

Mr. COOPER. That much damage was done to our Nation's future just in 1 hour.

Mr. ROSS. In the last hour.

Mr. COOPER. And that will continue every hour, every night.

Mr. ROSS. Again, we have got to be good stewards of our tax money. We have got to be good stewards of this country. We have got to get our Nation's fiscal house back in order. We must restore fiscal responsibility to our government. It affects every one of us in a lot of different ways.

For example, our Nation is spending a half a billion dollars a day with a "B," 500 million, a half a billion every day, simply paying interest on the national debt.

We could finish I-69 in Arkansas, creating all kinds of jobs and economic opportunities, just with 3 days' interest on the national debt, or I-49, again with 3 days' interest on the national debt.

Many of America's priorities are going to continue to go unmet. Many of America's needs are going to go unmet, from health care to education to veterans to infrastructure, until we get our Nation's fiscal house back in order.

The Blue Dog Coalition has a way to do that. It is a 12-point plan, and the first and foremost of all of those 12 points is require a balanced budget. Forty-nine States do. My wife requires one in our household in Prescott, Arkansas.

The family business my wife and I own, our banker requires us to have a balanced budget. And it is time for this Nation, it is time for the politicians in Washington to have a balanced budget for our Nation.

I yield to the gentlemen from Georgia.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, it is very important to point out, and you touched upon it, that just the interest, just the interest alone, is nearly \$200 billion.

Now just think about that. This money that we are borrowing, we have to pay for. You got to add in the \$200 billion in interest on top of that, which is more than five times the amount that we spend on education, the environment, and veterans care put together.

I submit to you, my friends in the Blue Dog Coalition, I just hope that the American people have been listening to us tonight, and I believe that they have. I hope that we have awakened a sleeping giant. Because, like I say, we are here and we are gone tomorrow.

The President does not have to run anymore. He does not have to go out and face the people. I believe, quite honestly, if he had to go out and face the people, I do not think he would have made that deal with the Arab immigrants. I do not think he would have done that.

But the fundamental question we have to go back to is from this star-

ting information that you have brought to us, the question has to be, why? Why are we just discovering it and why is this great discrepancy there?

There are some serious questions that have to be answered by this administration. But you know what? They are not going to answer these questions unless and until we in Congress stand up and represent the interests of the American people and put their feet to the fire. Once we do that, then we are truly standing up for America, and America deserves that.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from Georgia, and I thank the gentleman from Tennessee for joining me this evening as we try to hold this Congress accountable and urge a good dose of common sense and fiscal responsibility.

For folks with questions or comments or concerns, I encourage them to e-mail us at bluedogs@mail.house.gov, we are members of the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, bluedogs@mail.house.gov. That is bluedogs@mail.house.gov.

And, Mr. Speaker, we are here this evening for a simple reason and a simple cause; that is, to try and be good stewards for this Nation of the tax money and the trust that has been placed in us for the people.

We think this Congress is letting the American people down. I yield back.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DENT). Members are reminded to address their remarks to the Chair and not to persons outside the Chamber.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) is recognized for half the remaining time until midnight.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, you know, last week I was sitting in the Chair when some of this same material was being presented here on the floor. And I jotted down some notes, thinking, well, one of these days I hope I am going to have a chance to make some comments about some of those things that are being said, not knowing I was going to be asked tonight to come over here and use some of the Special Order, because a couple of my colleagues were called away who had planned to be here tonight. So I am doing this at sort of the last minute.

But I found my notes from last week, and I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the comments that were made last week, again on this issue, and some of the comments that are being made tonight. I am astonished again at the hypocrisy that is evident here on the floor of this House every day.

We have our Democratic colleagues standing up all of the time talking

about how we need to cut spending, cut spending, cut spending, and how we have got a debt. But when we bring in bills and give them the opportunity to cut spending, they vote against them.

Much of the spending that is occurring now is the result of Democratic programs that were begun in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, that have been put on automatic pilot.

One of the first meetings I came to when I was elected to Congress last year, I heard people talking about mandatory spending and discretionary spending, and entitlements. And I got up and I said, you know, I have read the Constitution, and nowhere in the Constitution do I see the words mandatory spending, discretionary spending, or entitlements.

A large part of the problem that we have in this Congress is that we have people who think in those terms. They think in terms of entitlement, and they have helped create in this society an entitlement mentality.

And when the President proposes, and the Republicans propose to try to change that mentality, the Democrats vote against it. The President said last year, "We have got a terrible problem with Social Security. The problem is that we are going to run out of money. There is not enough money in Social Security."

And when the Social Security program was established back in the 1930s, nobody ever thought that anybody would get any money from it to begin with. The average age in those days was 59 years old. So they set Social Security up to be collected when people became 65, assuming nobody would collect from Social Security.

But lo and behold, this country has prospered and people are living a lot longer.

□ 2215

The average age now is about 78 years. People are thinking that they can retire at 65 and live on their Social Security, and that is just not possible. So the process makes a proposal, let us do something about Social Security.

Let us explain to the American people that the Congress controlled by the Democrats for over 40 years, as they admitted tonight, spent that money as it came in, did not put it aside for Social Security. I am ashamed to say that Republicans have done the same thing. They came in and they spent the money on Social Security. But people are waking up to the problem and the President says, let us do something about it. Let us create personal Social Security accounts. Let us put people's Social Security money into an account with their name on it, give them some options about where that money is going to be invested, and let them know what they are going to get when they retire. No more of this fooling the American people into thinking that they have paid in a certain amount of money and it is going to let them live in the style to which they have become accustomed while they worked.

It is a cruel hoax that has been perpetrated on the American people. The average Social Security payment now is \$921. I do not know anybody who can live on \$921 a month; but when we tried to bring in proposals to do something about it, the Democrats shot them down. The Democrats go out and use terrible language to scare people to legislate about what is going to happen with Social Security. They talk tonight about lack of accountability. We really do need accountability in this country. We need accountability for all of us. We have to individually be accountable, and the Congress needs to be accountable. And part of our attempt to be accountable is to explain to people what the problems were with Social Security.

The Democrats just want to hide their head in the sand about it. They want to put the problem off and off and off. They do not want to deal with that. But it is a program that has developed an entitlement mentality in this country, and we have got to change that.

They talk about lack of accountability, and they talk about that in terms of FEMA. And I wonder, all of these people are talking about that and criticizing FEMA tonight for not having a plan and not being accountable, all of them voted for the Katrina money, all of them voted to give that money out with no plan and with no sense of accountability. Just a very small number of us voted against that because we wanted a plan and we wanted accountability.

Again, the hypocrisy is simply unbelievable when it comes to these folks. They talked last week about how local communities have become dependent on the Federal Government, the COPS program, education funding, all of these programs that are being funded at the State level and at the local level. Again, that has developed a sense of entitlement. When the Democrats were in charge of the Federal Government, they wanted people to come to them and ask for the money, and they wanted to be the people with largess in giving out that money. Unfortunately, we have developed that mentality in the country that local and State governments should be dependent on the Federal Government.

There is nothing in the Constitution that says the Federal Government has any business being involved in education. And yet we are funding huge dollars in education and that, again, has developed a sense of entitlement for the local people. They think the Federal Government should be giving them this money. It is a real travesty because those dollars come to the Federal Government and just a portion of them go back to the local and State governments. Whereas, if we did not take that money to begin with and left it at the State and local levels, the folks would be gaining much, much more from it, and they would be able to spend that money the way they want to spend it instead of based on the

ideas of Federal bureaucrats who want to do that or even, perish the thought, some Members of Congress who decide how it should be done.

They went on and on and on about how any potential cuts would be cutting services at the local level. And yet they say we need to cut the deficit. I really hope that the American people are going to be smart enough to see that these folks are talking out of both sides of their mouths. They want to cut the deficit, and yet they want to increase spending. They want to increase spending for things that are constitutionally Congress, things that the Federal Government has no business doing; and yet they want to put us deeper in debt, ultimately to have to raise taxes. They know that that is going to be the net result of it. And it is unbelievable to me how they can get on the floor every night and talk about that.

They talked about Congress is living for today, leaving a burden to our children; we should be paying our own way. Well, again, last fall we had a reconciliation bill that would not only cut spending but cut the growth of spending. Did any Democrats vote for that? No. Not a single one. The only people who voted for that were Republicans and not all Republicans voted for that. But there were many, many of us who understood we have simply got to rein in the appetite of the Federal Government for spending. We simply cannot continue at the level at which we are going. And yet there are many people who are frightened to try to cut the Federal budget because they know that this will be used against them, that the issues will be distorted.

When we cut growth, we are accused of cutting programs. We are not cutting programs. We are trying to cut growth. We made modest, modest changes in the spending for Medicaid in that reconciliation budget. We went from 7.3 percent growth to 7 percent. Modest changes. And what we tried to do was rein in the abuses. We tried to make sure that people would not be able to put their family members on long-term care for Medicaid and avoid paying for that themselves.

Part of that mentality that has developed in this country is that we have an entitlement society. I talk to my colleagues a lot about the use of language, and I have said the words we use are important to us. When we stand up here and we talk about "mandatory spending" and "discretionary spending" as both Republicans and Democrats do, I will have to say then we are creating a mindset for people. We are saying there is such a thing as mandatory spending. And, again, if we look at the Constitution, which ought to be the basis for why we do everything in this country, we never see those words "mandatory spending" and "discretionary spending."

Congress is in charge of spending, and it is entirely appropriate that budget bills come out of the House of Representatives. That is our job and we

should continue to do that. But we have got to break the habit of talking about discretionary and mandatory spending. The only mandatory spending that the Congress should be doing is to provide for a national defense. That is the main role of the Federal Government, and we have to remember that. We have to remember that it is our job as a Federal Government to provide for the defense of this country. State governments cannot do that. Local governments cannot do that. The Federal Government is the only government entity that can do that. That is why we are fighting a war in Iraq and in Afghanistan, and all over this world we are fighting a war on terrorism. We did not create the war. The war came to us. But it is our responsibility as a Federal Government to do that.

I often wonder how we would have been able to have stayed in World War II, to win that war and to defeat the Nazis and to defeat fascism if we had had the kind of press that we have now and the kind of naysayers that we have on the other side of the aisle. They would have gotten us out of that war long before we won that war because of the kinds of approaches that they have.

They do not understand the role of the Federal Government. They do not understand that that is what it is we should be about here. They want to do things that we have no business being involved in, providing 100,000 policemen across this Nation. We certainly do want to help the local governments solve their crime problems, but the way we can do that is get the Federal Government out of the way and let them do that at the local level, not by providing a pittance of money and then holding all kinds of strings attached to it and not allowing them to spend that money the way they need to spend it at the local level, just like we do in education, just like we do in other areas.

Last week when my colleagues were here talking about things that we should be doing and should not be doing, they brought up the issue of health care and talked about how we should not be cutting any kinds of funds out of Medicare. They talked about the Medicare part D plan and how it is not saving taxpayer dollars. They are going out and holding town hall meetings and talking about what a bad program it is and then encouraging the people in their districts to sign up for it. So, again, they are talking out of both sides of their mouths.

They talked last week about let us back up our promises by fully funding health care and education, and yet tonight they are standing up here and they are saying we have got to cut the deficit. We have got to cut back on spending. We are leaving a debt to our children. And I am quoting from last week again: "We back up our promises by fully funding our health care and education priorities."

What does that mean “fully funding” that? As far as I know, that is what socialists do. They fully fund their programs and keep people dependent on the Federal Government or on the type of centralized government that they have. They are saying that if we get out of doing business at the local and State level, then we are going to force the local and State agents or governments to raise taxes. Again, they do not understand the proper role of the Federal Government. It is up to the locals to decide what they want to do in education and what they want to do with policing.

They talked about the Federal Government would renege on its fundamental commitment to community safety by cutting the money going out for the COPS program. Nowhere do I see again in the Constitution “community safety.” I do see where it is up to the Federal Government to provide for an army and for national defense, but it is not our job to be doing that.

They say we are making progress in the battle against methamphetamines. Today in the PATRIOT Act we had the major methamphetamine legislation that is probably going to pass in this session of Congress, very, very important legislation worked on by many Members of Congress. Did they vote for it? No, they voted against it. Did they vote for the PATRIOT Act so that we could have the tools that we need to make sure that terrorists cannot come back here and do to us what happened on 9/11 because of a lack of effective dealing with that under the previous administration, ignoring all the signs that terrorists were going to be doing these kinds of things? No. They voted against it.

They really do believe that nobody is paying attention or that the people who are paying attention are only going to be hearing some of what they need to be hearing. They think that we are not going to call their hand when they are being hypocritical and when they are out and out lying.

Last week they talked about the higher education bill increasing the cost of college loans. That is absolutely wrong. What we are doing in the higher education act is to help students be able to get loans at a lower rate and have to pay back less money than they have had to pay back under Democratic administrations and under Democratic Congresses that want to make these loans more expensive and to keep people unsure of what it is they are paying for.

They talk about the fact that many people in our country are poor because they have not had the opportunities to be as prosperous as others; but what they want to do, they say, is have the Federal Government make them not poor. Again, that is socialism as I understand it.

□ 2230

What we have to do in this country is provide for opportunities to people. We

are the freest country in the world. There is no place in the world where folks have the opportunities that they have in the United States of America. They can choose to go to college. They can choose to do any kind of work they want to do. They can do all kinds of things to create prosperity for themselves. The government is not going to create prosperity.

There is one place last week, and I have to find the point that I was trying to make, where they talked about government investment in programs. Every time I hear that phrase “government investment,” it is like somebody scraping their fingernails across a blackboard for me. The government does not invest in programs. Government spends money. People invest in themselves and invest money, but the government does not do that. We do not get a payback on the money that the government spends. It is spent and it is gone.

Now, the government has certain obligations; we all know that. Again, most of the obligations are at the local and State level, not at the Federal level, but what our colleagues would like you to believe is that the Federal Government can fix anything.

They talk about the problems with Katrina and the problems with FEMA. I would contend that they, again, are talking out of both sides of their mouth. They believe that the Federal Government can fix everything so that what we should be doing is putting more money into FEMA, putting more money into these programs. The Federal Government is not equipped to do that. The Federal Government should not be the first responder.

In the Katrina situation, all levels of government, in my opinion, failed. I think none of them were prepared for what happened, but it is wrong to expect the Federal Government to go in and act like a first responder. The Federal Government should go in and take care of those things that the State and local governments cannot take care of. Leaving all those buses parked in New Orleans, not getting people out when they were told to get out, that was the responsibility of the local and State governments. That was not the responsibility of FEMA. That was not the responsibility of the Federal Government, and yet, all that is lumped into the discussions of the failure of the Federal Government.

I am sorry, but I just do not think we are going to take that blame at this level. There is plenty of blame to go around for what things the Federal Government does not do, but we are not going to take the blame of not being prepared and not taking care of those people in New Orleans. That was the responsibility of those local and State elected officials, and it is a real shame that they did not do that.

I think I will use my glass as an illustration. I have got it just about half full. Some people would say it is half empty. I think that this is an illustra-

tion of the problem that our colleagues see. Everything they see about this country is negative, negative, negative, negative. They have almost nothing good to say about it. You hear them night after night after night talking about the United States and talking about our government. You hear them only condemning, only saying negative things.

I happen to think that we live in the best country in the world and that we are doing a lot of things right. We are not a perfect country. None of us who are in elected office are perfect people, but we work hard at it, and we try to do the kinds of things that will make this country a better place.

I think always talking down the country and talking in negative terms is a very bad thing to do, and our colleagues, along with their willing accomplices, the mainstream media, do that all the time. You never hear the good news about what is going on in the economy, but there are a lot of good things going on in the economy. All they do is talk about negative things, and I am frankly tired of hearing them say that.

I want to point out some facts about the positive things about our economy. It has been growing for 17 straight quarters. You never hear that from the mainstream media. You never hear that from our colleagues.

The National Association for Business Economics predicts the economy will grow at a 4.5 percent rate in the first quarter of 2006. What is responsible for that? It is not because of government spending. The government does not create that kind of prosperity. That is created because of tax cuts and slowing down the rate of spending. But the tax cuts that the President proposed and this Congress instituted in the last 3 years are what is responsible for the positive things that have been happening in our economy.

After inflation, disposable incomes increased 2.2 percent in the last 12 months. You never hear that, again, out of our colleagues.

The Federal Reserve has reported that the median net worth of U.S. households increased 1.5 percent between 2001 and 2004. That is great news. We never read about it in the media.

January's unemployment rate fell to 4.7 percent, the lowest monthly rate since 2001, and lower than the average of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Those are decades when Democrats were in control in the Congress. The unemployment rate was lower than the average of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. I think many of us can remember when interest rates in the 1970s were reaching 20 percent. It has been a long time since we have seen high interest rates and high inflation in this country. That has all come about in a Republican administration and a Republican-controlled Congress.

There have been 29 consecutive months of job gains in this country. That has come about not because of

government investment, additional government spending. That has come about because of cuts in taxes, which left the money in the hands of entrepreneurs and the people who create capital and create jobs, not coming from the government.

Our folks on the other side of the aisle can continue to spend. They, again, and their willing colleagues in the media and in Hollywood, they can try to change what are the facts, the people from the left, but the economy is strong, and it is growing stronger every day under Republican leadership.

Do I want to see spending cut even more? You are right. Do I want to see tax cuts made permanent? You are absolutely right. We need to do that. We need to make the tax cuts permanent, and we need to cut our spending so we put more money into the hands of the entrepreneurs and into the hands of business people who can truly create wealth, who can create jobs. The government cannot do that.

I am asked a lot of times by school groups, what is the difference between Democrats and Republicans. Well, there are a lot of differences between us, but usually we are in a time crunch and I do not have a whole lot of time to explain all of the differences. So I tell folks I am going to give them the short version of what is the difference between Democrats and Republicans. It really is sort of at the nub of the issue between what is the difference between us.

Democrats think that government can solve all of our problems: Take all the money you can from the public, give it to the government, let the government solve our problems. Republicans believe that Americans work hard for their money and they should be allowed to keep as much money as they possibly can; the government should only step in to do those things that people cannot do for themselves.

The Democrats have turned that on its head. It would be cradle to grave. Again, socialism. They would do their best to try to take care of everybody. It would not be a very pretty picture, though. We can already see that. The hand of government in so many things in our country now is taking away a lot of the incentive for people to work. It is creating, again, this culture of entitlement, which we have to get away from.

The Declaration of Independence in our country talks about the pursuit of happiness, not the delivery of happiness to the people from the Federal Government. We are free to pursue happiness and pursue prosperity.

There are some other good things about this economy that I want to share. Earlier this week, the Commerce Department reported that consumer spending shot up by nine-tenths of 1 percent in January, the strongest gain in 6 months. In addition, Americans' personal incomes rose by seven-tenths of 1 percent, the highest rate since September. Again, our economy has a posi-

tive momentum, and that momentum is the direct result of a pro-growth agenda from the Republican-led Congress and our Republican President.

□ 2240

It is the Republicans who are proposing that we slow down the rate of spending and that we leave more money in the hands of the American people. We want to have improved fiscal responsibility and at the same time show our commitment to continuing economic growth. We are the party that is working to improve the lives of the American people by lowering taxes, enacting legal reform, decreasing government interference into the lives of entrepreneurs and small business owners. That is what we have to do.

Democrats, on the other hand, want to continue to promote their tax-and-spend policies because they think they know how to spend the American people's hard-earned money better than they do. However, I think the Republicans know better than that and will prevail on this issue.

I hear a lot from my constituents about the high cost of health care, and I have used this analogy before: when I grew up, I grew up in the mountains of North Carolina, extremely poor, no electricity, no running water. My family was very poor. There were no jobs in those days in that part of North Carolina, but my family could afford health care. Even though we had very little money, both my parents worked, and I began working when I was 12 years old; but health care was not as expensive as it is now, and everybody that I knew of could afford health care. But almost nobody had insurance.

In fact, I guess only school teachers maybe who worked in our county, may have had health care through the State of North Carolina; but nobody else that I know of had health insurance, and so people could afford to go to the doctor when they got sick.

Now, we didn't run to the doctor for every little thing; but when we truly needed health care, we could get it, and we could pay our bills for it. I remember that very, very clearly.

However, what has happened in the last 50 years? Why has health care become so unaffordable for people? Why has the cost of health insurance gotten so high? I contend that the reason that has happened is because of the third-party payer. And the biggest third-party payer is the Federal Government. Any time you get the Federal Government involved in something, it is going to drive up the cost of that commodity. We know that. We have seen it happen in lots and lots of cases, but I do not think there is any case where it is more clearly the case than it is with health care.

The fact that we have gotten involved in Medicare and Medicaid is driving up the cost of health care. We also see that Medicare and Medicaid determine what is going to be paid out in other programs, because that is the

benchmark that insurance companies use. And so because people are getting their health care primarily from the government or from a third-party payer, folks are not scrutinizing how much it is costing. They do not care. They just say, okay, if an aspirin costs \$150, that is okay, I am not paying for it. Insurance is paying for it.

It is again a part of that entitlement mentality we have created and taking away the personal responsibility that we used to have so much of in this country. Because of government programs, we are diminishing the sense of personal responsibility and increasing the sense of entitlement. Slowly but surely, we are changing the entire culture of this country.

When I served in the North Carolina senate, I had a good friend from Asheville, North Carolina, who served with me and who used a wonderful analogy many times, and I think it is a great one to use here. What he would say is: if you throw a frog in a pot of hot water, he will jump out of it. But if you put a frog in a pot of cold water and then you gradually turn up the heat a little at a time, pretty soon that frog will be cooked and he wouldn't even notice it.

That is what has happened in this country over the years. We have turned up the role of the Federal Government, we have turned up the sense of dependency on the government, and what we are doing is we are creating major problems for our country. We are creating an entitlement mentality which we have to break ourselves away from or else we are going to find that we have a whole generation of people that think it is the government that should take care of them.

That is what I think my Democratic colleagues want, because they believe in the power of the government. Republicans believe in the power of the individual and of individual responsibility. And I think this is a message we are going to have to keep telling. It is going to take a long time, I think, for it to get out and for it to be absorbed and for people to be able to see the wisdom; but it is something we are going to need to talk about more and more.

And we have to talk about it honestly. We cannot continue the hypocrisy that is being used by our colleagues who talk on the one hand about decreasing spending but on the other hand taking care of everybody from the cradle to the grave and doing everything from the Federal Government level.

THE 30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FITZPATRICK of Pennsylvania). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to once again address the