, and that is unfortunate. It is the reason that we are here. But when the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. HOEKSTRA) talked about some of the good things that we have done here in the Congress, that certainly is an example of it.

I think that it is something most of us here this evening would argue are going to benefit, to a very big extent, the folks, the people in our respective congressional districts and States.

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM).

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding, and I would say this one Member is glad the President is going to veto the tax Medicare bill, because it does not deal adequately with the health problems in my district, in my opinion.

In requesting additional spending, I am well aware that we have to find that money someplace else, because no matter how many times we say how much is enough, we have agreed $645 billion is enough. When I say I am glad the President will veto the bill, I hope we will work out a better package for rural hospitals, teaching hospitals, all of the things that need a little better shake in that.

I say that realizing we have to take the money from someplace else, and I think the HMOs are getting a little bit too much. I think we can perhaps trim some other places. A very respected Member of the other body has said in this spending $21 billion is very questionable.

I do not think that it is wrong for us to suggest a little more on hospitals at home would be a better use of some of that money.

A CONTINUATION OF HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

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

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to an issue raised by the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE), my friend, regarding the concern that I think we all have regarding our rural hospitals.

The main reason that I object to the bill that was passed on this floor that the President has said he will veto is just the issue the gentleman raised, and that is, it is inadequate in terms of its funding for our rural hospitals and dedicates too much of the money set aside to increase funding for Medicare to the insurance company HMOs.

Mr. Speaker, I have a letter here from a hospital administrator in my district, George Miller. He is the administrator of the Christus Jasper Memorial Hospital. He writes to me and he says we are extremely concerned because as the present language reads in the bill, the one we passed, one-third to one-half of BBA relief over 10 years would go to HMOs, leaving less for providers and beneficiaries in east Texas, such as the Christus Jasper Memorial Hospital. Further, the bill does not prohibit HMOs from dropping benefits or leaving the community as they have done here in Texas and left many of our patients without HMO coverage. We need your help, Administrator George Miller, Jasper, Texas.

That is the concern that I have about the bill that was passed, and that is why I support the President's threatened veto of the bill. The truth of the matter is, HMOs are abandoning our seniors. I only have four counties out of the 19 that I represent that even have an HMO plan offered to them after December 31 of this year.

I clearly, in representing my constituents, want to see more of that increase that we have provided in this bill applied to the rural hospitals, the health care providers, rather than giving 40 percent of that new money to those HMOs.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON).

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, me say, number one, that I appreciate the gentleman's sincerity on this issue. However, in terms of the President, I have not seen any alternatives. And as the gentleman knows, this bill was endorsed by the American Hospital Association, the American Cancer Society, the American Federation of Home Health Care Providers, the National Association of Children's Hospitals, the National Association of Rural Health Clinics, Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, the National Association of Community Health Clinics.

I hope that the President, rather than to veto it, putting politics in front of people, I hope he will say, okay, here is how we can constructively make changes and fine tune this thing. I think if it was up to the handful of us tonight, we could work out the differences real quick. And I, too, represent a rural area; and we can have genuine disagreements on it, but I do question some of the motives down on 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, it is always easy to question motives, and I really think that what we have to do is try to form our own views on these issues. I am sharing with my colleagues mine, and that is too much of the increase in Medicare money in this bill goes to the insurance company HMOs, and there are only four counties in my district that even offer an HMO Medicare choice plan.

I am not sure how long they are going to be there. I would invite my colleagues to take a look at the report just issued by the General Accounting Office, which tells us a whole lot about the status of these Medicare HMO choice plans. Basically, the message is pretty clear. HMOs are not working in Medicare for either our seniors or for the taxpayers, because what we have seen, last year we had several hundred thousand seniors receive notices of cancellation of their HMO+Choice