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

(Mr. DAVIS of Illinois addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

WASHINGTON WASTE WATCHERS

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

Mr. HENSARLING. Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise as cofounder of a new Republican effort dedicated to bringing the disinfectant of sunshine into the shadowy corners of the wasteful Washington bureaucracy. We call ourselves the Washington Waste Watchers. Do not be confused, the Washington Waste Watchers is not about counting calories. Instead, we are about counting the myriad of ways that the Federal Government routinely squanders the hard-earned money of the American family. We are here to look after the family budget by checking the growth of the Federal budget.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that all my colleagues are well aware of the size of our Federal deficit. It is large and getting larger every day, at a time when our homeland security needs are paramount.

Now, Democrats say the only way to cut the deficit is to yet again raise taxes on the American family. Sound familiar? It is the same refrain we have heard from them for many, many years. We do have a large deficit, but it is not because the American people are taxed too little; it is because Washington spends too much.

Since I was born, the Federal budget has grown seven times faster than the family budget. Seven times faster. This is unconscionable. And the Democrats who claim to be concerned about Federal deficits have voted to spend almost $1 trillion more than our budget allows, $1 trillion more. There is a spending problem in Washington, not a taxing problem, and much of the spending is absolute pure waste, abuse and fraud.

For the moment, let us talk about fraud. In many instances, our government stands idly by while criminals routinely defraud the American people of billions of dollars each year. Here are just a few examples.

In just five individual cases, the United States Department of Agriculture was defrauded of almost $6 million in food stamp benefits; $6 million wasted by the Washington bureaucracy. And Democrats want to raise our taxes to pay for more of this?

Over a 4-year period, a California law student helped two companies bilk Medicaid out of $9 million in false claims; $9 million wasted. And Democrats want to raise our taxes to pay for more of this?

In Los Angeles, a woman and three coconspirators were convicted of wire fraud after they were caught helping unqualified borrowers obtain $70 million in fake FHA-insured loans; $70 million wasted. And Democrats want to raise our taxes to pay for more of this?

One Veterans Administration employee embezzled over $11.2 million from the VA. The woman, a 30-year VA employee, was the last of 12 coconspirators arrested in the scheme which involved the resurrection of claims filed for deceased veterans; $11 million wasted. And Democrats want to raise our taxes to pay for more of this?

Twenty-three percent of the people who have had their student loans forgiven due to disability actually hold full-time jobs, costing the Federal Government $40 million a year; $40 million, just wasted. And Democrats want to raise our taxes to pay for more of this?

Mr. Speaker, these are just a handful of examples of the types of fraud that are being perpetrated against the American taxpayer every day, and we have just begun to scratch the surface.

One of the hallmarks of the recent Enron scandal was not just the profound outrage at the criminals who committed the fraud, but the recognition that the system had to be reformed. It was not enough just to catch the crooks, we had to change the system of accountability to make sure that it never happened again. Washington spending is a scandal, and it must be changed.

Once you begin to look at the reports, it is easy to see that many Washington programs routinely waste 10, 20, 30 percent of their budgets due to waste, fraud and abuse, and have for years. Yet Federal agencies routinely spend next to nothing policing these multibillion-dollar budgets. In the real world, when people lose this much money, they either go broke or they go to jail, but in Washington it is simply another excuse to take more money away from the American family.

Mr. Speaker, there are many ways that we can save money in Washington without cutting any needed services and without raising taxes on our hard-working Americans, because when it comes to Federal programs, it is not how much money Washington spends, it is how Washington spends the money.

Mr. Speaker, at a time of huge Federal deficits, unparalleled homeland security needs and a crushing family tax burden, the Washington Waste Watchers are here to let Americans know there is an alternative to even more Democrat tax increases on the American family.

THE UNDERFUNDING OF HEAD START

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Wisconsin (Ms. BALDWIN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening on a very important topic, the Head Start Program.

During the August recess, I had three opportunities to visit with Head Start workers at the Dane County Parent Council, a nonprofit agency that runs 13 Head Start sites. What I learned during those visits shocked and worried me, and I believe it will shock you also.

Thirty percent of these Dane County, Wisconsin, Head Start workers have faced or experienced an eviction from their housing. Fifty-five percent have had phones or other utilities shut off. Forty-five percent have used a food bank. Sixty-two percent make so little money that their own children are Head Start-eligible.

These figures are stunning. Head Start is a program designed to break the cycle of poverty. Instead, it has become a program that guarantees poverty to some of its front-line workers.

Workers and the management at the Dane County Parent Council are currently engaged in tense contract negotiations. Their most recent contract expired last night. At the center of these contentious negotiations are the extremely low salaries paid to these front-line Head Start workers.

So why do these Head Start workers put up with low wages and face the daily challenges that accompany poverty and near poverty? Because they are dedicated to the Head Start Program and the good that it does for so many children and families, oftentimes their own families.

One woman recounted for me how her own son had been a Head Start student. As a child, he had delayed speech development, but today he is a 15-year-old honor roll student. His mother, now a Head Start worker herself, knows firsthand of the good that the Head Start Program does. So despite the low wages and challenges that she faces in making sure her family's basic needs get met, she remains committed to being a part of Head Start.

This level of commitment is admirable, and it is the sort of commitment that we as Members of Congress should show to the Head Start Program as well.

I was sad to report to these struggling Head Start workers that the House-passed Head Start bill is not going to help their situation. In fact, the House-passed bill gives Head Start teachers a meager 0.4 percent raise. This is insulting, not to mention unconscionable. This is not going to help the workers that I met with who are constantly faced with the challenge of making ends meet. For these families the ends do not meet. They do not even come close.

In Congress we pass bills that authorize a lot of spending. Our appropriation bills authorize billions upon billions of dollars. But I urge my colleagues to stop for a moment and remember that it would take just a small amount of money, a drop in the bucket really, to do right by these devoted workers who do so much to bring hope to the next generation of youngsters.

A teacher's assistant or a bus driver should be focused on their precious students, not how they are going to keep the electricity on at home or clothe a growing child or stave off an army of bill collectors.

I remain hopeful that our colleagues in the other body will reward the dedication of Head Start teachers by adequately funding the Head Start Program. I also remain hopeful that the Dane County Parent Council will recognize the value of their workers through expeditious resolution of the remaining economic and noneconomic disputes in their contract.

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

(Mr. SOUDER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. BERRY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. BLACKBURN addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. SMITH of Michigan addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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TEA-LU EQUALS JOBS, JOBS, JOBS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FRANKS of Arizona). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LIPINSKI) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, on May 14 of this year, after months and months of delay, the administration finally released their TEA–21 reauthorization proposal. Called SAFETEA, the administration's proposal will authorize $247 billion for surface transportation programs.

In contrast, TEA–21 authorized $218 billion over 6 years for our Nation's surface transportation needs. While the landmark legislation made tremendous advancements towards addressing those needs, we still have much work to do. The next reauthorization must advance on the successes and priorities of TEA–21 and take into account our future needs as well.

Unfortunately, SAFETEA fails miserably in that regard. When we factor in inflation, SAFETEA's $247 billion funding level would mean a flatline of current transportation spending.

While I admire the administration's laser-like focus on flatlining surface transportation investments in their proposal, the fact of the matter is that SAFETEA is shortsighted and inadequate.

The administration's SAFETEA proposal is too little, too late, especially in today's gloomy economy. We now have 6.1 percent unemployment rate. This is the highest level since July, 1994. The unemployment rate for construction workers is even higher at 7.1 percent. In a time where nearly 9 million Americans are out of work, over 4 million Americans are underemployed, and nearly 2 million Americans have been out of a job for more than 6 months, we need something more than SAFETEA.

What this Nation needs is a bold and innovative economic stimulus plan. What this Nation needs is a robust public works funding package, and what the administration has proposed just is not it.

What we need is the proposal laid out by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. Under the leadership of the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), the committee is working on a $375 billion reauthorization bill. Mr. Speaker, $375 billion is within the funding levels recommended by the U.S. DOT's ''Conditions and Performance Report.'' Mr. Speaker, $375 billion is needed to maintain and improve our highways and transit systems.

I strongly believe that TEA-LU will adequately fund our national surface transportation needs. And just as important, it will be a shot in the arm for our struggling national economy. It will create jobs and put people back to work.

Over the last several months, much of the debate has centered on the highway user fee, or gas tax. User fees and taxes are never popular, but leadership requires making tough decisions.

Let us be perfectly clear. I support an increase in the highway user fee. I support depositing these revenues in the Highway Trust Fund to pay for surface transportation needs, and I do not stand alone on this.

In fact, I stand with the majority of Americans on this issue. In a poll conducted by Zogby International in June 2003, 67 percent of those surveyed supported an increase in the highway user fee of up to 5 cents per gallon, provided those revenues went towards infrastructure improvements.

Putting this into perspective, a 5-cent increase in the highway user fee on gasoline will cost the average motorist an additional $30 per year, which is about the same price as an oil change nowadays.

Instead of getting bogged down with the concept of user fees and taxes, we should all take a page from the history books.

Let us look back to 1982. Let us not forget that this Nation was in the midst of a recession when Ronald Wilson Reagan, a native Illinoisan, signed into law the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982, a bill that raised the gas tax by 5 cents. In his wisdom, he knew the importance of increasing highway and transit funding. He knew the importance of investing for the future. He knew that the cost to the average motorist would be small, while the benefits to the national transportation system would be immense. But most importantly, Ronald Reagan knew that a $151 billion surface transportation funding bill would create jobs and provide immense benefits for a sluggish economy stuck in a recession back in 1982.

Reagan also pointed out that the gas tax is not a tax, it is a user fee. An increase in the highway user fee would simply be deposited in the Highway Trust Fund, and there it would be used to improve our Nation's transportation system and would have no impact on our Federal deficit.

Highway user fees are, as President Reagan noted, simply good tax policy.

His successor, President George Herbert Walker Bush, also recognized the importance of public works investments and economic vitality. When he signed ISTEA into law in 1991, he said the highway bill could be summed up in three words: ''jobs, jobs, jobs.'' That is just as true today.

Each $1 billion invested in infrastructure creates 47,500 jobs and $6.1 billion in related economic activity. For the price of a few cents per gallon, we can craft a $375 billion transportation investment bill that would potentially create millions of new jobs. That is an investment for our American working families today as well as an investment for our Nation's future. For the price of a simple oil change, we can reauthorize the Highway Trust Fund at $375 billion. It would not only ensure our transportation system will be second to none in the world; it would also create jobs and stimulate the economy without impacting the Federal deficit. What is not to like?

But right here, right now, it is really about jobs, jobs, jobs. We need to create good-paying jobs. We need to put people back to work. We need a $375 billion surface transportation bill.

Let us not lose sight of these public policy objectives in these trying economic times.

In conclusion, let me once again say that the sure way to improve this economy, to improve transportation, to improve highways in this country is to