good feelings that come from their values, that come to anyone who reaches out to help someone in need.

WHY DEFICITS MEAN SOMETHING

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

Mr. TANNER. Mr. Speaker, I am a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, as everybody knows. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) is here with me. The gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY) was here earlier, as was the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR). This is going to be a first in a series of, I hope, enlightened or enlightening exercises that we do with regard to why deficits mean something in this country.

I heard some of the most astounding rhetoric I have ever heard in my life when there are some in this town who say deficits do not matter. We are going to try to point out why they do over the next few weeks.

Mr. Speaker, do you realize that today we are passing on to our children and our grandchildren an 18 percent mortgage on this country? We have literally mortgaged our children's future by our spending habits and our inability or our lack of courage to raise the necessary funds to pay for what my generation wants.

□ 1830

The President has submitted a budget that is another $300 billion in the red. Let me just say why that matters.

We already are paying, as a people, a billion dollars a day in interest on past consumption. If we do the math on that, there are 129.9 million individual taxpayers in this country, that means that every individual taxpayer last year paid on average $2,556 on the debt, interest on the debt, a debt tax that will continue to go up under these present economic policies that we are asked to follow.

It gets even worse than that, though, because what happens is, every time we borrow money, we have put a tax increase not only on us, but on our children and grandchildren, that can never be repealed because the interest must be paid. It is a tax increase every day we sit here spending more money or not having the courage to raise the money we need to protect this country and the people who live here.

Every day we do that is another tax on our children and us and our grandchildren that cannot be repealed. That is what the debt tax is. That is what the interest tax is.

And it really is ironic that people would sit here and say, we are not going to pass on the problems of this Congress on this day, in this hour, to those who come after us. If our forefathers had done to us what we are doing to our children and grandchildren, we would not have the standard of living we have today, that we have had and enjoyed. We would not have the opportunities, because we would not have the discretionary income for education, for health care, for veterans, for the world class military that we all know is necessary for the defense of this country.

We will not have that money. It will continue to go out in the form of interest payments.

What the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY) said about Brazil, we are not creditworthy were it not for the full faith, credit and confidence of the people of this country in terms of what we have done in borrowing money. It is a shame what is going on each and every day.

The gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR) asked for a balanced budget amendment vote, 1,400-some pages. We do not have one. This Congress, if it does not come face to face with the fact that we are spending a lot of money that we did not count on because of 9–11 that we have to spend to protect this country, our first and foremost obligation as Members of Congress, if they do not come face to face with that and understand that we have to get the money up to pay for it or else pass it on to our children in the form of a debt tax that can never be repealed, then we have shamefully failed not only our oath of office, but we have shamefully failed those who will follow us.

And each and every day a billion dollars goes out of this place to pay interest, and each and every day we operate in the red, it is more piled on. That is why deficits matter and that is what the Blue Dogs are going to be talking about over the next few weeks.

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

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

THE NATIONAL DEBT

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

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, just a few days ago the President stood in where the Clerk of the House stands and told the Nation that we will not pass along our problems to other Congresses, other Presidents and other generations. I stood and applauded that statement because I agree with my President. I agree with my commander in chief.

Then I was somewhat disappointed, considerably disappointed, when the administration's budget came through projecting a $307 billion deficit for next year and deficits as far as the eye can see. The President's budget protects cumulative deficits of over $2.1 trillion from 2002 through 2011. That is a $7.7 trillion deterioration of our fiscal matters of this country in 2 years.

The Blue Dogs stood on this floor and opposed the economic game plan that we are now under. We were not prophetic. We agreed with the majority party on the spending, but we were not even allowed to have our budget on the floor, and we have heard nothing but rhetoric ever since.

But now the results of the economic game plan are coming in, and I want everyone to understand, 60 percent of the deterioration has occurred because of 9–11–01 and the military homeland defense needs of this country and the recession. But 40 percent of that deterioration has occurred because of the economic game plan that we are now under.

I personally happen to agree with the President's leadership regarding solving the Social Security problem while we still had a chance. Again, I am ready to step forward in a bipartisan way and work with my colleagues to take care of that debt for our children. But that is not what we are talking about today. That is not what is being proposed and talked about in the budget.

After 4 years of reduction in the debt held by the public and warnings by administration and Republican after Republican in Congress that the government would pay off the debt too quickly 2 years ago, debt held by the public will exceed $5 trillion by 2008, a 50 percent increase, a debt tax increase on the American people that every taxpayer will have to pay, a debt tax increase under the administration's budget that is being proposed.

The administration requested the statutory debt limit be increased for the second time in less than a year. That ought to tell us something. When we are having to increase the debt limit so we can borrow more money, it ought to tell us there is something wrong with the game plan that we are now following.

The greatest danger of the deficits in the President's budget is that it will make it harder to address the challenges facing Social Security and Medicare when our baby boom generation begins to retire in the next decade. Instead of saving money to prepare for those costs, we will already be in a deep hole when the $18 trillion liability facing those programs begins to come due. The analytical prospectus volume of the President's budget, the administration warned us, as the baby boomers reach retirement age in large numbers, the deficit is projected to rise steadily as a percent of GDP. Deficits will grow from 2.2 percent of GDP in 2020 to 5.4 percent in 2030 to 8.8 percent in 2040 under the President's budget policies. How can we continue to ignore that today?

The debt tax is real. It is an increase. But instead of our paying for it today, what are we saying? We are going to give this generation another tax cut. And no one, including the President's

own budget analysis, shows that it is going to do anything other than increase the debt.

And we are not even talking about paying for the war, the war that we all pray will not come, but it looks like it is; and I am behind my commander in chief 100 percent. But the rhetoric of the economy in the budget does not match the rhetoric of what is needed as the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR) spoke so eloquently on a moment ago. The debt tax consumed 18 percent of all government revenues to pay interest on the $6.4 trillion debt last year. That debt tax will go up to 19.5 percent by 2008 under the economic game plan that we are being asked to support.

I ask my colleagues as one Democrat who used to vote with you and we passed the balanced budget constitutional amendment in 1995, what has happened to you? What has caused you to suddenly start saying, deficits do not matter, balancing the budget does not matter?

The Blue Dogs stand ready to work with our President and with the majority in seeing that we do not increase the taxes on our children through the debt tax.

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

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

SUPPORTING THE NOMINATION OF MIGUEL ESTRADA

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

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning in support of the nomination of Miguel Estrada. If Miguel Estrada were considered for Federal bench on merits alone, we would not be still debating his qualifications. He would already be serving.

Estrada was given the very highest recommendation by the American Bar Association, not what those who seek to tar and feather him would consider a right wing organization. While we prefer our Tennessee law schools, we do know that some consider Harvard to be a pretty good alternative. Mr. Estrada not only graduated from Harvard, but was the editor of the Law Review. Again, Harvard is not what Estrada's critics would consider a right wing organization. And in what can only be described as a stellar career, he went on to clerk for Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, who is also not considered by those on the left to be part of the right wing.

I think my point is clear. Partisan politics are behind the attacks on his character and the delay in his nomination.

With the country on alert for terrorist attacks, a potential conflict in Iraq, and effort on the way to enact economic stimulus, it is time to stand behind this extremely qualified candidate.

CHENEY TASK FORCE RECORDS AND GAO AUTHORITY

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

Mr. WAXMAN. Mr. Speaker, last Friday, February 7, the General Accounting Office abandoned its efforts to obtain basic records about the operation of the Vice President's Task Force on Energy Policy. This action received only limited attention, and few people fully understand its profound consequences.

When we have divided government, the public can expect Congress to conduct needed oversight over the executive branch. But today we are living in an era of one-party control. This means the House and the Senate are not going to conduct meaningful oversight of the Bush administration. When there is one-party control of both the White House and Congress, there is only one entity that can hold the administration accountable, and that is the independent General Accounting Office. But now GAO has been forced to surrender this fundamental independence.

When GAO decided not to appeal the District Court decision in Walker v. Cheney, it made a fateful decision. In the Comptroller General's words, GAO will now require ''an affirmative statement of support from at least one full committee with jurisdiction over any records they seek to access prior to any future court action by GAO.'' Translated, what this means is that GAO will bring future actions to enforce its rights to documents only with the blessings of the majority party in Congress.

This is a fundamental shift in our system of checks and balances. For all practical purposes, the Bush administration is now immune from effective oversight by the Congress. Some people say GAO should never have brought legal action to obtain information about the energy task force, but in reality GAO had no choice.

The Bush administration's penchant for secrecy has been demonstrated time and time again. The Department of Justice has issued a directive curtailing public access to information under the Freedom of Information Act. The White House has restricted access to Presidential records. The administration has refused to provide information about the identity of over 1,000 individuals detained in the name of homeland security.

The White House deliberately picked this fight with GAO in order to secure its power to run the government in secret. From the start, the White House assumed a hostile and uncompromising position, arguing that GAO's investigation ''would unconstitutionally interfere with the functioning of the executive branch.'' Even when GAO voluntarily scaled back its request, dropping its demand for minutes and notes, the Vice President's office was intransigent. Faced with an administration that had no interest in reaching an accommodation, GAO was left with no choice. Reluctantly on February 22, 2002, GAO filed its first-ever lawsuit against the executive branch to obtain access to information.

□ 1845

In December, the district court in the case issued a sweeping decision in favor of the Bush administration, ruling that GAO had no standing to sue the executive branch. The judge in the case was a recent Bush appointee who served as a deputy to Ken Starr during the Independent Counsel investigation of the Clinton administration. The judge's reasoning contorted the law, and it ignored both Supreme Court and appellate court precedent recognizing GAO's right to use the courts to enforce its statutory rights to information.

Before deciding whether to pursue an appeal, the Comptroller General consulted with congressional leaders. He found no support from Republican leaders for an appeal.

This hypocrisy is simply breathtaking. During the 1990s, it was the Republicans in Congress who embarked on a concerted effort to undermine the authority of the President. Congressional committees spent over $15 million investigating the White House. They demanded and received information on the innermost workings of the White House. They subpoenaed top White House officials to testify about the advice they gave the President. They forced the White House to disclose internal White House documents, memos, e-mails, phone records, and even lists of guests at White House movie showings. They abused congressional powers, and they launched countless GAO investigations.

But now that President Bush and Vice President CHENEY are in office—

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEARCE). The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. WAXMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to proceed for 1 additional minute.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair cannot entertain the motion. The gentleman's time has expired.

THE BUSH RECESSION AND ITS IMPACT ON MINORITY WORKERS

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

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN).

CHENEY TASK FORCE RECORDS AND GAO AUTHORITY

Mr. WAXMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding, because