

Our current Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, issued a similar warning when she recently declared: "I think that our rising debt levels[sic] poses a national security threat, and it poses a national security threat in two ways. It undermines our capacity to act in our own interest, and it does constrain us where constraint may be undesirable. And it also sends a message of weakness internationally." Despite these warnings, Congress has refused to address this crisis.

Congress' spending addiction is not a partisan one. It reaches across the aisle and afflicts both parties, which is why neither party has been able to master it. We need outside help. We need pressure from outside Congress to force Congress to rein in this out-of-control behavior. We need a balanced budget amendment to our Constitution.

That is why I am introducing this legislation, which garnered 261 bipartisan votes when it came before the House for a vote last Congress. This bill would amend the Constitution to require that total spending for any fiscal year not exceed total receipts and require the President to propose budgets to Congress that are balanced each year. It would also provide an exception in times of war and during military conflicts that pose imminent and serious military threats to national security.

Furthermore, the legislation would make it harder to increase taxes by requiring that legislation to increase revenue be passed by a true majority of each chamber and not just a majority of those present and voting. Finally, the bill requires a 3/5 majority vote for any increases in the debt limit.

Our federal government must be lean, efficient and responsible with the dollars that our nation's citizens worked so hard to earn. We must work to both eliminate every cent of waste and squeeze every cent of the value out of each dollar our citizens entrust to us. Families all across our nation understand what it means to make tough decisions each day about what they can and cannot afford and government officials should be required to exercise similar restraint when spending the hard-earned dollars of our nation's citizens.

By amending the Constitution to require a balanced budget, we can force the Congress to control spending, paving the way for a return to surpluses and ultimately paying down the national debt, rather than allow big spenders to lead us further down the road of chronic deficits and in doing so leave our children and grandchildren saddled with debt that is not their own.

This concept is not new. 49 out of 50 states have a balanced budget requirement.

Our nation faces many difficult decisions in the coming years, and Congress will face great pressure to spend beyond its means rather than to make the difficult decisions about spending priorities. Unless Congress is forced to make the decisions necessary to create a balanced budget, it will always have the all-too-tempting option of shirking this responsibility. The Balanced Budget Constitutional amendment is a common sense approach to ensure that Congress is bound by the same fiscal principles that guide America's families each day.

I urge support of this important legislation.

SALUTE TO SLOVAK REPUBLIC

HON. JOHN L. MICA

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 3, 2013

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate our ally and friend, the Republic of Slovakia, on her 20th anniversary of independence.

In two brief decades, Slovakia has dramatically transitioned to an independent, democratic and economically viable free nation.

As some of my colleagues may know, my great grandparents emigrated from Slovakia to the United States at the turn of the last century. Like so many others, my family was drawn to America by the promises of freedom and opportunity. My ancestors would be proud to see both the progress of America over that century and the positive development of the Slovak Republic in its 20 years of independence.

For a millennia, the Slovak people were ruled or governed by others. After centuries of power shifts and realignments, in 1989, the Velvet Revolution brought down the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. Democracy came to that nation as formerly jailed dissident and political activist Vaclav Havel was elected to the presidency. However, the Slovak people's yearning for self-governance was not realized until 1993.

Following the peaceful separation of the Czech and Slovak Republics, January 1, 1993 marks the birth of the Second Slovak Republic. As fate would have it, days later I was sworn in as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives. As one of the Members of Congress with Slovak ancestry, I have been proud to work with many who have been so successful in strengthening U.S.-Slovak relations and to aid in the political and economic development of the Slovak Republic.

Like any new democracy, the Slovak Republic has experienced some growing pains. After President Michal Kovács service as the first president, my good friend and former Košice Mayor Rudolf Schuster was elected president after a constitutional amendment changed the presidency to a directly elected position. His successor is now President Ivan Gašparovič. I commend these and all the other Slovak leaders who have helped fashion a new era for their people.

Even with many difficult challenges as a new nation, the Slovak Republic made outstanding progress over the last 20 years, and I am proud to have played a very small part in its history. In 2000, Slovakia became a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and in 2004, joined both NATO and the European Union. The Republic of Slovakia and its people continue to provide international leadership both in Europe and throughout the world.

For the United States and the American people, we are fortunate to have such a strong ally and friend in the family of nations. So today we salute and congratulate the Slovak Republic on the special occasion of their 20th anniversary of independence. We wish them every continued future success as they mark this historic milestone.

I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating the Slovak Republic and look forward to peace and prosperity for both of our countries for decades to come.

INTRODUCTION STATEMENT; H.R. 40 THE COMMISSION TO STUDY REPARATION PROPOSALS FOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS ACT

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 3, 2013

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to re-introduce H.R. 40, the Commission to Study Reparations Proposals for African-Americans Act. Since I first introduced H.R. 40 in 1989, we have made substantial progress in elevating this issue in the national consciousness. Through legislation, state and local resolutions and litigation, we are moving closer to a full dialogue on the role of slavery in building this country.

In the 110th Congress, the House passed a slavery apology bill on July 29, 2008, in which the House issued a formal apology for slavery. The Senate followed on July 18, 2009, with the passage of S. Con. Res. 26 which was sponsored by Tom Harkin of Iowa. In recognition of the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade on January 1, 1808, both the House and Senate passed legislation creating a commemoration commission, which was signed into law on February 5, 2008. I believe that such Federal efforts are significant steps toward proper acknowledgment and understanding of slavery and its implications, but our responsibilities on this matter are even greater.

The establishment of a commission to study the institution of slavery in the United States, as well as its consequences that reach into modern day society, is our responsibility. This concept of a commission to address historical wrongs is not unprecedented. In fact, in recent Congresses, commission bills have been put forward.

In 1983, a Presidential Commission determined that the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II was racist and inhumane, and as a result, the 1988 Civil Liberties Act provided redress for those injured by the internment. However, the internment of Japanese Latin Americans in the United States during World War II was not examined by the Commission, resulting in legislation calling for a commission to examine this oversight. Legislation establishing a commission to review the injustices suffered by European Americans, European Latin Americans, and Jewish refugees during World War II has also been proposed.

H.R. 40 is no different than these other commission bills. H.R. 40 establishes a commission to examine the institution of slavery and its legacy, like racial disparities in education, housing, and healthcare. Following this examination, the commission would recommend appropriate remedies to Congress. As I have indicated before, remedies do not equate to monetary compensation.

In the 110th Congress, I convened the first Congressional hearing on H.R. 40. With witnesses that included Professor Charles Ogletree, Episcopal Bishop M. Thomas Shaw, and Detroit City Councilwoman JoAnn Watson, we began a formal dialogue on the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. This Congress, I look forward to continuing this conversation so that our nation can better understand this part of our history.