

BUDGET RECONCILIATION

HON. PATRICK J. KENNEDY

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 9, 2005

Mr. KENNEDY of Rhode Island. Mr. Speaker, in October 1999, a presidential candidate from Texas said that House Republicans “shouldn’t balance the budget on the backs of the poor.” He criticized his fellow Republicans for projecting “pessimism, indifference, and I disdain for government.”

That man was President George W. Bush, and what a sad, tragic difference 6 years in power has made.

Today, too many Americans are struggling just to get by, let alone get ahead. They’re trying to scratch out a living . . . [pause] . . . and some hope for the future in the face of rising energy prices, higher education costs, stagnant wages, and for some, the complete loss of homes, jobs, and even loved ones to Hurricane Katrina.

To them, this reconciliation bill says, “we need you to sacrifice more so that the energy companies can get their subsidies and the wealthy elite can get their tax breaks.”

Democrats believe that government should reflect the sense of community that Americans demonstrated after Katrina—the sense of community that has defined and united America throughout its history.

We believe in some basic human principles—everyone should have the opportunities not just to survive, but to excel with their God-given talents and abilities. Those are the values that should be reflected in our budgets.

We could have a budget that brings Americans together.

But sadly, instead, we have a budget that will widen the divide in America between those who have plenty, and those who struggle just to have enough.

EDUCATION

One of those people is a young lady in my district. She will graduate from high school this spring; the first in her family with a chance at college.

She will work in an America that faces more global economic competition than ever before in its history.

But this budget will limit her opportunity and turn education into a commodity because it will increase by almost \$6,000 the interest rates, taxes and fees she will have to pay.

Robert McKenna, who heads up higher education in my state, has proclaimed that this budget could severely undermine already existing education benefits. And make it harder to expand access to higher education.

I have 44,000 students like that young lady in my state, and this spring when she graduates, she will have one less tool to build the American Dream for her and her family.

FOOD STAMPS

Unfortunately, these families will have plenty of company in their disproportionate sacrifice. At the beginning of every month, you will find many families in the supermarket, pinching and saving and clipping coupons to get by. We saw some of those same faces on August 31—those without enough money at the end of the month to fill up the gas tank to get out of New Orleans.

In my state, over 17,000 households are going hungry on a regular basis.

My state has the highest child poverty rate in all of New England, above the national average.

What does this budget do for the people in my state?

It starts by taking school lunches from their kids.

It continues by taking 300,000 families in this country—over 12,000 in my state alone—and kicking them off food stamps. Leaving them to sacrifice basic nutrition for their children to keep the heat on this winter or a roof over their heads.

Bernie Beaudreau, the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, recently commented: “The forces and trends in our economy creating conditions of poverty and hunger—low wages, unemployment and low incomes, housing and energy costs, the cost of food and health care, are outstripping our capacity to respond. Given this hunger data, cutting food stamps is a disastrous idea.”

MEDICAID

Regarding Medicaid, I recently had a chance to visit with some young adults who have Down’s Syndrome or autism, at the Groden Center in Providence, Rhode Island. Of all the people in America who are asked to sacrifice, I can’t believe this budget would go after them.

And yet the Medicaid program that helps them meet the challenges of their disabilities is also on the chopping block.

Dale Klatzker, Executive Director of the Providence Center, a facility that provides mental health treatment and supportive services, recently commented, “Perhaps if some of the Members of the House could spend some time with the individuals that these changes seek to make more personally responsible—they would have a different take on the life and death decisions they seem intent on making.”

Nearly 200,000 Rhode Islanders on Medicaid will be affected by these changes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, reconciliation is more than a line item in a budget. It should be about hope and dreams and opportunity, not just tax breaks for the wealthiest among us.

In his Second Inaugural Address, President Roosevelt said, “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

With this budget it is all too clear that we are failing the test.

THE CONGRESSIONAL ROLE IN
DECLARING WAR**HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 9, 2005

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask that we return to the framework for declarations of war set out by our Founding Fathers and found in the United States Constitution.

The Iraq War and all the damage it has done and continues to do, is a demonstration of what happens when Congress ignores the Constitution and the intentions of the Founding Fathers. As Leslie H. Gelb and Anne-Marie

Slaughter point out in their article in the November 8, 2005 Washington Post “No More Blank-Check Wars” “Most wars overflow with mistakes and surprises. Still, in Iraq, much that has gone wrong could have been foreseen—and was. . . . Too often our leaders have entered wars with unclear and unfixed aims, tossing away American lives, power and credibility before figuring out what they were doing and what could be done. Congress saw the problem after the Vietnam War and tried to fix it with the War Powers Act. It states that troops sent into combat by the President must be withdrawn within 60 days unless Congress approves an extension. But Presidents from Nixon on never recognized the validity of this legislation against their powers as commander in chief. Nor did Congress ever assert its rights and take political responsibility. Since the Korean War, the process has consisted of at most a Congressional resolution, a few serious speeches and authorization for the President to do whatever he wants. Odds are against changing these ‘political realities.’ But, impaled as we are on costs and carelessness of so many of our recent wars, it is worth trying to find a better way.”

As it happens, Gelb and Slaughter point out: the answer is in the Constitution. The Founding Fathers understood that sending Americans to war required careful reflection and vigorous debate. The answer survives in Article 1, Section 8, of the Constitution, which give Congress—and only Congress—the power to declare war. The authors suggest that power needs to be reestablished and reinforced by new legislation. The new legislation would require a declaration of war from Congress in advance of any commitment of troops. Requiring a declaration by Congress would require congress to debate the issues, analyze the threat, and consider the costs of a war. In the case of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the President would retain his power to repel the attack and strike back without a Congressional declaration. But if he went to Afghanistan and planned to keep troops there, topple the government and transform the country, he would need a Congressional declaration. Without the declaration, he would have no funding for nation building. These are ideas that need discussion. These ideas come from the document we all swear an oath to uphold: the Constitution of the United States.

In my view, a patriot is a person who remembers he must uphold and defend the Constitution, not a political party or a President.

[From the Washington Post, Nov. 8, 2005]

NO MORE BLANK-CHECK WARS

(By Leslie H. Gelb and Anne-Marie Slaughter)

Most wars overflow with mistakes and surprises. Still, in Iraq, much that has gone wrong could have been foreseen—and was. For example, most experts knew that 100,000 U.S. troops couldn’t begin to provide essential security and that Iraqi oil revenue wouldn’t dent war costs. But none of this was nailed down beforehand in any disciplined review.

And Iraq, whether justified or not, is only the latest in a long line of ill-considered and ill-planned U.S. military adventures. Time and again in recent decades the United States has made military commitments after little real debate, with hazy goals and no appetite for the inevitable setbacks. John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson plunged us

into the Vietnam War with little sense of the region's history or culture. Ronald Reagan dispatched Marines to Lebanon, saying that stability there was a "vital interest," only to yank them out 16 months later after a deadly terrorist attack on Marine barracks. Bill Clinton, having inherited a mission in Somalia to feed the starving, ended up hunting tribal leaders and trying to build a nation.

Too often our leaders have entered wars with unclear and unfixed aims, tossing away American lives, power and credibility before figuring out what they were doing and what could be done. Congress saw the problem after the Vietnam War and tried to fix it with the War Powers Act. It states that troops sent into combat by the president must be withdrawn within 60 days unless Congress approves an extension. But presidents from Richard Nixon on never recognized the validity of this legislation against their powers as commander in chief. Nor did Congress ever assert its rights and take political responsibility. Since the Korean War, the process has consisted at most of a presidential request for a congressional resolution, a few serious speeches and authorization for the president to do whatever he wants. Odds are against changing these "political realities." But impaled as we are on the costs and carelessness of so many of our recent wars, it is worth trying to find a better way.

As often happens, an answer can be found with the Founding Fathers and the Constitution. They could not have foreseen the present age of nuclear missiles and cataclysmic terrorism. But they understood political accountability, and they knew that

sending Americans to war required careful reflection and vigorous debate. Their answer survives in Article 1, Section 8, of the Constitution, which gives Congress—and only Congress—the power to declare war. That power, exercised only a few times in our history, and not at all since World War II, needs to be reestablished and reinforced by new legislation. This legislation would fix guidelines for exercising the provision jointly between the White House and Congress. It would restore the Framers' intent by requiring a congressional declaration of war in advance of any commitment of troops that promises sustained combat.

Requiring Congress to declare war, rather than just approve or authorize the president's decision to take troops into combat, would make it much harder for Congress to duck its responsibilities. The president would be required to give Congress an analysis of the threat, specific war aims with their rationale and feasibility, general strategy and potential costs. Congress would hold hearings, examine the information and conclude with a full floor debate and solemn vote.

In case of a sudden attack on the United States or Americans abroad, the president would retain his power to repel that attack and strike back without a congressional declaration. But any sustained operations would trigger the declaration process. In other words, the president could send troops into Afghanistan to hunt down al Qaeda and punish the Taliban in response to the Sept. 11 attacks. But if he planned to keep the troops there to topple the government and transform the country, he would need a congressional declaration. Without one, funding

would be restricted to bringing the troops home soon and safely.

This declaration process should appeal to conservatives and even neocons. It meets their valid concern that the United States often loses diplomatic showdowns and wars not on the battlefield but at home. It adds credibility to presidential threats and staying power to our military commitments. Binding Congress far more closely to war, for instance, might have convinced Saddam Hussein of Washington's resolve to fight him in both gulf wars; today it would help convince insurgents in Iraq of America's long-term commitment to make Iraq secure. Liberals and moderates, always rightly complaining about a rush to war, would welcome the restored declaration. Not least, the attractiveness of this approach would be aided by the political power of the Constitution itself.

Nor would the process proposed here diminish a president's leadership or stature as commander in chief as he makes his case to Congress. If, even with these advantages, his arguments fail, then the case cannot be very compelling.

Today Congress deliberates on transportation bills more carefully than it does on war resolutions. Our Founding Fathers wanted the declaration of war to concentrate minds. Returning to the Constitution's text and making it work through legislation requiring joint deliberate action may be the only way to give the decision to make war the care it deserves.