

panel and maintains full authority to remove the Independent Counsel. Mr. Starr was not appointed because he was without integrity; he was appointed because he is a fine lawyer, possessed of substantial legal skills and experience, and respected for his character and honesty.

If President Clinton genuinely believes Mr. Starr has acted beyond authority, the Attorney General may remove him for cause and appoint a different Independent Counsel. The power to do so resides in this President.

If the President believes the insults that his spokesmen level at Mr. Starr, then the President should seek removal. If he does not agree with those insults, the President should instruct his defenders to stop their public criticism, criticism that is not designed to learn the truth, but to deflect it and bring contempt on our justice system.

With international challenges facing our country, the public needs reassurance that our highest national leader is truthful, that his representations to us are reliable, that we can trust his word on matters of national security, that he is an honorable representative for all Americans. Under the circumstances, the President's sacred honor is in question. All the criticisms against the Independent Counsel by political operatives of the President do not change that at all. Their criticisms serve not the best interests of the country nor the one standard that Americans support most, the truth.

Mr. Speaker, all Americans need to know that our President is honorable. Seeking the truth should not just be another political campaign. Assaulting our legal system and the officers of the court who administer it, who serve under it, may have temporary political benefit. Public opinion polls ebb and flow, but the long-term damage is more lasting. Public distrust of our legal system, the system in which we want our citizens to have faith, will result from a contradiction of the noble American principle that we are a country of laws, not men. That rule of law and justice is of paramount importance to a civil society. No person, no matter how popular, is above the law.

Mr. Speaker, we should all take a careful look at the phenomenon unfolding before us, the gaming of our justice system, where criticizing legal authority is the defense weapon of choice, where putting a proper spin on the evidence is a substitute for being truthful and honest and accepting the consequences.

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Free societies governed by laws fairly administered can prevail over political tyranny only if citizens have faith in and respect for authorities charged with enforcing the laws. Law is the embodiment of the moral sentiment of the people. The laws of our country are the most perfect branch of ethics. Laws should be like death, which spares no one. It has been said that every viola-

tion of truth is a stab at the heart of human society.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, our society, our country, needs the truth in this instance. To people of integrity, there would be no conversation so agreeable as that of a man, be he the President or the independent counsel, who has no intention to deceive. The withholding of truth can be a worse deception than a direct misstatement. Searching for the truth is the noblest occupation of mankind. Obscuring it is a curse on our society that will damage our institutions of government and our national spirit for years to come.

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

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

EXPLAINING THE ATTITUDES, CONCERNS, AND BELIEFS OF OUR CONSTITUENTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. SCHAFFER) is recognized for half of the time until midnight as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. BOB SCHAFFER of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, tonight I am joined by some of my colleagues from the freshman Republican class, which includes individuals who were elected in 1996 and were sworn in at the beginning of 1997. This class is one that has come to this microphone often during special orders to talk about the agendas that we have set forward and that we are fighting to promote here in Congress, but more recently, we have had the opportunity to spend a considerable amount of time back at home in our respective districts, holding and conducting a number of town meetings and visiting with constituents and speaking about the issues that are taking place here, and describing our activities to our constituents.

So tonight our focus is primarily to report back to the Congress and to our colleagues about those things we have heard from our constituents, and to in fact explain the attitudes and opinions and beliefs of those constituents to the rest of the House.

With that in mind I am joined tonight by the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) and also the gentleman from great State of Minnesota, Mr. ROY BLUNT, is here. We may be joined by another gentleman from the State of Michigan, who has suggested he may join us tonight. I just wanted to have a general discussion with the Members here, and yield time back and forth and talk about the things we have heard.

As for me, conducting several town meetings and visiting throughout the country, throughout the district, rath-

er, the concern for the key issue in the country of the national debt seemed to be first and foremost on people's minds, at about \$5.5 trillion. That debt, when divided by the number of citizens in the country, comes to about \$20,000 per man, woman, and child.

People are quite concerned about providing some real relief with that debt. People are encouraged by the news that we have heard and the reports that the economy has done so well and has allowed the American taxpayers to catch up with the spending of Congress, so we anticipate a budget surplus; that is to suggest that the debt may be eliminated, and that is, again, according to the way the government does its accounting. But the real question is what to do with a surplus if one is found to exist.

What I am hearing for the most part is that people would like to see us find some strategy to retire that debt, either pay it off directly, to try to find a way to relieve the tax burden on the American people in a way that allows them to be more productive, and generate more revenue to the Federal Government through tax relief, and a number of other strategies that have been suggested to me.

People would still like to see us move forward on our goals to provide further tax relief, to rein in the abuses at the IRS, and to begin treating taxpayers as though we are innocent until the IRS proves we might be guilty, rather than the other way around, as the burden is unfairly placed on taxpayers today when there is some question over tax obligation and liability.

Education was the third key issue that I had heard back in my district. We have had a lot of discussion about the government trying to usurp an independent national testing strategy that we have today, with independent operations that provide national benchmarks for our schools. The Clinton administration, as we know, has been trying to establish a national testing procedure through the U.S. Department of Education in a government-owned sort of fashion.

Many people in my district, in fact most people who are familiar with the proposal, have flatly rejected it and believe that we ought to defer authority back to our States and really focus on the freedom to teach and liberty to learn at the most local level. So that is a general sense of the key issues that have been raised in my town meetings.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) to tell us what he has been hearing.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Colorado for yielding to me.

I would say that there has been a lot of talk lately about how great the economy is doing, and just yesterday the Congressional Budget Office announced that we actually have an \$8 billion Federal surplus in 1998. I think that is remarkable when we think about where we have come from, starting when our side took a poll of the