

reader. In any event, the rights of freedom of speech and press were next, and then the right of us, the people, to peaceably assemble and petition the government for redress.

You see, these rights are first because if you do not have these, the rest of them in the Bill of Rights do not mean anything. And when this speech phrase was put here, it was put here because there were two types of speech our forefathers wanted to protect: religious speech and political speech. You see, that is the controversy. You could not say what you wanted to say about the king. You might get in trouble. And so political speech is protected. Religious speech is protected. And that is why you have the right of freedom of speech and, of course, the right of press. And a free press protects the rights in this amendment and all the others as well. And, of course, the right of the people to assemble and petition the government.

So as we progress in the next few weeks, we will talk more about our Constitution in detail, hopefully getting some interest in the American public, into reading this book. Most books like this have the Declaration of Independence in it and then the Constitution.

The Declaration of Independence was the promise. The Constitution was the fulfillment of that promise. And it is a philosophy our forefathers had that we still are arguing and debating about tonight and debating in this House on a constant basis. It is the idea of freedom from government, or government controlling us. That is the choice we make every time we pass legislation.

Every time we give government more authority, we are taking more authority and responsibility from us, the individual and the people, and willingly giving it to government. Maybe we should do that and maybe we should not. But freedom is something that is very valuable. It is, in fact, the most valuable thing that any of us as individuals have or will ever have. And that is why the Founders of our country believed and died and lost so much to be free from British rule.

It is now a world we live in, where many countries are free, that raise the value and worth of the individual to its highest level and put government below the people. And in this country we must constantly be vigilant to protect the people from government, because it is government's responsibility to do our will, not our responsibility to do government's will. Our will is paramount to the government's. And the only way government gets authority is because we decide to give it authority over the rest of us.

I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to spend these few minutes talking about these great two documents, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States. And as the weeks progress, we will talk more about these truths that are self-evident, that these two docu-

ments are who we are, what we are, what we stand for, and what we will continue to stand for.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed without amendment a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 1053. An act to authorize the extension of nondiscriminatory treatment (normal trade relations treatment) to the products of Ukraine.

□ 1800

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SCHWARZ of Michigan). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor once again to come before the House. I would like to thank Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi for allowing us to have the time and the Democratic whip, Mr. HOYER; Mr. CLYBURN, our chairman; and Mr. LARSON, our vice-chair.

Mr. Speaker, we have been coming to the floor all this week. We are going to be talking tonight about our plans to hopefully move this country forward. Maybe we can work together in doing that in a bipartisan way. Mr. RYAN is here at the top of the hour tonight, and I am so glad that you are here.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, it is great to be here. We have a lot to talk about again, as we wrap up another week of business here at the Capitol.

There are a lot of issues facing our country, and I had a lot of meetings this week on different issues: education, folks in about manufacturing, about the local economy and the problems that they are having with pension and health care.

I think if you look at what is happening in the country, you will see that most Americans either intellectually or in their gut realize that the country is going in the wrong direction.

So our plan tonight, as we come here several nights a week, is to try to let the American people know that we are moving them forward.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is very easy to say that, trying to let them know that we are moving forward because that is what we are trying to do, Mr. Speaker. We are trying to move this country in the right direction. Unfortunately, I must add there has been a lot of discussion here under the Capitol dome about who we are going to do business with, how we are going to do business with them, and how we are going to prevent ourselves from getting into a situation like this ongoing port situation that is some back-room deal that took place with a special com-

mittee, and we are finding out more and more about it each day.

When we start, I do not really want to focus on that, Mr. Speaker. I want to focus on the fact that we talk about working in a bipartisan way. The Republican Party here in this House is in the majority. That means that the majority has the opportunity to lead in a comprehensive way, including all Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, as we start to move down the road to not only making this country financially secure but secure its borders and secure all America.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. One of the issues that I think is a fundamental issue that we have in the country facing us is the issue of balancing the budget here and making sure that our country pays its bills. The Republican majority has not been able to get themselves together in a comprehensive way, as you said, to try to balance the budget here in the United States.

I want to just make a point here, and we have got several charts I think that are pretty powerful in illustrating this point.

The Republicans have increased the debt limit, Mr. Speaker, by \$3 trillion, \$3 trillion. This Republican Congress, Mr. Speaker, has said to the Treasury Department, go ahead and borrow that money. In June of 2002, increased by \$450 billion. In May of 2003, increase of \$984 billion. In November of 2004, \$800 billion, and we have an increase coming that is going to probably come in the next couple weeks of another \$781 billion. Over \$3 trillion this Republican Congress has okayed for the Treasury to go out and borrow because this Republican Congress does not have the fiscal responsibility or the discipline to rein in spending.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. There is no probably about it. You are saying they probably will raise the debt ceiling. There is no probably about it. It is going to happen.

We have our rubber stamp here because you know that they are going to rubber-stamp this deal. They are going to take this stamp out, and they are going to rubber-stamp raising the debt ceiling. What does that mean? What that means, by some \$821 billion, raising the debt ceiling, even more, beyond where it is now, and that is just the number that I received recently that Secretary Snow has predicted we need to raise the debt ceiling by.

It is because of the love affair with special interests, giving oil companies more subsidies or more money in the time that they are making record profits. It is when the President says let us make tax cuts permanent for billionaires, knowing that we have been fiscally irresponsible, Mr. Speaker; and I think it is important, I was about to just give some information that is pretty fresh about what happened last night in Appropriations Committee, and I think it is important for us to reflect on this.

We talk about bipartisanship. We talk about working in a comprehensive