

I will tell you what I think we need to do. Half of your conference over there agrees we need to balance the budget in 7 years, and what I say is the President will not come around, let us forget about the President, let us sit down with the conservative side of the Democratic Caucus with us and come to terms on a 7-year balanced budget so we can do a veto override, and we can reopen the Government, and we can all go home for Christmas.

But I bought a Christmas tree, and I brought my wife and daughter up here, and I am willing to stay as long as it takes.

THIS IS A HOSTAGE SITUATION

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

Mr. PETERSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, this is a hostage situation. I know from which I speak. I was a hostage of the Vietnamese Government for six Christmases. I knew what was going on at that time. As a hostage in Vietnam I knew what my options were. I really had a feel of the paralysis of the circumstance, and I could live with that. I was a volunteer, just like so many of our brave men and women that are in Bosnia right now are volunteers to serve their Nation, and I would take my hit. I did not have any problem with that. But what we have here is a nation, an entire nation, every citizen of the United States, being held hostage to the radical extremist portion of the Republican Caucus conference.

Now maybe they can justify that. Maybe that is OK. Maybe they are OK out there writing the new Dickens Christmas Schrooge Carol based on new circumstances, modern circumstances. Maybe in fact they all wish to be the Christmas Scrooge because they are holding not only the Federal employees who have been furloughed, they are holding this entire country hostage to an ideology that the country is not buying into.

The United States citizenry is not extreme, they are not radicals. They are God-fearing, compassionate, logically thinking people, and they cannot understand why it is that we as a House of Representatives cannot sit down and agree to disagree; first of all, to get down to some negotiations, but then to get to the point of compromise, yes, compromise, the word "compromise" which has been for whatever reason essentially destroyed in its definition. In fact we are using the term "compromise" in its worst categorization, which would be to suggest to compromise one's values.

We are ultimately going to have to compromise, my colleagues. We are ultimately going to have to do the people's business. We are ultimately going to have to answer to the mainstream of America as we deal with this budget issue.

Extremist, radical ideas are not America's ideas. There will be a price to pay if the radical elements continue, and that price will be paid at the ballot box next November because that is how it works here.

The question is who, in fact, is in charge? Who is in charge? Who is leading here in this national government? We have lost our leadership. Clearly the Republican side has lost its leadership because they have failed to keep the motors of government working, which is their contract with America as a majority. It is their contract to keep the offices of the government running. They have purposefully shut them down, and they have done so, in fact I believe, with malice. We need to move on.

THE BLAME GAME

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kentucky [Mr. LEWIS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, today I listened to the President in his news conference, and he was talking about essentially in the same way and with the same terms as the previous speaker about extreme freshmen, 73 individuals that are holding up the Government, and you know it is the same old story: the blame game.

By the way, I remember a President by the name of John F. Kennedy, and I remember when the Bay of Pigs tragedy happened, and President Kennedy stood up and said, "I take the blame, the buck stops here." But what I heard from President Clinton today was that it is the freshmen that are causing this problem, those extremists.

It reminded me not too long ago when we had the tragedy in Waco. The President said, "It is not my fault," and the Attorney General had to take the blame.

He is never to blame. It is never his fault.

He has offered four budgets that do not keep his word with CBO scoring, but it is not his fault. There were three bills on his desk that he could have signed that would have got the Government up and running again, Commerce, Interior, and VA-HUD, that would have put the people back to work, but he vetoed them, and he blames the freshmen.

Mr. Speaker, let us talk about those extreme freshmen just for a minute. What is extreme, and I asked this the other day, what is extreme about wanting a balanced budget in 7 years? Seven years, not tomorrow, not next year, not 2 years from now, but 7 years. A glidepath for 7 years that is going to actually spend basically \$3 billion more than what we are spending now. There are no cuts. We are going to be spending more money. As I said, a glidepath towards a balanced budget that will provide a future for our children and our grandchildren, that will not allow this country to go bankrupt. What is extreme about that? Trying to save the economic viability of this country.

Medicare. The President said we are extremists, that we are going to cut, slash, kill Medicare. There is only a 2-percent difference between the Republican plan and the President's plan. Basically \$138 difference over a year period of time in the year 2002 on what would be spent per individual.

What are we talking about here when we are talking about extremists and radicals? Individuals that want to save Medicare for their mothers and fathers. My mother and father are 78 years old. I want to save Medicare.

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Why would I do anything to hurt the most precious people that I know? I do not know when this rhetoric is going to stop, but it is time that we get serious about balancing the budget. It is time we do have serious negotiations, but the President is not willing. He is the one that is not willing. He is the one that broke it off last night. He is the one that said, in one instance through the Vice President, that, "Well, we cannot go specifically by the CBO. We have to have other numbers in there." Then he comes back later and he said, "That was not what we meant. We are willing to go by CBO scores now."

What are we dealing with here? Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, I wish the President would just come forth, put a budget on the table that would provide for a balanced budget in 7 years and that would allow the CBO to score it to see if the numbers are right. I think we would be willing to then look at, what is he talking about, Medicare and taxes? We are willing to look.

WE CANNOT FORGET THE POOR IN OUR NATION IN ORDER TO MAKE THE WEALTHY WEALTHIER

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WHITE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas [Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest. I, too, am tired with the rhetoric. No matter which way you put it, there are real people out there being affected. I am from a regional city with many, many, many Federal employees. I, too, have gotten messages: Stick with the President.

I am from a city and a district that has one of the most well-known medical schools, one of the most well-known dental schools. A medical school that has four Nobel Prize winners there now in my district. None of them are for these cuts. All of them understand that when we put the bottom line to it, there are a few more dollars being added. So no, there is not a cut as such; but what we have forgotten to be honest with the people about, there are a million more people going into the system to share these dollars. When you put that many more people