Adoption of the Conference Report on H.R. 2112—Agriculture, Rural Development, Food & Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

Stated against:

Mr. MANZULLO. Mr. Speaker, I missed rollcall No. 857. Had I been present, I would have voted "nay."

PROPOSING A BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 466, I move to suspend the rules and pass the joint resolution (H.J. Res. 2) proposing a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution of the United States, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the joint resolution.

The text of the joint resolution is as follows:

H.J. RES. 2

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the following article is proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States within seven years after the date of its submission for ratification:

"ARTICLE—

"SECTION 1. Total outlays for any fiscal year shall not exceed total receipts for that fiscal year, unless three-fifths of the whole number of each House of Congress shall provide by law for a specific excess of outlays over receipts by a rollcall vote.

"SECTION 2. The limit on the debt of the United States held by the public shall not be increased, unless three-fifths of the whole number of each House shall provide by law for such an increase by a rollcall vote.

"SECTION 3. Prior to each fiscal year, the President shall transmit to the Congress a proposed budget for the United States Government for that fiscal year in which total outlays do not exceed total receipts.

"SECTION 4. No bill to increase revenue shall become law unless approved by a majority of the whole number of each House by a rollcall vote.

"SECTION 5. The Congress may waive the provisions of this article for any fiscal year in which a declaration of war is in effect. The provisions of this article may be waived for any fiscal year in which the United States is engaged in military conflict which causes an imminent and serious military threat to national security and is so declared by a joint resolution, adopted by a majority of the whole number of each House, which becomes law. Any such waiver must identify and be limited to the specific excess or increase for that fiscal year made necessary by the identified military conflict.

"SECTION 6. The Congress shall enforce and implement this article by appropriate legislation, which may rely on estimates of outlays and receipts.

"SECTION 7. Total receipts shall include all receipts of the United States Government except those derived from borrowing. Total outlays shall include all outlays of the United States Government except for those for repayment of debt principal.

"SECTION 8. This article shall take effect beginning with the fifth fiscal year beginning after its ratification.".

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HASTINGS of Washington). Pursuant to House Resolution 466, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) each will control 2 hours and 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials on House Joint Resolution 2, as amended, currently under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Americans want the Federal Government to stop excessive government spending and reduce the Federal deficit. The last time the budget was balanced was during the Clinton administration, when Republicans in Congress passed the first balanced budget in over 25 years. Meanwhile, the Federal debt has climbed from less than $400 billion in 1970 to over $15 trillion today.

Mr. Speaker, President Obama has set the wrong kind of new record. The national debt has increased faster under his administration than under any other President in history. America cannot continue to run huge Federal budget deficits. Financing Federal overspending through continued borrowing threatens to drown Americans in high taxes and heavy debt, and it puts a drag on the economy.

The Federal Government now borrows 42 cents for every dollar it spends. No family, no community, no business, no country can sustain that kind of excessive spending. That is the road to insolvency. Unfortunately, this kind of bad behavior has gone unchecked for so long that it has become the norm. The Federal Government has been on a decades-long shopping spree, racking up the bills and leaving them for future generations.

We need a Constitutional mandate to force both the President and Congress to adopt annual budgets that spend no more than the government takes in. Only a balanced budget constitutional amendment will save us from unending Federal deficits.

Just as both parties have joint responsibility for the deficit, we must jointly take responsibility for controlling the deficit by passing the balanced budget amendment. We came very close to passing this balanced budget amendment in 1995, falling just one vote short in the Senate of the required two-thirds majority. In that Congress, the amendment was supported by Congressman HOYER, now minority whip, Congressman CLYBURN, now Assistant Democratic leader, and Senator JOSEPH BIDEN, now Vice President.

As then-Senator BIDEN stated in support of the balanced budget amendment, "In recent decades we have faced a problem that we do not seem to be able to solve. We cannot balance our budget—or more correctly, we will not. The decision to encumber future generations with financial obligations is one that can rightly be considered among the fundamental choices addressed in the Constitution."

Congress is way overdue to pass a balanced budget amendment, and the American people want it. Polls show that 74 percent are in favor of a balanced budget amendment. It took less than a generation for us to get into this mess, we need a fiscal fix that will now last for generations.

If we want to make lasting cuts to Federal spending, a constitutional amendment is the only solution. It is our last line of defense against Congress' unending desire to overspend and overtax.

Thomas Jefferson believed that "the public debt is the greatest of dangers to be feared." Jefferson wished "it were possible to obtain a single amendment to our Constitution taking from the Federal Government the power of borrowing." It is time that we listened to Thomas Jefferson and passed a constitutional amendment to end the Federal Government's continuous deficit spending. We must solve our debt crisis to save the future.

I want to thank Mr. GOODLATTE, the gentleman from Virginia, for introducing the version of the balanced budget amendment we are considering today and for his tireless work in support of the amendment.

Since the 1930s, dozens of proposals offered by both Democrats and Republicans have called for constitutional amendments to address Federal budget deficits. We have the opportunity today to take the first step toward making a balanced budget a reality by passing this legislation.

□ 1630

The American people have not given Congress a blank check. Let's demonstrate to the American people that Congress can be fiscally responsible and get our economic house in order. Borrowing 42 cents for every dollar the government spends and setting a new deficit record is not the road to prosperity. Let's put our country first and pass this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Ladies and gentlemen, this balanced budget constitutional amendment is one that surprises me, and very little surprises me anymore. But for us to be seriously, on this day and this time, considering an amendment to the Constitution of the United States that would destroy jobs, that would drastically cut Medicare and Social Security and give members of the Federal judiciary the right to raise taxes and

make spending decisions for us is relatively shocking to me, and I am very much opposed to it.

I want to engage my dear friend, the chairman of the committee, in an exchange of views on this, but let's start off the discussion with this reality. This is not 1995, and that's why so many people that supported the amendment then have changed their minds now, and they will explain this as they go along.

I would like now, Mr. Speaker, to yield to the gentleman from New York, former chairman of the Constitution Subcommittee, JERRY NADLER, for as much time as he may consume.

Mr. NADLER. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to this misguided attempt to amend our constitution. It is both bad economic policy and bad constitutional policy.

Let's start with the basics. While balancing your budget and paying down your debts is important—and we did that under President Clinton—a balanced budget every year, regardless of the circumstances, even when facing economic crisis, a natural disaster or a terrorist threat, is economically dangerous. We would be risking economic ruin if we enshrined this unyielding rule in the Constitution and shackled future generations to one particular economic policy preference that does not work at all times and in all situations.

In general, the economists tell us, in good times, you should have a balanced budget and pay down the debt. In bad times, when a recession increases demands on government and tax revenues fall, or in emergencies, you need to be able to run a deficit.

The nonpartisan economists at Macroeconomics Advisers, for example, tell us that if this amendment were in effect next year, in fiscal year 2012, it would eliminate 15 million jobs and double the unemployment rate. And this amendment would shackle future generations in such situations.

One thing we can be sure of, this amendment will devastate the economy; destroy Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security; cripple our government's ability to deal with national emergencies, maintain our vital infrastructure, or deal with new challenges as they emerge.

Let's be clear on what this amendment does not do. It does not require us to balance the budget the way States or businesses or families do. They're not required to spend no more than that year's income. Families borrow money. If they were told you must pay cash—you want to buy a house, pay cash; you want to buy a car, pay cash—they wouldn't have the house, they wouldn't have the car, the standard of living would be much lower.

States borrow money. States have balanced budget amendments generally, but those amendments refer to their operating budgets. They borrow money for their capital budgets to build bridges and roads and highways. The budget of the United States does not make such a distinction, and this balanced budget amendment would say you can never borrow money. You cannot borrow money to build highways, to make investments, to deal with the economy in a recession. It doesn't make sense.

Similarly, we collect payroll taxes to pay for Social Security benefits. We collect gasoline taxes to pay for transportation infrastructure, and we carry over unexpended funds in those trust funds from prior years. Because they were paid in prior years, those revenues would not count, only the expenditures. If you paid $100 in Social Security taxes in 1960 and drew $100 of benefits in 2011, the budget would show a deficit of $100 because the tax was paid in a different year, even though it's the same money. No matter how much money we had put away for a rainy day, we would still be limited to spending no more than that year's tax revenues. No one in this room balances their budget that way.

What happens when you retire and your income drops? Do you not touch your savings because it didn't come in during that year? Of course not. You're not running a deficit when your expenses equals that year's income plus savings.

I know we have a lot of millionaires here, but did anyone pay cash for their home?

But this amendment enshrines crazy bookkeeping and distorted policies into our Constitution. So all the chatter about States and businesses and families balancing their budgets is true, but it's irrelevant to what this amendment actually says.

Because this is a constitutional amendment, it would give Federal judges, those same unelected, lifetenured Federal judges my Republican friends always complain about, the power to cut spending and raise taxes. Anyone could bring a lawsuit if the budget doesn't balance, if the estimated receipts, in his opinion, didn't match the estimated tax revenues, and a judge would have to decide whose revenue and expenditure estimates were correct. And if they didn't match in the judge's opinion, the judge would have to decide to increase taxes or to cut expenditures and which expenditures it cut, an unelected judge.

How is that possible? It's possible because, as a constitutional amendment, the courts will have to have the power to enforce it, just as they do the rest of the Constitution.

The Constitution now gives the power to tax in the first instance to the House. All revenue measures must originate here. That's because we are closest to the people—the people's House. This would go as far away from that wise decision as you possibly can by giving that power ultimately to the only part of government that is not elected by the people and that is not accountable at the ballot box—the judiciary.

The courts could also order reduction in spending to enforce a balanced budget. They could slash military spending or Social Security or eliminate disaster relief. The voters and Congress would be powerless to stop such decisions.

Is this really someone's idea of constitutional conservatism?

This amendment isn't limited to a requirement that we balance the budget. It imposes a three-fifths supermajority requirement to raise the debt ceiling. When we considered that in 1995, it never occurred to anyone that any Member of Congress, much less a majority, would consider allowing the United States to default on its debt. It wasn't just considered crazy; it was considered impossible.

Today, unfortunately, we live in a different world. This year, for the first time in American history, we nearly defaulted on the full faith and credit of the United States and, for the first time in our history, saw our top credit rating downgraded, and that was for difficulty in getting a simple majority. A three-fifths majority would make it much more difficult.

Is this balanced budget amendment necessary?

We have been told it's the only way to impose the necessary discipline to force Congress to balance the budget. We know that's not true because we balanced the budget under President Clinton. We turned in four balanced budgets and ran a surplus. In fact, in 2001, Alan Greenspan, testifying in favor of President Bush's proposed tax cuts, said we had to reduce taxes because we were going to eliminate, pay down the entire national debt in 10 years, and that would be a bad thing, he thought, for various reasons. But that was the danger—we'd pay down and eliminate the national debt.

But President Bush and a Republican Congress succeeded in turning that record surplus into record deficits in record time. They did it with two huge tax cuts, two unfunded wars, a prescription drug benefit that wasn't paid for, and the rejection of the Democratic Congress' pay-as-you-go rule. It was all done off the books.

And I have heard the calumny that it was wild spending by the Obama administration that has brought about our $15 trillion national debt. Well, the truth of the matter is, if you look at non-defense discretionary spending, everything we do, other than defense and Social Security and Medicare and veterans benefits and interest on the debt, adjusted for population and for inflation, it hasn't gone up by a nickel since 2001.

The fault, dear colleagues, is not in our Constitution; it's in an irresponsible Republican President and an irresponsible Republican Congress. Many of those same Republican Members who saw nothing wrong with busting the budget, who sat quietly when Vice President Cheney said that deficits don't matter, now demand this assault

on our founding document instead of delivering the votes for sound fiscal policy.

We should do our jobs, not wreck the Constitution and the economy with snake oil cures like this. I urge a ''no'' vote.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 15 seconds.

I just want to say to the gentleman from Michigan who spoke earlier that I agree with him. Today is not 1995. In fact, the deficit is worse. Since 1995, the deficit has tripled. It's gone from $5 trillion to $15 trillion, which is all the more reason to support this balanced budget amendment to the Constitution.

□ 1640

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to my friend and colleague from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE), the sponsor of this resolution.

Mr. GOODLATTE. I thank the chairman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, this chart tells the story. We have had a number of opportunities over the years to pass balanced budget amendments to the United States Constitution. It's not my idea; it's not a new idea. But as we've gone through time, we've managed debt. Now, as the chairman just noted, in the last 15 years the debt has tripled.

But looking ahead, this chart, which shows the ratio of our debt to our gross domestic product, and shows that by 2080 it will be nine times the total economic output of our country, indicates that what some on the other side have said simply is not the case.

Congress has not made the tough decisions. We have overpromised the American people, and the fact of the matter is, now we need to have something in the Constitution that the American people expect and demand of us. And that is a balanced budget amendment.

Now, we have lots of different balanced budget amendments that have been proposed in this Congress, I think 18 of them that I've seen thus far. And some ask for more stringent requirements—which I very much like—limiting the ability to balance this budget by putting a heavier burden on the American people through taxes. Capping the amount of money that we spend—certainly something that I also think we need to be cognizant of.

Others have said let's take certain things off the table, like Social Security or capital spending or disaster spending.

This balanced budget amendment, which passed this House with 300 votes, including 72 Democrats, strikes the right balance. It enshrines in our Constitution the principle that we should live within our means but gives future Congresses the flexibility to, in times of national emergency, have some years that are not balanced. That, I think, is a reality that we have to deal with.

But the fact of the matter is that in the last 50 years, since 1961, this Congress has balanced the budget of this Nation six times. It should be the other way around. There are certainly 6 years in those 50 that were crises in which you might say we should not balance the budget this year.

But when the gentleman from New York says that in good times we should pay down the debt, and in tough times we should borrow, that has not been what has happened because most of those 50 years have been good times.

Now, there's another important point to make here. Any amendment to the United States Constitution has to, by its very nature, be bipartisan. It requires a two-thirds majority. And many of my friends on the other side of the aisle have worked very hard to build support on their side of the aisle for this. I especially want to thank PETER DEFAZIO and JIM COOPER. Many Members, the Blue Dogs, have endorsed this balanced budget amendment. But it is necessary to have a bipartisan approach to this.

And you know what? This is a bipartisan problem. There have been Republican Presidents and Democratic Presidents, Republican Congresses and Democratic Congresses that have contributed to those 44 years when we've run deficits.

So now today we come and ask for a bipartisan solution to this problem, a solution that, depending upon the poll, 75 to 80 percent of the American people support.

Congress continues to prove it cannot make the tough decisions on its own. The budget has only been balanced six times in 50 years. The American people know what it means to balance their budgets. They are surprised that the Congress does not have this requirement. State governments do—49 out of 50 States, most of which have it in their constitutions. Local governments have to balance their budgets. Families and businesses have to live within their means, and they can't go more than a few years without living within their means.

But to run up a $15 trillion debt which, divided by the population of our country, means that the average person today owes more in debt based upon their share of the government's debt than they have in personal income, is a disgrace. This is not only an economic issue. This is not only something that we should be imposing upon future Congresses for economic reasons. This is also a moral issue.

This is wrong to borrow money year after year after year, over a trillion dollars in each of the last 3 years, so that today the average dollar spent by the Federal Government, 42 percent of it, by far the largest share, is borrowed against our children's and grandchildren's future.

And where does that lead us? It leads us to where Europe is.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. I yield the gentleman 1 additional minute.

Mr. GOODLATTE. This chart shows government debt as a percentage of GDP for the United States and five European countries—Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Italy, and Greece. When Greece first got into their problem last year, they were at 120 percent of GDP. That's what their debt totaled. Already just a little over a year later, it is 152 percent of GDP because their economy is shrinking because of irresponsibility on the part of their government.

The United States just this week crossed the 100 percent line. The United States owes as much in debt as we have in the total economic output of this Nation for 1 year.

It is time to put a halt to this, and the best way to do it is to enshrine in our Constitution a principle we all understand, we all live by, and that is you cannot live like this, you cannot live beyond your means year after year after year.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join this bipartisan effort to enshrine in our Constitution a principle sought by the vast majority of the American people.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased at this time to recognize the minority leader of the House of Representatives who, ever since she has come to Congress, has worked drastically to save and build on Medicare, Social Security, and to create jobs, the gentlewoman from California, NANCY PELOSI.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized for 1 minute.

Ms. PELOSI. I thank the gentleman for yielding and for his kind words and his great leadership on all of the issues that are important to America's working families.

Mr. Speaker, I came to the floor to talk about the balanced budget constitutional amendment, but before I get into my comments specifically to the amendment, I want to acknowledge that the gentleman from Texas, the distinguished chairman of the committee, Mr. SMITH, has talked about what the deficit was in 1995 and how much bigger it is now and the distinguished maker of this resolution today, Mr. GOODLATTE, talked about the problem of having such a big national debt.

Recognizing those two facts, I want to speak up about them.

First of all, if this were just talking about how we can reduce the deficit, the best way to do that is job creation. We know that.

If we want to talk about what happened in the nineties, we have to reference the fact that under President Bill Clinton, the Reagan-Bush deficit that he inherited he turned around, and five of his last budgets, the Clinton budgets, were in balance or were in surplus. He put us on a trajectory, he and the growth of jobs in our country in the public, and largely in the private sector, took us to a path, a trajectory of $5.6 trillion in surplus.

Along comes President George W. Bush and in record time, he reversed that. It was the biggest fiscal turnaround in our Nation's history, taking us to a trajectory of over $5 trillion in deficit, an $11 trillion turnaround. Two unpaid-for wars said the CBO, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. That was because of two unpaid-for wars, the Bush tax cuts, particularly at the high end which did not create jobs, and a giveaway pharmaceutical bill to the pharmaceutical industry.

□ 1650

Those were the three main reasons for the big fiscal turnaround and how we got deeply in debt. I don't remember a lot of complaints coming from the Republican side of the aisle while President Bush was taking us down this path. Mr. GOODLATTE referenced two paths. Well, this is one path that President Bush took us down, so now we have to deal with that because the deficit is a concern to all of us.

We believe that the best way to deal with that is what President Clinton did, which was to have a great economic agenda to generate jobs. Yet here we are, nearly 320 days into the Republican majority, and they have taken no action on any serious job-creating bills. Here we go again: debating legislation that will not create jobs.

In fact, according to experts, the enactment of this proposed amendment to our Constitution would destroy 15 million jobs, double the unemployment rate, and cause the economy to shrink by 17 percent. As Bruce Bartlett said recently, former economic adviser to President Ronald Reagan and to President George Herbert Walker Bush:

''Even if we were not in an economic crisis and fighting two wars, a rapid cut in spending of that magnitude would unquestionably throw the economy into recession just as it did in 1937.''

This legislation is an attack on our economy, and it is an attack on our seniors. According to the nonpartisan Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, it could result in cuts over 10 years of $750 billion to Medicare and $1.2 trillion in cuts to Social Security. These cuts would be devastating to the 40 million seniors who rely on Medicare and Social Security every day. They are even more draconian than the cuts in the Republican budget, which would effectively repeal the Medicare guarantee. And just one week after our Nation celebrated Veterans Day, we are debating potentially cutting $85 billion over the next 10 years from veterans' benefits.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle claim this is a clean balanced budget amendment. It is not. Because this proposed amendment to our Constitution will require a supermajority in both Chambers of Congress to raise the debt limit, it puts the full faith and credit of the United States of America in the hands of a minority—this after we went through all of the stress and strain and uncertainty and downgrading of our credit rating when we couldn't even get a majority, and now we're thinking of a supermajority vote for the debt limit increase. Again, that was never a requirement when President Bush was President that there would be a supermajority to raise the debt limit.

This amendment promotes further brinkmanship and uncertainty, enshrining extreme ideology into the Constitution at a time when Americans have been very clear that they expect us to set differences aside and to get to work.

It is our duty as Members of Congress—indeed, we take the oath of office—to be the elected guardians of our Constitution, to protect and defend it, and to do no harm to our founding documents. Yet, if this proposed amendment is adopted, it will have far-reaching and adverse consequences.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat that it was a Democratic President, President Clinton, who balanced the budget in the nineties. Five of his budgets were in balance or in surplus. We can do it again without harming our Constitution, our economy, our seniors, or our veterans. We must start by creating jobs and strengthening our economic growth—a key to reducing the deficit.

It was interesting to me to hear others on the other side of the aisle talk about our children and our responsibility to them. Yes, that's what we said when President Bush was amassing his deficit, but I didn't hear anyone on the other side of the aisle talking about that.

This is about our Constitution. We owe it to the vision of our Founders, to the sacrifice of our men and women in uniform, and to the aspirations of our children to get our economic and fiscal houses in order. This is the exact wrong way to do it. We must reignite the American Dream, and we have work to do on that. So let's get to work to create jobs so that many more people can achieve the American Dream.

I urge my colleagues to vote ''no.''

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FRANKS), who is the chairman of the Constitution Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, all financial budgets will eventually balance. The choice faced by those of us in Congress is whether we will balance this budget ourselves through the wise policy before us or whether national bankruptcy and financial ruin will do it for us.

From the very day that Barack Obama walked into the White House, he has, with breathtaking arrogance, absolutely ignored economic and financial reality. It took America the first 216 years of its existence to accumulate the debt that Barack Obama has accumulated in the first 3 years of his Presidency. He has in those short 3 years increased our Federal debt by over $4 trillion.

Just to put that into perspective, if all of a sudden a wave of responsibility swept through this Chamber and if we stopped all deficit spending today and began to pay installments of $1 million every day to pay down the over $4 trillion in new debt that Barack Obama has created in less than 3 years, it would take us more than 10,000 years to pay that off—and that's if we didn't pay one dime of interest in the process.

But you see, we are not paying Mr. Obama's debt down at $1 million per day; we are going deeper into debt, more than 4,000 times that much, every day under Mr. Obama's own submitted budget and deficit projections.

In an ominous prologue to the vote before us, the national debt surpassed $15 trillion yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, we have already tried Mr. Obama's way. We have thoroughly tested Democrat economics 101—the theory that we can tax and deficit spend ourselves into prosperity or, as Vice President BIDEN put it, ''We have to spend money to keep from going bankrupt.''

That theory has utterly failed. We cannot repeal the laws of mathematics.

But now the seminal moment approaches when each of us in this body will have the rare opportunity to cast a single vote that could pull this Nation back from the brink of economic cataclysm. For the sake of our children and our children's children, I pray that we do the right thing.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair must remind all Members that remarks in debate may not engage in personalities toward the President.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased now to yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Virginia, JIM MORAN.

Mr. MORAN. I thank the chairman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I have to rise in opposition to this balanced budget amendment. I did vote for a similar measure in 1995, but the events over the last 15 years have brought to mind the axiom ''fool me once, your fault; fool me twice, my fault.'' I could never have imagined back in 1995 the chaos we experienced this summer.

Despite the fact that we only needed to obtain a simple majority vote to raise the debt limit, which we'd raised 17 times during the Reagan administration, that would seem like child's play compared to what we would have to go through if this balanced budget amendment passed.

□ 1700

The events of these last 15 years have proved to us that this bill would have dramatic and dangerous consequences for our economic future. It would force the Federal Government to worsen economic recessions. Since Federal revenues fall while human needs rise in economic downturns, this bill would force spending cuts and tax increases at precisely the point when the economy is reeling, potentially turning a

manageable downturn into a depression. Essentially, this bill would forbid countercyclical spending.

Had this amendment been on the books in 2009, for example, we would not have passed the Economic Recovery Act, which proved to be a critical response to the economic catastrophe that followed the financial crisis. One of the reasons that the Recovery Act was necessary is that State balanced budget amendments forced States to rely on Federal funds in order to make up for budget shortfalls that would have prompted cuts right at the time when State economies could least afford them. The Federal Government was effectively borrowing on behalf of the States that were constitutionally prohibited from doing so; but they desperately needed to in order to maintain their law enforcement, their transportation, and their other responsibilities.

Even in Texas, where Republican Governor Perry and the legislature opposed the Recovery Act, Federal stimulus funds were used to close 97 percent of that State's budget gap. Now that those dollars are gone, many States face a very serious budget crisis.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I yield the gentleman an additional 30 seconds.

Mr. MORAN. I thank the gentleman.

Furthermore, House Joint Resolution 2 would require a three-fifths majority to raise the debt ceiling. This would only increase the likelihood of a catastrophic debt default like the one we barely avoided this summer.

Given the polarization that we're currently experiencing, I have severe doubts that the required supermajority could be secured either to respond to crises or to raise the debt ceiling. This would give preference to military action over economic crises, requiring only a majority for deficit spending for a war—such as the Iraq war, which was never paid for—but a three-fifths majority to respond to a domestic economic crisis. If this were enacted in 2012, it would require drastic cuts that would have unintended, but dire, consequences for our struggling economy.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has again expired.

Mr. MORAN. It's the wrong medicine for today's ailing economy.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair reminds Members to heed the gavel.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. GOWDY), a distinguished member of the Judiciary Committee.

Mr. GOWDY. I thank the gentleman from Texas, Chairman SMITH, for his leadership on this issue and so many others on Judiciary.

Mr. Speaker, when Odysseus was returning from the Trojan War, he was passing the islands where the sirens sang. Many a sailor had succumbed to their sweet melodious sound and died. So Odysseus made his men put wax in their ears, and he made them tie him up to the mast. Against his will, he made them tie him up, and he did it because he lacked the will to restrain himself.

When people take our freedom, we recoil. But when we've proven ourselves to be wholly incapable of exercising that freedom, we should give it up. Congress has proven itself to be hopelessly incapable of balancing the budget. We need to be made to do so because we cannot bring ourselves to make the hard decisions required.

As my colleague and friend, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE), who's been a leader on this issue, mentioned in his remarks, six times in 50 years is laughable. You would do better than six out of 50 if you just guessed. Six out of 50 is laughable. We are incapable of balancing our own budget.

And when South Carolina, Mr. Speaker—which does have a balanced budget requirement—was facing tough economic times, we had to cut public safety money to prosecutors. I had to cut and furlough employees who were making $19,000 a year. I had to furlough prosecutors who had $100,000 in student loans for 7 days. That's a hard decision to make, but we had to do it for fiscal health.

We need to make hard decisions, even if they're career-ending decisions, in this body; but we have proven ourselves incapable of doing it, so we must bind ourselves, even against our will.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. I yield the gentleman an additional 30 seconds.

Mr. GOWDY. Mr. Speaker, we are $15 trillion in debt. We need to tie ourselves up before we wreck this Republic.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey, a distinguished leader in the Congress, BILL PASCRELL.

Mr. PASCRELL. I thank the ranking member.

Mr. Speaker, this attempt to change the Constitution of the United States is a real disaster. We all want to make sure we balance the budgets, but to compare our household budget to the national budget is preposterous because we have different responsibilities as a Federal Government.

Alexander Hamilton, who wrote so many of the Federalist Papers—I thought we understand a great leader, a great American. I thought we understood what the responsibilities of government are.

But talking about disasters, what about natural disasters? How would a balanced budget amendment affect how the Congress looks at when there is a tornado in Joplin, a wipe-out and flooding of New Jersey, a hurricane in Florida, wildfires in Texas? The amendment requires this balanced budget amendment—which is a joke to begin with, how you named it. It doesn't balance the budget. And if the amendment ever got through, it would take 7 years to implement. We have people out of work now. But anyway, the amendment requires a supermajority for every emergency spending case of natural disasters.

Let's take my State of New Jersey. FEMA estimates that it will provide $400 million to help communities and individuals across the State recover and rebuild. Last September, we couldn't even get a majority, let alone a supermajority, to pass disaster aid unless it was offset with partisan budget cuts. Every State will have to go through that.

I want every State to know—you talk about the States. You talk about their budgets. Isn't it interesting that on January of this year, CBO Director Douglas Elmendorf wrote this: ''Amending the Constitution to require this sort of balance raises risks.'' Listen, my friends, brothers, and sisters: ''The fact that taxes fall when the economy weakens and spending and benefit programs increase''—by nature, they have to; people need help, unless we're no longer going to be a first-rate Republic—''when the economy weakens in an automatic way under existing law is an important stabilizing force for the aggregate economy.''

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I yield the gentleman an additional 30 seconds.

Mr. PASCRELL. I thank the gentleman.

''The fact that State governments need to work against these effects in their own budgets—need to take action to raise taxes or cut spending in recessions—undoes the automatic stabilizers, essentially, at the State level. Taking those away at the Federal level risks making the economy less stable, risks exacerbating the swings in business cycles.''

We did it together, Democrats and Republican, '98, '99, 2000. We did it without an amendment to the Constitution, which will undermine this institution that we so revere right here today.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to my friend from California (Mr. HERGER), a member of the Ways and Means Committee.

□ 1710

Mr. HERGER. Mr. Speaker, the American people understand the basic principle that you can't spend money you don't have. They live that reality on a daily basis. Unfortunately, Congress has disregarded this idea, choosing instead to imagine that it could spend money endlessly without harming our economy or standard of living. The result is that we're now an unthinkable $15 trillion in debt. Some argue that we don't need to amend the Constitution for Washington to do its job.

I'm proud to say that I served on the Budget Committee in the late 1990s

when we produced four consecutive balanced budgets. But the sad truth is that this kind of fiscal responsibility has been all too rare in recent years. Ultimately, a balanced budget amendment will force Congress to be serious about addressing the core driver of our debt, which is the out-of-control growth of Federal entitlement spending.

As the President has acknowledged, no taxpayer would be willing to pay the amount required to sustain the exponential growth of entitlements, and no amount of budget gimmicks can hide this serious crisis. A balanced budget is a commonsense idea that governs our personal lives, and it should also be at the heart of how Congress operates. I strongly support the balanced budget amendment, and I urge the House to pass it.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from California, JUDY CHU, a member of the Judiciary Committee.

Ms. CHU. Proponents of this bill claim it is about fiscal responsibility, but it is the opposite. This bill makes it impossible, in fact unconstitutional, for the government to save for the future. Under this bill, programs like Social Security or long term Federal highway projects would have to be completely eliminated to comply with the Constitution.

Today, American workers put money into a Social Security trust fund built to pay and save for future benefits. But under this shortsighted constitutional amendment, money coming into the Federal Government must be paid out the same year. That means you can't have a Social Security trust fund, so good-bye Social Security. Good-bye saving for retirement.

Let me tell you how bad this idea is. Let's say for a moment that this was your family's budget. If this constitutional budget amendment applied to you, you would have to spend everything you earned in the same year. No college fund or IRA, no savings account to put a downpayment on a house or, God forbid, to pay for expensive medical treatment. Not only is that ludicrous, it is tragic.

If that weren't bad enough, if this constitutional amendment goes through and no revenues are raised, all government programs will suffer a 17.3 percent cut. That's a $1.2 trillion reduction in Social Security payments through 2021. That is nearly a 20 percent reduction that would directly hurt current and future retirees and senior citizens for the next decade.

This so-called balanced budget amendment balances overzealous budget slashing on the backs of our senior citizens and future retirees. Does Congress really want to send the message now, in the midst of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, that saving responsibly for the future is unconstitutional? Is Congress prepared to abandon millions of Americans now? I, for one, am not. And so I urge my colleagues to oppose this reckless constitutional amendment.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE).

Mr. GOODLATTE. I thank the chairman, and I just want to make it very clear that some inaccurate assertions have been made about the protection of Social Security and highway trust funds.

The funds can be spent each year, and then any excess funds that need to be retained can be put into a rainy day fund. And so the Social Security trust fund or another type of fund like that is perfectly permissible under this provision. What is not permissible is continuing to run up debt year after year after year, and that is what endangers Social Security and Medicare and important programs for our senior citizens, and that is why this amendment is needed.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BARROW), a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Mr. BARROW. I want to particularly thank the chairman for yielding me time to speak in support of the balanced budget amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the balanced budget amendment, which I've supported since I first came to Congress. We all agree that our Nation's debt is unsustainable. Our economy is struggling, and folks everywhere are struggling to find work. But facts are stubborn things. And it's a fact that balancing the budget is essential if we're going to protect our future and the future of our children and grandchildren. Balancing the budget will also create the long-term stability our economy needs to fully recover.

Amending our Constitution is not something to take lightly. We shouldn't do it on a whim or because it is politically expedient. Amending the Constitution is something that we as a Nation should undertake only when it is truly needed. Unfortunately, Congress has demonstrated time and again that it cannot and will not balance the budget on its own. It is truly needed now.

Nearly every State in the Union has a balanced budget amendment. Families throughout America have to bring their income and outlays into balance, and so can the Federal Government.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is bipartisan. It is responsible. It is the right thing to do. And I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will join me and the Blue Dog Coalition in supporting the balanced budget amendment.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from New York, JERRY NADLER.

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, I have to correct what the distinguished gentleman from Virginia said a moment ago when he said that this amendment would not affect Social Security because Social Security would be paid for by the trust fund. This amendment says the total outlays cannot exceed receipts. Total outlays should include all outlays of the United States Government except for those for repayment of debt principle. That includes Social Security, which the courts have held is not a debt. Therefore, Social Security would have to be paid out of the same amounts, and they would be counted against the overall outlays when calculating whether the budget is in balance, something that's not the case today. It would throw the budget further out of balance and would require deeper cuts.

If this amendment were in effect today, Medicare would have to be cut by $750 billion, Social Security by $1.2 trillion, and veterans benefits by $85 billion through 2021. Despite anything anyone may say on this floor, that's the simple truth about this amendment.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlelady from Nevada, SHELLEY BERKLEY.

Ms. BERKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to this dangerous balanced budget constitutional amendment. We all agree that we must get America's fiscal house in order by cutting spending and balancing our budget. Nevada families know this. Families across Nevada are doing it by tightening their belts and making great sacrifices. The United States Government should be able to do the same.

However, this balanced budget amendment is wrong for Nevada and it's wrong for the rest of the country. It would force massive cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and veterans benefits, but big oil companies and corporations that ship jobs overseas aren't asked to sacrifice one penny under this balanced budget amendment. That's just not right. But this is what the American people have come to expect from this Congress.

Washington Republicans supported a radical budget proposal, the Ryan budget, that kills Medicare by turning it over to private insurance companies. Now they are supporting a plan that slashes Social Security and Medicare benefits that seniors rely on. It's a question of priorities.

I strongly believe that we need to get our deficit under control, and I believe that a version of the balanced budget amendment could be one way to achieve that. But I cannot and I will not support a balanced budget amendment that doesn't include ironclad protections for Social Security, Medicare, and veterans benefits. We should not be balancing our Nation's budget on the backs of our seniors and our vets.

This balanced budget amendment may be good politics for some, but it is not good policy for America. I urge my colleagues to join me in voting ''no'' on this attack on our seniors and our veterans.

□ 1720

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman

from Oklahoma (Mr. LANKFORD), a member of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. Speaker, 27 times the United States Constitution has been amended. It's something we do rarely, and it's something that we should think through in the process. We do it only because it is absolutely required and we have common agreement across the House, the Senate, and the American people. This is one of those moments.

If you ask most every American on the street, ''Should we balance our budget?'' they will nod their head. If you ask them again, ''Should we force Congress to balance the budget?'' again they will nod their head and say yes, this is something we should do.

There is common agreement across the American people because it's common sense. It's hard to explain to any family or any business why they have to balance their budget but Congress does not. It is the ultimate exemption for Members of Congress that they can spend as much as they want as often as they would like without any retribution.

I hear all the doomsday statements that if we balanced our budget, what would possibly happen if we had to live within our means? It makes me smile and say, just like every business and every family, we have to make hard choices, and we have to do it.

But it's not what doomsday prediction happens if we balance our budget. It is look up across the ocean at what is happening in Europe right now to nations that did not balance their budget, and for some reason, we think as Americans we can run up as much debt as we would like with no consequence. We are fooling ourselves.

The doomsday is coming. We must put a boundary around the United States Congress to be able to balance our budget. In 1995, when this failed by one vote, we will forever regret that if this occurs again. It's time for us to balance our budget once and for all.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentlelady from Ohio, MARCIA FUDGE.

Ms. FUDGE. I thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in opposition to the balanced budget amendment, H.J. Res. 2. Despite its name, this amendment does not balance the budget. It would have little effect on our deficit but could seriously harm our economy. It would destroy jobs, drastically cut Medicare and Social Security, and unconstitutionally give Federal judges the power to make spending decisions.

And this amendment does not even require a balanced budget every year. What it does it make it easier to cut taxes and more difficult to raise taxes in order to allocate money to important programs that protect our veterans, our seniors, and our most vulnerable. It could also allow Federal judges to have the final say on taxing and spending decisions.

No one knows if amending the Constitution to require a balanced Federal budget will actually reduce the debt. No one knows if it could prevent the debt from growing in the future. What we do know is that when Democrats controlled Congress, PAYGO was effective in reining in spending. And what we do know is that this amendment is not the answer.

If a balanced budget requirement were to go into effect, it would destroy millions of jobs. If the budget were balanced through spending cuts, those cuts would come to about $1.5 trillion in 2012. This would throw 15 million more Americans out of work, double the unemployment rate to approximately 18 percent, and cause the economy to shrink by 17 percent.

Republicans, as part of their budget proposal, have made it clear they want to cut Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. By requiring a balanced budget, these programs would be directly on the chopping block. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, this amendment could force Congress to cut all programs by an average of 17.3 percent by 2018. If revenues are not raised, Medicare could be cut by about $750 billion.

Democrats have balanced the budget before, and we will do it again without harming the economy. This amendment is nothing more than a Republican political diversion, and I urge my colleagues to vote ''no.''

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. FORTENBERRY).

Mr. FORTENBERRY. I thank the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. Speaker, I have long supported a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, and I don't take the issue lightly of amending our Constitution, which has endured through strife and dramatic historical shifts with very few amendments. Constitutional amendments should be exceedingly rare, as they have the power to spur sweeping change. But I do believe it is necessary that the same process that guaranteed our hallmark freedoms of speech and religion and freedom from slavery be used to protect our children and future generations from economic collapse.

Most States, including Nebraska, have already enacted balanced budget requirements. My State has to live within its means. The Federal Government needs to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, we are standing at history's door. We can either lead and be bold, making the hard decisions necessary to correct this fiscal trajectory, or stay in our timeworn political lanes, continuing with the status quo that has given our Nation this unsustainable debt burden. We can do something big for this country and our future and make deficit spending a thing of the past.

This is a significant moment. I urge my colleagues that we pass this bill.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the indomitable gentlelady from Illinois, JAN SCHAKOWSKY.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. I rise in opposition to the balanced budget amendment. It was just a decade ago that President Clinton left office with not just a balanced budget but a surplus, and we got there by a one-vote margin. No Republican votes whatsoever.

And here we are today, after 8 years and two wars and two tax cuts that were paid for on the credit card and mainly benefiting the wealthy and a devastating recession that could have been prevented had financial regulators not turned a blind eye to Wall Street, and now we're debating an amendment to the Constitution that offers anything but balance.

This amendment would destroy the budget and, in the process, wipe out jobs and eviscerate Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, extended unemployment benefits, as well as education, cancer research, veterans, bridge repair, and food inspection. You name a program, and this amendment will put it at risk.

A balanced budget amendment could force Congress to cut all programs by an average of 17.3 percent by 2018. This amendment would limit the ability of the Federal Government to respond to national crises, including an economic or natural disaster. It would virtually guarantee that recessions turn into depressions.

This amendment will require a supermajority to raise the debt ceiling—a reckless requirement given how close we came to defaulting earlier this year when just a simple majority was required.

And I'm really tired of hearing Republicans say, well, if States and families must balance their budgets, so should the Federal Government. The States have to balance their operating budgets, but they can still borrow for capital projects. And families have to manage their budgets, but they can do so by incurring debt, home mortgages, student loans, car loans, and payments for medical bills. This amendment blocks the Federal Government from making investments in the same way.

And suppose in 2008, when the deficit seemed manageable, we had a balanced budget amendment. The effect on the economy would be catastrophic. If the 2012 balanced budget were balanced through spending cuts, those cuts, it is predicted by Macroeconomics Advisers——

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield the gentlelady an additional 15 seconds.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Macroeconomics, a nonpartisan forecasting firm, said that those cuts would throw about 15 million more people out of work, double the unemployment rate from 9 percent to about 18 percent, and cause the economy to shrink by about 17 percent instead of growing at an expected 17 percent. This amendment will only make the economy worse.

Vote ''no.''

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Washington (Mrs. MCMORRIS RODGERS), a member of the Republican leadership.

Mrs. MCMORRIS RODGERS. I appreciate the gentleman yielding.

James Madison said that the trickiest question the Constitutional Convention confronted was how to oblige a government to control itself. History records not a single nation that spent, borrowed, and taxed its way to prosperity, but it offers us many, many examples of nations that spent, borrowed, and taxed their way to economic ruin and bankruptcy.

And history is screaming to us a warning that nations that bankrupt themselves aren't around very long because before you can provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty, you have to be able to pay for it.

□ 1730

Today I rise in strong support of the balanced budget amendment. This past weekend, I re-read the 1995 House Judiciary Committee report that accompanied the resolution that passed at that time. Incredibly, the same justifications put forward against the balanced budget amendment in 1995 are the same ones that we hear today.

First, the report highlights a $4.7 trillion debt in 1995 and discusses the implications of a $200 billion interest payment. I only wish those were the debt levels that we are responding to today. What this comparison means is that we haven't corrected the government's spending problem on our own.

Our debt has more than tripled and interest payments more than doubled in the last two decades. All we have to show over that time is that we have a spending problem; in fact, we have an addiction. And I don't see that addiction going away unless we pass H.J. Res. 2.

Where would we be today if the balanced budget amendment had passed the Senate in 1997 and it had been sent to the States? I guarantee we would not be facing a total debt of $15 trillion or a $450 billion interest payment. And so we must ask ourselves where will we be 5 to 10 years from now without a balanced budget amendment.

I urge my colleagues to stop the cycle of overspending. Support this amendment.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the former chair of the Progressive Caucus, LYNN WOOLSEY, the gentlelady from California.

Ms. WOOLSEY. I thank the ranking member for this time.

Earlier this year, economist Bruce Bartlett, who served in the Reagan and Bush administrations, had this to say about an earlier Republican balanced budget amendment. He said: ''It looks like it was drafted by a couple of interns on the back of a napkin.'' Granted, he was talking about a different version, but I still say that was pretty unfair to interns, who I think could do a lot better than this amendment that we're debating today.

If the balanced budget were in place today, it would cripple the economy and decimate Social Security, Medicare and veterans programs, among many others. The austerity dogma of the Republican majority—their balanced budget fetish—is hurting America, not helping it. We need more Federal dollars pumped into this economy. We need it to stimulate demand and to create jobs. We don't need less.

If you get caught in a rainstorm—I mean, I wouldn't want to be caught in a rainstorm with anybody on the other side of the aisle because I'd be afraid that they'd propose a constitutional amendment banning umbrellas.

Call me old fashioned, Mr. Speaker, but I think amending the Constitution is a pretty big deal. It should be reserved for correcting gross injustices and expanding fundamental rights. For decades, I've been among those pushing for a constitutional amendment that enshrines the notion that women should be treated equally. Republicans want no part of that, but they're eager for a constitutional amendment that shreds the safety net and could cause another recession for our country. No thanks.

Vote ''no'' on this balanced budget amendment.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. NUNNELEE).

Mr. NUNNELEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before I came to this body, I chaired the appropriations committee in the Mississippi Senate. I worked with my counterpart in the other chamber, a Democrat, Chairman Johnny Stringer. We crafted three balanced budgets because Chairman Stringer and I shared a commitment to a principle that you can't spend more money than you take in.

One thing I learned is that there are always more needs and more requests than there are available resources, and that fact causes you to have to make some difficult decisions. We made those difficult decisions in the Mississippi State house. In fact, there are 49 States that require that around the Nation. Municipal, county governments are making those difficult decisions. More importantly, families are making those decisions sitting around the kitchen table, and small businesses are making those decisions tonight. And if they're willing to live within their means, they have every reason to expect their government in Washington to do the same thing.

This balanced budget amendment has been a dream of leaders in this body since Thomas Jefferson. Sixteen years ago we had bipartisan support and came within one vote of getting it adopted. I welcome the support of those Democrats that are stepping up and giving bipartisan support to this measure. We must have a balanced budget amendment to rein in spending so that we can create jobs.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, STENY HOYER has been working in leadership for many years. He is now our distinguished whip, and I recognize him for 5 minutes.

Mr. HOYER. I thank the chairman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, in 1995 I spoke on the floor in support of a balanced budget amendment. That was 16 years ago. There's a lot of water over the bridge since that time. I said then and I quote: ''I do so because I believe this country confronts a critical threat caused by the continuation of large annual deficits.'' I believed that then, and I believe it now. And I have voted against tax cuts that weren't paid for, I have voted against Social Security benefits that weren't paid for, and I have voted against other items that weren't paid for. I stand by my 1995 statement today. However, as I've said, events in the last 16 years lead me to oppose today's balanced budget amendment.

Only months after we had that debate, my Republican colleagues shut down the government. In 1997 we passed an amendment with bipartisan agreement reaffirming the 1990 agreement that we would have a PAYGO process in place. And without having passed a balanced budget amendment, we did in fact balance the budget 4 years in a row. Why? Because we paid for what we bought, we didn't cut revenues before we cut spending, and we restrained spending—4 years in a row. I tell my Republican friends, none of you in your lifetime has lived during the course of a President who had four balanced budgets. Were you partially responsible? Absolutely. Were we partially responsible? Absolutely. But what was the lesson? That we didn't need an amendment; we needed the will and the courage.

Without having passed that balanced budget amendment under President Clinton, not only were we able to balance the budget, but we also achieved the only President term in the lifetime of anybody in this Chamber or listening to me that had 4 years of balance and a net surplus—hear me—a net surplus at the end of 96 months as President of the United States. We made it happen not with a balanced budget amendment, but because we had the will to do so and by following PAYGO rules.

Sadly, I tell my colleagues and the American people, Mr. Speaker, under President Bush, Republicans exploded the deficit and abandoned PAYGO, along with the principle that we ought to pay for what we buy.

We do not have a spending problem or a revenue problem; we have a pay-for problem. The Republican Congress spent enormous sums on two wars, a prescription drug program, and tax cuts without paying for them. If you have the courage of your convictions, you pay for things.

Spending rose at a level nearly twice the inflation rate that Bill Clinton's rose in spending during the 8 years of the Bush administration when Republicans were in charge of everything for 6 years and had a President who could veto anything that we did.

When the financial crisis hit in 2008, President Bush told us that if we failed to act, there would be a high risk of depression.

□ 1740

What did the President's party do? You say you have a three-fifths vote if there's an emergency. President Bush told us that if we did not act there would be a depression and, in fact, we had a vote, and that vote was 205–228, with two-thirds of the President's party voting against the President in what he called a crisis.

That gives me, I tell my friends on the Republican side, no confidence that in time of danger and crisis, that we could summons three-fifths vote. I believed in 1995 we could summon those votes because, frankly, we were a much more bipartisan and, in my opinion, responsible body. But I do not have that confidence today, and I am not prepared to take that risk.

My party, of course, voted with President Bush because we thought there was a crisis. Now, a few days after that, we came back to vote, and we did pass it.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I grant the gentleman 1 additional minute.

Mr. HOYER. I tell my friends that even on the second vote, when we did, in fact, pass that bill that President Bush asked us to pass because there was a crisis, he could not summon the majority of your party to support him. Barely three-fifths, notwithstanding the President's assertion of crisis, voted to meet that crisis, with 172 Democrats voting with President Bush in a bipartisan response to crisis.

Earlier this year, again, in control of the House, Republicans brought the government to the brink of shutdown. Over the summer we saw them hold the country hostage by pushing us to the brink of default, in the first time in my memory, the United States of America to the brink of default.

I have not changed my beliefs about balancing the budget, and I invite all of you to vote with me on paying for things that we buy, not passing those costs along to my children, my grandchildren, and my two great grandchildren. We have shown we can do it. We balanced the budget for 4 years.

Don't talk about it. Just do it. Don't refuse to pay for it. Don't cut taxes and increase spending.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has again expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I grant the gentleman 10 additional seconds.

Mr. HOYER. Don't just preach fiscal responsibility; practice it. It will take no courage to vote for this amendment. But it will take courage to balance our budget by paying for what we buy.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 15 seconds.

I just want to point out for the record that all of the balanced budgets enacted during the Clinton administration were, in fact, proposed by a Republican Congress. I happened to be a member of the Budget Committee at the time.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. MILLER).

Mrs. MILLER of Michigan. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, our Constitution is certainly the greatest governing document ever created by man. It's the bedrock foundation for this, the United States of America, the greatest nation on Earth.

Mr. Speaker, our Founding Fathers, in their genius, provided us with a way to amend the Constitution to deal with a changing world. James Madison, who, of course, is widely seen as the Father of the Constitution, once said that ''A public debt is a public curse.''

In 1995, this House passed a very similar balanced budget amendment to the one that we are considering today. The amendment received 300 votes in this House, but fell just one vote short in the United States Senate.

Since that time, Mr. Speaker, our national debt has grown by over $9 trillion, yes, $9 trillion, including nearly $4 trillion in new debt in just the last 3 years, and today the debt is over $15 trillion. And the fact of the matter is that our public debt has become the public curse of which Madison warned us.

The American people understand that this level of debt is not sustainable, and that is why they overwhelmingly support this balanced budget amendment. Today we have a choice, Mr. Speaker. Do we answer the call of the American people and embrace fiscal responsibility, or do we continue the status quo of more spending and more borrowing and more debt?

It's time for this Congress to use the tools our Founding Fathers gave us, Mr. Speaker, to amend the Constitution to save further generations from the shackles of unsustainable debt. I would urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this commonsense amendment to balance our Federal budget.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from St. Louis, Missouri, LACY CLAY.

Mr. CLAY. I thank my friend from Michigan for yielding.

My Democratic colleagues have spoken, and will speak, eloquently on the numbers. They have, or will, correctly point to the millions of jobs the balanced budget amendment would certainly destroy.

However, I want to talk about the personal impact of this irresponsible legislation. For example, Social Security recipients should not be held responsible for Congress' reckless acts. Radically cutting Social Security hurts Americans. Drastically cutting Medicare hurts Americans. Enormous cuts to Defense and Homeland Security measures, to food stamps, to veterans' pensions and Supplemental Security Income for the elderly and disabled hurts Americans. It hurts America and makes us less safe and secure.

And make no mistake. This legislation requires these massive cuts. Some have claimed that these cuts will not be necessary under this legislation, or worse, that they are necessary and good. They claim that cutting benefits to the most vulnerable Americans is good, that destroying jobs, destroying lives is good.

Mr. Speaker, it is not. It is not good. It is not good to balance the budget on the backs of those who can least bear the burden. It is not good to balance the budget by taking away from those who have so little.

This is exactly what the balanced budget amendment would do, and it takes away from medical care for seniors. That means more of our elderly unable to afford their medication, unable to get needed tests and treatments, and more Americans hurting.

It destroys jobs. That means more Americans out of work, more Americans unable to pay their bills, and more American families hurting.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I yield the gentleman an additional 15 seconds.

Mr. CLAY. You know, Hubert Humphrey said it best. He said, ''The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of their life, the children; those who are in the twilight of their life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and disabled.''

This reckless legislation fails all tests.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. HERRERA BEUTLER).

Ms. HERRERA BEUTLER. Winston Churchill said that Americans can always be counted on to do the right thing after they've exhausted all other possibilities.

What's interesting about this quote is it actually applies to this institution. What have we tried? We've tried billion-dollar bailouts for auto companies. We've tried billion-dollar bailouts for Wall Street fat cats, not for Main Street. We've done bailouts for automakers. We've thrown money at everything, and we have added so much to our national debt in the last 4 years.

Republicans did it too. It doesn't make it right.

So, are we better off than we were 4 years ago? No. In southwest Washington State, we still have rampant unemployment and joblessness.

I'm no economist. I'm not the distinguished minority leader, whom I respect. I'm just an average American

that understands a very simple truth: You cannot spend more than you have.

That's all this amendment does. That's it. We're not cutting Social Security. We're not cutting Medicare. We would not. We're actually protecting those programs by saying, this Federal Government is going to live within the money that it takes from the taxpayers every year, no more, no less.

□ 1750

It's very, very simple. You don't have to be an economist to understand that if you spend more money than you have every year, you have a problem. Our problem is $15 trillion worth of backbreaking debt. We don't have to look much further than Europe to know that no country can exist under debt like this for too long. We're actually taking steps to protect our poor and vulnerable by putting sideboards around the reckless spending of this Congress.

With this amendment, we're cutting up the credit card that is going to break the backs of the American people and cost us more jobs.

I urge my colleagues to join us in solutions, and bipartisan solutions, that are going to bring an opportunity for America to prosper and succeed. A ''no'' vote is putting people under and putting politics above. We need to reverse that and put people before politics.

I urge a ''yes'' vote.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The gentlelady from Washington, I listened to her very carefully, and she has promulgated one of the greatest misunderstandings in this debate, namely, that the Social Security and Highway Trust Fund are not jeopardized by House Joint Resolution 2 because section 7 excludes repayment of debt principle from the definition of total outlays.

Now, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the balanced budget amendment could result in Medicare being cut by about $750 billion, Social Security almost $1.2 trillion, and the veterans' benefits $85 billion through 2021 if cuts were spread proportionately. So I hope that there will be fewer and fewer of my colleagues trying to assure us that this bill does not jeopardize those programs. This is from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

I yield 3 minutes to the distinguished member of the committee, the gentlelady from Texas, SHEILA JACKSON LEE.

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. I thank the ranking member of this committee.

Many of us could spend a lot of time on educating the public on just what is occurring. We cherish this little book that has lasted in this Nation for some—more than centuries that we can count. As this document was written, the question was going to ask—or was asked whether it could last. And today, we cite the United States as the longest democracy holding on to a Constitution that provides us with the opportunity to even be here.

But it is important to note that in order to amend the Constitution, the Founding Fathers were so serious about how important an action this would be that they indicated that there should be two-thirds votes from both the House and the Senate and three-quarters of our States. The people of the United States must likewise answer the call.

Frankly, let me make a pronouncement. The American people will not answer this foolish call. They will recognize that whether it's supercommittees or Tea Parties and others that want to detract away from the reasonable approach to budgeting, which is revenue enhancement and serious reform, they know that the way they do their budget is thoughtfulness and not rushing to judgement.

A headline on the markup of our bill in committee, though I know this is not, said: SHEILA JACKSON LEE Can't Slow Down Republican Balanced Budget Amendment Freight Train. That train keeps coming, and in the midst of it, there are bloody bodies left along the wayside.

Our Chairman of the Federal Reserve said we really don't want to just cut, cut, cut. Chairman Bernanke said you need to be a little bit cautious about sharp cuts in every near term because of the potential impact on the recovery. That doesn't at all preclude, in fact, I believe it's entirely consistent with a longer-term program that will bring our budget into a sustainable position.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I yield the gentlelady an additional 30 seconds.

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. I thank the gentleman.

So for us to go this route, it means that even in a war, it is a complicated process of a majority vote, even beside the declaration of war; even in an emergency when our soldiers are needing more resources, we have to come to this body and stop and wait for our soldiers to get what their resources are. We have to stop and wait for our veterans to get the resources that they need.

While veterans hospitals are closing, while centers for posttraumatic stress disorder are closing, we will be fiddling around and the freight train of the balanced budget amendment will drive over the veterans, the soldiers, the President who is trying to save this Nation, Homeland Security resources that are needed, because we wanted to be a political grandstanding for a balanced budget amendment.

We balanced a budget in 1993; some suffered politically. We got the budget balanced in 1997; some suffered politically. But the Democrats knew how to do it. Let's come together. Balance the budget and ignore a complicated, ludicrous process that the Founding Fathers said, stop, wait, do the right thing; do your job, not an amendment to the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong opposition to the rule for H.J. Res. 2, a ''Proposing A Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.'' While I support bipartisan efforts to increase the debt limit and to resolve our differences over budgetary revenue and spending issues, I cannot support a bill that unduly constrains the ability of Congress to deal effectively with America's economic, fiscal, and job creation troubles.

In my lifetime, I have never seen such a concerted effort to ransom the American economy in order to extort the American public. While I support bipartisan efforts to increase the debt limit and to resolve our differences over budgetary revenue and spending issues, I cannot support a bill that unduly robs average Americans of their economic security and ability to provide for their families while constraining the ability of Congress to deal effectively with America's economic, fiscal, and job creation troubles.

This bill would put our national security at risk. If our nation is under attack or needs to respond to an imminent threat, the last person I would consider contacting is an accountant. I would expect that this body would act swiftly and this mandate takes away that ability.

We need to change the tone here in Congress. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke said it best when he stated recently before the House Committee on Financial Services. "We really don't want to just cut, cut, cut," Chairman Bernanke further stated "You need to be a little bit cautious about sharp cuts in the very near term because of the potential impact on the recovery. That doesn't at all preclude—in fact, I believe it's entirely consistent with—a longer-term program that will bring our budget into a sustainable position."

NATIONAL SECURITY—VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

I am outraged to find that revisions to this legislation include a provision that will hurt our veterans and military families and seriously compromise our ability to combat terrorism. As a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee, I am deeply concerned about any measure that undermines the men and women of the Armed Forces or the safety and security of the American people.

The Department of Defense, DOD, has already agreed to cut its budget by $450 billion over the next ten years. The Center for Strategic and International Studies predicts that further budget reductions, including those that would stem from a balanced budget amendment, will cause substantive modification to our defense strategy, capabilities and force structure.

Enacting a balanced budget requirement would severely limit the ability of the Armed Forces to procure the equipment necessary to keep our troops safe, and prepare them for potential combat. A balanced budget amendment would dramatically constrain discretionary budgets, so much so that procurement, research and development, and the acquisition of new technologies would have to be zeroed out of the DOD budget.

These deep cuts to research and development and procurement would threaten the safety of the men and women of the Armed Forces. For example, the constraints caused by a balanced budget amendment would seriously endanger the Marine Corps' V–22 Osprey program, as well as the intended order of

340 F–35B Joint Strike Fighters. The effects of a balanced budget amendment would hinder the Navy's planned expansion from 287 to 320 ships.

This bill will deeply impact the Defense Industrial Base, DIB, a group of companies and contractors that supply equipment and technology to the Armed Forces. The budget reductions caused by a balanced budget amendment would deeply impact modernization and procurement. In fact, Army Secretary John McHugh recently said that to facilitate any further budget cuts, ''you'd probably have to take some 50% out of modernization.''

The DIB has resulted in the development of the most advanced military force the world has ever seen. However, large cuts in procurement funding would seriously compromise our ability to develop some essential future capabilities. Moreover, the downsizing that a balanced budget requires would leave a large number of highly skilled and professional workers unemployed in an economy unlikely to absorb them for quite some time.

Passing this legislation will not, as many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle believe, result in a more stable budget. An amendment requiring a balanced budget will render discretionary budgets, particularly the DOD and national security budgets, much less predictable. The Departments of State, Defense and Homeland Security will have to compete for their shares of the national security budget, and furthermore, a likely response to a balanced budget amendment will be an increased reliance on emergency, ad hoc appropriations.

A provision of H.J. Res. 2 requires legislation to spend money that will take the budget out of balance due to a military conflict or national security need. As it stands, this bill will require a Joint Resolution from both houses of Congress with the specific dollar amount being spent.

In order to spend more than has been appropriated, agencies tasked with defense and national security will need approval from Congress. This increased reliance on emergency appropriations will have detrimental effects on the sound functioning of our defense and national security institutions. The more these institutions are forced to rely on emergency funding, the more unpredictable their budgets will become.

This legislation would allow a military conflict or threat to national security to take the budget out of balance. However, in order to authorize additional funds for military engagement or threats to national security that require action, Congress would need to pass legislation citing a specific dollar amount.

As a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee, I know that the threats against the nation are constantly changing and ever present. We cannot ask those responsible for protecting this nation to ask Congress for a specific amount of money every time there is a threat to our national security that requires action. Should we ever experience another attack on American soil, we cannot expect out first responders to wait for authorization before intervening.

Mr. Speaker, I am incredibly disheartened to see my colleagues on the other side of the aisle champion this legislation, legislation that has so many negative impacts on our veterans and military families. The permanent budget cuts necessitated by a balance budget amendment would require the DOD to drastically curtail the number of active duty service members, retirement benefits, and health care benefits for veterans and military families.

There are currently 22.6 million veterans living in the United States, and all of them deserve the retirement and health care benefits that were promised to them. In my home State of Texas we have nearly 1.7 million veterans, and 18th District is home to 32,000 of them. Of the 200,000 veterans of military service who live and work in Houston; more than 13,000 are veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan. We should not compromise the benefits for one of these patriotic Americans with this harmful legislation.

There has been a theme this Congress of focusing on cutting programs that benefit the public good and for the most at need, while ignoring the need to focus on job creation and economic recovery. Debate of this balanced budget amendment is wasting a tremendous amount of time when we should be focused on paying our nation's bills and resolving our differences.

As I mentioned, a balanced budget is not something that should be mandated in our Constitution, nor something that should be automatically be required every year. In particular, during economic downturns, the government can stimulate growth by cutting taxes and increasing spending. And in fact, the cost of many government benefit programs is designed to automatically increase when the economy is down—for example, costs for food stamps, SNAP, and Medicaid increase when more people need to rely upon them.

These countercyclical measures lessen the impact of job losses and economic hardship associated with economic downturns. The resulting temporary increases in spending could cause deficits that would trigger the balanced budget requirements at the worst possible moment.

A constitutional amendment requiring Congress to cut spending to match revenue every year would both limit Congress's ability to respond to changing fiscal conditions and would dramatically impede federal responses to high unemployment as well as federal guarantees for food and medical assistance.

H.J. Res. 2 would amend the Constitution to require Congress to balance the budget each year. It would also impose new procedural hurdles to raising the debt ceiling, and require the President to submit a balanced budget each year.

The thresholds proposed in H.J. Res. 2 are completely unrealistic. Even during Ronald Reagan's presidency—before the baby boomers had reached retirement age, swelling the population eligible for Social Security and Medicare, when health care costs were much lower—federal spending averaged 22 percent of GDP. This would impose arbitrary limits on government actions to respond to an economic slowdown or recession.

Cutting spending during a recession could make the recession worse by increasing the number of unemployed, decreasing business investment, and withholding services needed to jump-start the economy. As written, this bill would render Social Security unconstitutional in its current form. By capping future spending below Reagan-era levels would force devastating cuts to Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, Head Start, child care, Pell grants, and many other critical programs.

Only five years in the last fifty has the Federal Government posted an annual budget surplus; all other years the government has been in deficit. Even the House-passed Republican budget resolution, which requires immediate and sustained drastic spending cuts, never reaches balance in the ten-year window required by H.J. Res. 2—indeed, it is not projected to be balanced for several decades, only reaching balance by 2040.

Because this proposal makes it so much harder for Congress to increase revenues than to cut spending, it in essence forces the President to match those same restrictions in his budget. In other words, H.J. Res. 2 is a political ploy designed to force the President to submit a budget that reflects the Republican priorities of ending the Medicare guarantee while cutting taxes for millionaires.

SOCIAL SECURITY & MEDICARE

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, H.J. Res. 2's balanced budget requirement could result in Medicare being cut by nearly $750 billion, Social Security almost $1.2 trillion, and veterans' benefits $85 billion, through 2021 assuming that the spending cuts would be distributed evenly across the government. These cuts would devastate millions of seniors, veterans, children and the disabled.

These cut would have a devastating effect on the millions of aged, disabled, veterans, children, and others who depend on Social Security. The BBA would have the foreseeable effect of plunging millions of Social Security beneficiaries into poverty and making for a very bleak future for most others. Over two-thirds of seniors and 70 percent of people with disabilities depend on Social Security for half or more of their income. Close to half—47 percent—of all single (i.e., widowed, divorced, or never-married) women over age 65 rely on Social Security for 90 percent or more of their income.

Seniors are spending more on their health care costs, and Americans in general are making less. The face of poverty is a child's face. If a private employer attempted to do what is being asked of us here today, which would be to use their pension plans in a manner that H.J. Res 2 would deal with Social Security that would be against the law.

Furthermore, the need to raise the debt ceiling has no correlation to whether future budgets are balanced; increases in the debt ceiling reflect past decisions on fiscal policy. And as demonstrated by this year's current disagreement about whether and when to raise the debt ceiling, Congress does not need to impose further barriers to its consideration. Treasury has warned that failing to raise the debt ceiling and the resulting government default, which would be unprecedented, could have catastrophic impacts on the economy. Interest rates would rise, increasing costs for the government and potentially on American businesses and families.

Any cuts made to accommodate a mandated balanced budget would fall most heavily on domestic discretionary programs; the immediate result of a balanced budget amendment would be devastating cuts in education, homeland security, public safety, health care and research, transportation and other vital services.

The Founders purposely made the Constitutional amendment process a long and arduous one. Having a Constitutional balanced budget amendment is not a novel idea. Balanced

budget amendments have made it to a floor vote in the Senate five times, and in the House four times, according to CRS. The Senate barely passed a version in 1982, but it failed to gain the necessary two-thirds majority in the House. The House passed a version in 1995, but it failed in the Senate.

Do my Republican colleagues really expect Congress to capriciously pass an amendment altering our Nation's founding document on such short notice; an amendment that will fundamentally change our country without reasonable time for debate; without the opportunity for a hearing or questioning of witnesses; without any reports as to what impact it may have?

By tying the fate of whether the United States pays its debt obligations to the historically prolonged Constitutional amendment process, the Republicans who support this bill have demonstrated, at this critical juncture in American history, that they are profoundly irresponsible when it comes to the integrity of our economy and utterly bereft of sensible solutions for fixing it.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON MEDICARE

Medicare covers a population with diverse needs and circumstances. Most people with Medicare live on modest incomes. While many beneficiaries enjoy good health, 25 percent or more have serious health problems and live with multiple chronic conditions, including cognitive and functional impairments.

Today, 43 percent of all Medicare beneficiaries are between 65 and 74 years old and 12 percent are 85 or older. Those who are 85 or older are the fastest-growing age group among elderly Medicare beneficiaries. With the aging and growth of the population, the number of Medicare beneficiaries more than doubled between 1966 and 2000 and is projected to grow from 45 million today to 79 million in 2030.

POVERTY

We are constantly discussing cutting the budget, reducing our debt. Any yet, there has not been a single strong job creating measure purported by my Republican colleagues. Instead time and again there is legislation brought before this body to delay having a real debate on job creation. The poorest among us are being asked to bare the brunt of this legislation; cuts to Medicare, cuts Social Security . . . Who do you think these programs serve? We would be asking the poor to pay more for health insurance, to pay more for medical expenses, to pay more for housing. I ask my colleagues a simple question.

Currently more Americans are in need of jobs than jobs are available. Without focusing on creating jobs and advocating for job growth, what will happen to those individuals who are unable to find work, are seniors, are disabled, are children? What about veterans who find their pensions cut? When all these cuts to essential and vital programs occur in order to support this proposed constitutional mandate, what will happen to these individuals—how will they pay housing, health, and basic life necessities come from?

I am, as we all are, deeply troubled by the report issued by the U.S. Census Bureau. One of every six Americans are living in poverty, totaling 46.2 million people, this highest number in 17 years. In a country with so many resources, there is no excuse for this staggering level of poverty.

Children represent a disproportionate amount of the United States poor population. In 2008, there were 15.45 million impoverished children in the Nation, 20.7 percent of America's youth. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that there are currently 5.6 million Texans living in poverty, 2.2 million of them children, and that 17.4 percent of households in the state struggle with food insecurity.

In my district, the Texas 18th, more than 190,000 people live below the poverty line. We must not, we cannot, at a time when the Census Bureau places the number of American living in poverty at the highest rate in over 17 years, cut vital social services. Not in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and persistent unemployment, when so many rely on federal benefits to survive, like the Supplemental Nutrition Access Program, SNAP, that fed 3.9 million residents of Texas in April 2011, or the Women, Infants, and Children, WIC, Program that provides nutritious food to more than 990,000 mothers and children in my home state.

The Census Bureau also reported there are 49.9 million people in this country without health insurance. This is an absolute injustice that must be addressed. We can no longer ignore the fact that nearly 50 million Americans, many of them children, have no health insurance.

Texas has the largest uninsured population in the country; 24.6 percent of Texans do not have health care coverage. This includes 1.3 million children in the state of Texas alone who do not have health insurance, or access to the health care they need.

It is unconscionable that, despite egregiously high poverty rates, Republicans seek to reduce spending by cutting social programs that provide food and health care instead of raising taxes on the wealthiest in the Nation, or closing corporate tax loopholes.

Balanced budget amendments have made it to a floor vote in the Senate five times, and in the House four times, according to CRS. The Senate passed a version in 1982, but it failed to gain the necessary two-thirds majority in the House. The House passed a version in 1995, but it failed in the Senate.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. COFFMAN).

Mr. COFFMAN of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I've had the honor of serving in both the Army and the Marine Corps, five overseas deployments, two of them in combat.

What has really struck me since I've been in the Congress of the United States and had the honor, as well, to serve on the Armed Services Committee is testimony by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, who said the greatest threat to the United States is our national debt. He didn't say it was al Qaeda. He didn't say it was some foreign power of terrorists. He said the greatest threat to the United States is right here. The greatest threat to the United States are the decades of out-of-control spending by the Congress of the United States that is bringing down this country.

We have an opportunity today to change that. We have an opportunity today to put the discipline in place that we are not going to go down the path of Greece.

I would ask the Members of this body to show the same courage and determination that the young men and women show who serve our country in defense of our freedom every day, to do the right thing and to vote for a balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution.

If not now, when? Let us vote for this. Let us put this country down the right track. And let us not be the greatest threat to the United States.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Oregon, EARL BLUMENAUER.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. I appreciate my friend for the courtesy of permitting me to speak on this.

I am here in honor of the memory of the late, and I think great, United States Senator from Oregon, Republican Mark Hatfield.

When the balanced budget amendment freight train was moving through Congress in 1995 and a number of people piled on, it passed here overwhelmingly, but it failed in the United States Senate by one vote. The only Republican who voted ''no'' was Senator Mark Hatfield, who was chair of the Appropriations Committee. He was visited repeatedly by some of the most ardent proponents of a, quote, balanced budget amendment importuning him for special treatment.

□ 1800

Senator Hatfield understood that, had that balanced budget amendment been approved, it would have been an excuse for people to feel like they'd done their job and that they could go about continuing business as usual. He took a lot of heat. He, in fact, offered his resignation to Bob Dole, which would have reduced the number of Senators, and the balanced budget amendment would have passed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I yield the gentleman an additional 30 seconds.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. But Senator Hatfield understood that that was wrong. He voted against it. It failed.

And what happened?

We were able to move forward under a Democratic administration to be able to rein in spending. We balanced the budget for 4 consecutive years. What happened was, when the Republicans took over, restraint was lost; deficits skyrocketed; and they put in place tax-cut and spending policies that drive the deficit to this day.

Reject this phony solution. Stand up. Provide a balance of increased revenues and program cuts. Don't pretend something that you're not doing and that's not enforceable as an excuse to avoid our responsibilities.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to a member of the Armed Services Committee, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COOPER).

Mr. COOPER. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mike Mullen, said

that our worst enemy was not any foreign power or al Qaeda—rather, that it's our own national debt. That's right. It's official now. Congress has become basically America's worst enemy.

I wish we would take it upon ourselves to cut spending and to balance budgets. We are failing in doing that, and we have failed repeatedly. I wish the supercommittee would come up with a super solution. That does not look likely.

I regret that we are at the stage now where we need a balanced budget amendment, and I regret that we're at the stage of partisanship when, just 10 years ago, 72 Democrats voted for this, including two out of the three top members of our leadership.

We've got to live within our means. The Nation's future is at stake. It's sad that we have become so lame that we need this crutch, but we need it. America's overspending—our obesity in this body—is so great that we have become America's greatest obesity problem. The balanced budget amendment is the right diet.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) control the remainder of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Illinois, DANNY DAVIS.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. A balanced budget amendment to the Constitution represents bad economics and bad social policy. The ability to borrow to help our States and citizens is a critical tool to aid our Nation during economic crisis.

One of the most egregious consequences of this bill is the dangerous cuts to Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, and other safety net programs that would result. Given the vast deficit that exists due to reckless tax cuts for the wealthy, this bill would achieve balance on the backs of the elderly, the poor, and the disabled.

To achieve balance in the short term, massive reductions to critical safety net programs would have to occur—$750 billion in cuts from Medicare, $1.2 trillion from Social Security, and $85 billion from veterans' benefits through 2021. Dramatic cuts to other safety net protections for citizens, such as food stamps and supplemental security income for the disabled, poor, and the elderly, would almost certainly occur.

To add insult to injury, nonpartisan economists with Macroeconomic Advisers estimate that a balanced budget amendment would eliminate 15 million jobs, increase unemployment to 18 percent, and shrink the economy by 17 percent—catastrophic economic losses at the same time that Federal safety programs to support citizens experiencing such hardships are eviscerated.

This is a terrible piece of legislation. It's a bad bill. I could not, would not, and I don't think anybody should vote for it.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. DUNCAN), a member of the Natural Resources Committee.

Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina. I simply ask: Are you better off today than you were $4 trillion ago?

I say not.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today to discuss the most important issue that we will take up this year, and that is a balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution.

For much too long, Congress has allowed mountains of debt to pile upon our children and our grandchildren. We are in debt to the tune of $15 trillion, and we continue to spend each year in excess of $1 trillion more than we are bringing in.

In the short time that I have been a Member of Congress, it is evident to me that Washington will never voluntarily make the significant cuts to spending. That's why we need to pass a balanced budget amendment, which would force Washington to do what families and small businesses do each and every year: live within their means and stop the spending insanity. It's common sense not spending more than you have; but maybe that's too simple for those who gain some sort of power by providing services that our Nation cannot afford and by spending money that we don't have.

A balanced budget amendment: the right bill at the right time for America to regain control of its finances.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from New Jersey, ROB ANDREWS.

(Mr. ANDREWS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ANDREWS. Mr. Speaker, when Congress doesn't want to do something, it forms a committee. We tried, and that doesn't appear to be working. Then when it doesn't want to do something, it kicks the can down the road and sets up a process where somebody else does the hard thing. That's what we're doing here tonight.

If you want to balance the budget, then vote to tell the Federal-operating Departments to do with 5 or 10 percent less money than they got last year. I'm prepared to do that.

If you want to balance the budget, then save money in the Medicare program by saying Medicare can negotiate prices of prescription drugs the way the VA does, and save billions of dollars on prescription costs. I'm prepared to do that.

If you want to balance the budget, bring the troops home from Afghanistan sooner. Since we have the ability to blow up the world 24 times, let's not pay for weapons that blow it up a 25th time. Let's not have 90,000 troops in Europe and Korea who are defending against an enemy that largely doesn't exist anymore.

If you want to balance the budget, then vote to tell the hedge fund managers and all of these other people who are making all this money that maybe they should just pay a little bit more in taxes into the Federal Treasury.

All the heartfelt, pious speeches tonight won't save $1, but the things I just talked about would. They're difficult; they're controversial; but they're real. So let's not fool the American public that some process that somebody else someday might follow will balance the budget. If you want to balance the budget, vote to cut spending. You may have ways that I didn't outline. I'd like to hear them. If you want to balance the budget, then vote for some people who can afford to pay more.

Do something real.

That will create the balanced budget, the confidence, and the jobs the American people need—not just another empty, hollow, meaningless political debate. The right action is to balance the budget, and the right vote on this bill is ''no.''

□ 1810

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MCINTYRE), the ranking member of the Seapower Subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee.

Mr. MCINTYRE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.J. Res. 2, a balanced budget constitutional amendment. With the national debt topping more than $15 trillion, it is critical that we pass this important legislation to improve our Nation's economic health and national security.

Mr. Speaker, $48,570, that's the price we're putting on the head of every American, the portion that every man, woman, and child owes today to pay off our Nation's skyrocketing Federal debt. It's often said that our children and future generations will pay for the choices we make today. But the truth is that we're incurring debt at such a rapid pace that we'll begin to pay that price sooner than expected. We'll pay now as well as later. As public debt continues to grow, including borrowing from foreign nations such as China, interest costs alone are soaring into the stratosphere. Our economy, our military strength, and the opportunity for future growth are at risk if this problem is not addressed more quickly. That's why I will stand here today to support H.J. Res. 2, a balanced budget amendment.

Since first coming to Washington in 1997, I have cosponsored legislation that would adopt a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. This critical legislation would require the Federal Government to balance its budget like most States are required to do. In fact, 49 of the 50 States have some form of a balanced budget requirement. So this is not something

novel or unusual. It's something that makes sense. My home State of North Carolina has one of the most stringent requirements to do so.

Let's stand together today for common sense. Let's send a message to the American people that we can keep our fiscal house in order, that we can balance our budget, and we can do the right thing with the American taxpayers' dollars to put our Nation on a path of economic strength and vitality.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to another gentleman from North Carolina, DAVID PRICE.

(Mr. PRICE of North Carolina asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PRICE of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise to oppose the Tea Party Caucus' latest misguided attempt to derail Federal fiscal and economic policy.

I understand the appeal of a simple, sound bite-friendly solution to all that ails us. In fact, some people think that balancing the budget is just a matter of cutting foreign aid and converting to a flat income tax. Many of our colleagues have stoked such nonsense and similar claims that are mathematically impossible. They know very well that balancing the budget through cuts alone would require eliminating every penny of discretionary spending, including the entire Department of Defense. I don't believe that's really what they want.

Why, then, would they vote for this amendment? Well, there is no real risk in establishing a constitutional requirement that can't be enforced. It would likely never, ever produce a balanced budget. In fact, it would make balance harder to achieve. It does absolutely nothing to create jobs or strengthen the economy, and it would put Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid in real jeopardy. But in the short term, proponents are counting on a political payoff. They will be brandishing their ''aye'' vote as proof that they're the most fiscally responsible folks in the land. In fact, these emperors have no clothes.

Many of my colleagues seem to have forgotten this, but we balanced the budget once before, not so long ago. It started with the bipartisan vote in 1990 and the subsequent vote by Democrats alone in 1993. Our country not only had a balanced budget, we ran 4 years with surpluses. And we did it without a balanced budget amendment. In fact, if the amendment we're considering tonight had been in place then, these critical agreements would have failed!

The other lesson of the 1990s is that the best cure for budget deficits is a healthy economy. Here, too, the so-called balanced budget amendment would actually make things worse, tying our hands during periods of economic downturn or high unemployment, locking in recessions and making them deeper.

Mr. Speaker, in earlier years, we had some true fiscal conservatives in this body. They knew that raising the revenue needed to invest in our people and secure our economic success was a lot wiser than drawing ideological lines in the sand. They didn't need a balanced budget amendment to take tough votes, to make compromises, or to stand up for the future of our Nation in the face of uncompromising ''pledges'' demanded by some group or another.

As we watch the ''supercommittee'' on the brink of failure, I don't know what further proof we need that there isn't a silver bullet in the fight for fiscal security. The real answer—and I believe colleagues know this very well—isn't a matter of gimmickry; it's about mustering the political will to do the right thing. I understand it's hard to revolt against King Norquist. But any Tea Party worth of its name ought to be prepared to challenge the monarchy, not to do its bidding. I urge my colleagues to vote against this amendment.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 15 seconds to say that the last time that the Congress balanced a budget with a Democratic controlled Congress was 1969, more than 42 years ago.

At this time, it is my pleasure to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. MCCOTTER), a member of the Financial Services Committee.

Mr. MCCOTTER. I thank the gentleman from Virginia.

I would like to take a quick second to add that in 1969, the Democratic Congress had a Republican President to help them do it.

I rise in support of a constitutional balanced budget amendment. In this debate, we have heard that Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid will be doomed by a balanced budget amendment. But if we do nothing, those entitlement programs will continue to be doomed by today's fiscal implosion. We have heard that tax hikes will somehow manage to balance the budget all by themselves. But we've heard this talk before, and after all the tax hikes of the past, today we face a fiscal implosion.

We have heard that there was a brief glowing era when a Democratic President and a Republican Congress managed to balance the budget. That is the exception that proves the necessity of a balanced budget amendment because, again, today we are fiscally imploding.

We have heard the differences between how families borrow and how the government borrows, and these are absolutely accurate. When a family borrows money, it is personally liable for that debt. It must prioritize its finances and pay it back with its own money. But today we are fiscally imploding because Big Government is not personally liable for that debt. It does not prioritize, and it can't even pay it back with other people's money.

What is the solution? I believe that Big Government is addicted to spending, so we must turn it over to a higher power called the United States Constitution. Only in this way, when Congress spends your money, will you be allowed in the room to sit over their shoulder and say ''no,'' because as we know, today's fiscal implosion is here. And under statutory limitations, the Congress has not been able to balance your budget. Go to the highest law of the land, force them to live within your means, and ensure that the doom and gloom we hear about being able to spend less money to help America actually occurs.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentlelady from Oakland, California, BARBARA LEE.

Ms. LEE of California. I want to thank the gentleman for yielding and for continuing to fight the good fight on behalf of the American people.

Many of my Republican colleagues have come to the floor to keep telling us that the Federal Government must balance the budget, just like every American family. Well, it sounds like it makes sense to me, but it's nonsense. How would those families and businesses feel about Congress passing a constitutional amendment making it illegal to borrow money to invest in their futures? What if they could not get a mortgage to buy a house? What if they could not get credit to buy a car or get a credit card just to buy some clothes? What if they could not get a loan to grow their businesses? That's what this fundamental change to America's Constitution would do to the entire country. Can you imagine opening up the Constitution to make it impossible for people to invest in their future?

In addition, millions of families across America are taking in less income than they need to survive because of failed Republican economic policies that drove our economy into the ditch. Why would you now want to balance the budget on the backs of these people—seniors, the poor, our children, the most vulnerable? Now that people need a helping hand, Republicans want to tie the hands of government and restrict our budget so that exactly when Americans need more, you want to hurt them more.

□ 1820

This is really a moral disgrace. Let's stop wasting time on ridiculous efforts to amend our Constitution when millions of Americans need jobs now. Let's stop wasting time keeping campaign promises to Republican Tea Party supporters and pass real legislation that will create jobs like the American Jobs Act. Let's stop wasting time when nearly 50 million Americans—mind you, 50 million—in the richest and most powerful country in the world are living in poverty.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I yield the gentlelady an additional 30 seconds.

Ms. LEE of California. Thank you very much for the 30 seconds, and I just

want to remind us all that 50 million Americans are living in poverty in the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world. And millions of job seekers are about to lose their unemployment benefits.

We do not need to radically alter our Nation's founding document to do what is right. We just have to take a balanced approach to reducing our deficits and balancing our budgets, and you do this by creating jobs.

So let the unwise Bush tax cuts expire, end the wars, cut the bloated and wasteful Pentagon spending, and protect the social safety net that protects millions of Americans.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure to yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HENSARLING), the chairman of the House Republican Conference.

Mr. HENSARLING. I thank the gentleman for yielding, and I thank him for his leadership on the balanced budget amendment.

Mr. Speaker, since the President was elected, our Nation has now seen its first trillion-dollar deficit, its second trillion-dollar deficit, and its third trillion-dollar deficit. The President and the previous Congress have been on a spending spree the likes of which this Nation has never seen before. And yesterday, Americans were greeted with the news that our national debt has now topped $15 trillion—$128,000 for every household. We are borrowing almost 40 cents on the dollar, much of it from the Chinese, and sending the bill to our children and grandchildren. In short, there is a debt crisis. The debt is not just unsustainable, it is immoral.

And the American people know that it's because Washington spends too much, not because they are undertaxed. The problem is on the spending side. Now, taxes are temporarily down due to the economy, but they're going to come back. It is spending that is exploding from 20 percent of our economy to 40 percent over the course of the next generation. If that's solved on the taxing side, we'd be the most highly taxed industrialized nation in the world.

Now, the crisis should be solved on the spending side of the equation. I wish we were debating a spending limit amendment to the Constitution. We're not. We had no takers. I know of no takers on the other side of the aisle. So we're debating what is known as the classic balanced budget, the jump ball balanced budget, the clean balanced budget; equal opportunities for spending restraint and tax increases. Now, it's not my preferred policy; yet so many Democrats, Mr. Speaker, will come to the floor and say we need a balanced approach. But the question is: How many believe we need a balanced budget?

Now, we all agree that amending the Constitution is something that should be taken with great reverence, with great deliberation. It is a sacred responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, we know that our Founding Fathers set up a process by which to amend the Constitution, and no less of a Founding Father than Thomas Jefferson said: ''I wish it were possible to obtain a single amendment to our Constitution. I would be willing to depend on that alone for the reduction of the administration of our government; I mean an additional article taking from the Federal Government the power of borrowing.''

Forty-nine of 50 States have some form of balanced budget requirement. Every family in America has to balance their budget. Every small business. Should we expect anything less from a great nation?

Sixteen years ago was the last opportunity we had in the United States Congress to vote on a balanced budget. We came within one vote, one vote in the United States Senate. Imagine where we would be today had that one vote made the difference and we had this amendment. It's sad.

I can tell you, Republicans and Democrats can't seem to agree on spending. We can't seem to agree on taxes. But as Americans, can't we at least agree it's past time, past time to stop mortgaging our children's future and bankrupting the greatest Nation in the history of the world?

There is a real crisis, and to paraphrase Winston Churchill: Haven't we now exhausted every other possibility? Isn't it finally time to do the right thing?

Amend the Constitution, save the country, balance the budget.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 5 seconds.

I hope that those words will help us in the supercommittee that the gentleman from Mississippi is working on night and day.

I now yield 5 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Virginia, BOBBY SCOTT, the former subcommittee chair of the Crime Subcommittee and a former member of the Budget Committee.

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, the supporters of this legislation have spoken at length about how nice it would be to balance the budget and how dangerous deficits are. The speeches, there are great speeches about the budget, but the one thing they have not talked about is how the provisions of this legislation will actually help balance the budget.

Now, we had a hearing earlier this month where the former Governor of Pennsylvania talked about the Pennsylvania balanced budget amendment and how their constitutional provision was such a good thing; but he had to acknowledge that other than the title, there is nothing in H.J. Res. 2 that can be found in the Pennsylvania Constitution.

We also found that the gentleman from Arizona had to acknowledge, after he talked about how good the balanced budget amendment works in Arizona, that Arizona was able to balance its budget only because federally borrowed stimulus money provided $6 billion to Arizona; $1,000 for every man, woman, and child in that State. And that wasn't enough. Arizona had to sell their State capitol and supreme court building. That's right, sold their State capitol and supreme court building and leased it back in order to achieve about a billion dollars worth of cash needed that year.

So we should be looking at the provisions of the legislation, not just talking about how nice it is to balance the budget.

One of the provisions is a three-fifths vote to increase the debt ceiling. Last August, the United States lost its AAA credit rating because it looked like we were not going to be able to achieve a simple majority. We should explain how it makes a lot of sense to make that spectacle an annual affair. I think most people would think it would be fiscally irresponsible to enact that provision.

Another provision is a three-fifths vote to pass a budget that's not balanced in a given year. That would cover every budget we considered this year, including the strongest deficit reduction plan, because those budgets are not balanced in the first year.

Now, strong deficit reduction is politically difficult because we're talking about arithmetic. You have to raise taxes and/or cut spending. Now, you can't get a simple majority; we can't even get a simple majority to do that, so why would anyone think that this legislation requiring a three-fifths vote would make it any easier. In fact, that same three-fifths vote will be sufficient to pass new tax cuts and additional spending, making the deficit worse. Last December we passed an $800 billion tax cut. We got three-fifths for that. But instead of discussing just the title of the resolution, we should be noticing that if this legislation were in effect in 1993, we never would have passed that budget.

We've heard people on the other side of the aisle taking credit for the hard work. I came in in 1993, and we passed a tough budget. There were tough votes. Fifty Democrats lost their seats as a direct result of those votes. The deficit was $290 billion at that time. In 1995 when the Republicans came in, they passed their little budgets; and rather than sign those budgets, President Clinton let the government get shut down rather than sign those budgets. If they want to take credit, they can take credit for President Clinton vetoing their budgets and shutting down the government.

□ 1830

In 1997, the deficit had gone from 290 down to less than 25 billion, and there were no tough votes on that. The budget was on the way to balancing itself if we hadn't done anything, and so we find out what would have happened if President Clinton hadn't capitulated in 1995.

In 2001, when the Republicans came in with a Republican President and a Republican Congress, we saw what happened. They passed two tax cuts, fought two wars without paying for them, prescription drugs without paying for them; and rather than, in 2001, when Chairman Greenspan had to answer questions like, What will happen when we pay off the national debt? Are we paying off the national debt too quickly?, it looked like we were on target by 2008 to pay off the entire debt held by the public. Those were the discussions.

The first tax cut was the last time you heard any of that discussion. And as a result of the two tax cuts, two unpaid-for wars and an unpaid-for prescription drug benefit, we ended up in huge deficits. The fact is the 1993 budget never would have passed if we had required a three-fifths vote.

Now we should be focused on the actual effects of the resolution. There's another provision, and that's the provision involving war.

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

Mr. CONYERS. I yield the gentleman 1 additional minute.

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. All of the provisions of this budget can be set aside when a declared war is in effect or when the United States is engaged in a military conflict which causes an imminent and serious military threat to national security. That provision ought to scare every two-bit dictator around the world because if we're having trouble getting the three-fifths, all we've got to do is drop a bomb on them, and we can pass a budget with a simple majority.

But we ought to be focused on the provisions of the bill. How would the three-fifths vote, when we can't even achieve a simple majority, help balance the budget? It should be obvious that rather than just talking about how nice it would be to balance the budget, how do these provisions actually make that easier? I think the fact of the matter is if we adopt this resolution, it will be harder, if not impossible, to ever balance the budget, and that's why this resolution ought to be defeated.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 30 seconds to complete the record.

As I said in my remarks earlier, Presidents of both parties and Congresses of both parties have much to explain in terms of the lack of the balanced budgets over the last 50 years. Only six times in 50 years have they been balanced. But here is the record: of the 13 of those 50 years that Republicans controlled the Congress, they only balanced the budget four times. Of the 37 years that Democrats controlled the Congress, during that time, they only balanced the budget twice.

It is now my pleasure to yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN).

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I would encourage my colleagues in this body to consider the balanced budget amendment and to support it.

I do rise in support of this amendment because hardworking taxpayers know that out-of-control spending in Washington is killing job creation and economic growth. In less than 3 years, President Obama and his administration have added $4.3 trillion to our national debt, which is now over $15 trillion. Astounding. That is $47,900 for every American. Is it really fair for our children and grandchildren to have to shoulder that kind of debt for programs they don't want and having to pay for it with money they don't have? Is that really fair?

The Obama economy is stifling the ability of small businesses and hardworking taxpayers to achieve their goals and dreams. It is time to rein in wasteful Washington spending. It is time to stop the madness.

We need a permanent solution to the fiscal problems that are plaguing this economy, and the clear and commonsense solution is to pass this balanced budget amendment. It's not a new idea. Every year in my State of Tennessee, our State, cities and counties across our State all balance their budget, and 49 other States do. Passing a constitutional mandate would require Congress to balance the budget every year and legally obligate this body to spend only what it takes in.

We can no longer kick the can down the road. We can't wait to replace Washington's blank check with the checks and balances necessary to provide true fiscal responsibility. Passing the balanced budget amendment is an effective component of accountability and spending control. Washington mandates too much, spends too much, takes too much, and takes our freedom.

Mr. CONYERS. I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentlelady from Florida, Ms. KATHY CASTOR.

Ms. CASTOR of Florida. I thank the gentleman for the time.

I support a balanced budget, and I support a balanced budget amendment; but this version would place a very dangerous straitjacket on our country's ability to address a disaster. I'm very proud to represent the State of Florida. But after a year of devastating tornadoes, floods and fires all across this country, you do not have to hail from the State of Florida to understand the impact of a natural disaster and the importance of our ability to speed assistance to local communities.

This amendment would erect roadblocks to our country's ability to address natural disasters and emergencies. Please recall how many of our GOP colleagues a few months ago sought to stall emergency aid. I will read from a press report from back in August: ''Americans who saw their homes flooded, streets ripped apart and businesses disrupted by last weekend's hurricane are about to face another storm: a new congressional battle. Unless additional disaster aid is appropriated, Federal officials said communities trying to rebuild from natural disasters this year in the Midwest and South will have to wait while funds are diverted to help victims of Hurricane Irene. The recent string of disasters, including a tornado that tore through Joplin, Missouri, and a flood that inundated Minot, North Dakota, is running into the same political buzz saw that nearly forced the government into default over the bitter fight over the debt ceiling this summer.''

Delays in emergency aid are unconscionable, and it is terrible for FEMA to have to choose between which American cities and towns can be helped and which ones can't. And the problem with this version of the balanced budget amendment is that it could cause impacted communities to live that nightmare again. It didn't happen after Hurricane Katrina or 9/11 or other disasters, but after the antics of this Republican Congress this past fall, I am very concerned that this version of the balanced budget amendment would allow another irresponsible Congress to block emergency assistance to local communities.

We should not set our country up to be at the mercy of Tea Party hardliners, not at the times when our neighbors and communities need us most.

I relayed my concerns to the House sponsor after he was kind enough to call me directly, and I appreciate that opportunity. Unfortunately, the Republicans did not allow any amendments or revisions, so I intend to file my own version of a balanced budget amendment, a version that seeks to avoid an irresponsible Congress from withholding disaster assistance.

Because this version of the balanced budget amendment is flawed, I urge its defeat.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ALTMIRE), a member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Mr. ALTMIRE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the balanced budget amendment. Forty-nine of the 50 States are required to balance their budgets. And while I'm certain that State legislatures will agree that it's always a difficult process, somehow they annually meet their obligations while achieving balance. The Federal Government should be able to do it, too.

But States aren't the only place Congress can look to for examples. Every family and every business in America has to balance expenses and income. They have every right to expect the Federal Government to do the same; but, unfortunately, Congress has let them down time and again.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come to fix the problem. Constitutional amendments to require a balanced budget have been introduced in Congress for

the past 75 years. Most recently, in 1995, the House passed a balanced budget virtually identical to the one we're debating today, and it passed this House with bipartisan support, 72 Democrats and 228 Republicans. And because that amendment failed by one vote in the Senate, our national debt has now surpassed $15 trillion. The situation has only gotten worse, and the stakes today are much higher than 1995.

□ 1840

This vote is an opportunity to prove to the American people that this Congress can work together and that we are finally committed to balancing our budget and putting our country back on fiscally solid ground.

Mr. CONYERS. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUCSHON), a member of the Education and Workforce Committee.

Mr. BUCSHON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. This is an opportunity for the Federal Government to keep our checkbook balanced, just as every American is expected to do.

The House passed a very similar amendment in 1995 when our debt was $4.86 trillion. Seventy Democrats voted for the amendment, including 11 of my current colleagues. I urge my friends on the other side of the aisle to vote for this amendment now that our debt has tripled to over $15 trillion.

The President recently said in regards to balancing the budget, ''We don't need a constitutional amendment to do that. We don't need a constitutional amendment to do our jobs. The Constitution already tells us to do our jobs—and to make sure the government is living within its means and making responsible choices.'' Mr. President, I respectfully disagree. Washington, D.C., has not been able to make these choices and is not living within its means. I was elected by the people of Indiana's Eighth Congressional District to help us make that happen.

I'd also like to say that some of Mr. HOYER's comments help us today to outline exactly why Washington, D.C., needs a balanced budget amendment. I thank him for pointing those reasons out. This is not a partisan issue, Mr. Speaker, it's an American issue.

I support this amendment, and I urge my colleagues today to vote ''yes'' on a balanced budget amendment.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to not traffic the well while other Members are under recognition.

Mr. CONYERS. I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CONAWAY), the chairman of the Agriculture Committee General Farm Commodities Subcommittee.

(Mr. CONAWAY asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, it's already been said tonight that 15 years ago we came within a chigger's whisker of passing a balanced budget amendment and sending it to the States. Imagine how different today's conversations would be had the folks in charge then done that. We'd still be fussing and fighting about what ought to be done, but the argument would be, how do we solve today's problems using today's resources? Instead, we've stacked up another $9 trillion of future generations of Americans' resources in our quest to solve these problems.

Well, think about what 2026 will look like, 15 years from now. The folks in charge then will be able to take out the projections that we have in place today and compare those to what is actually going on then—if we pass this balanced budget amendment—and say, wow, look how much better off this country is. They'll still be fussing and fighting, but it will be using their resources to fix their problems instead of the model that we've put in place collectively, on both sides of the aisle. There's plenty of blame to go around.

The decisions that will have to be made to balance our budget are no different with or without the balanced budget amendment. They are hard. They are difficult. And I've got $15 trillion worth of evidence that we're not making those tough decisions without the balanced budget amendment. Technically, we could get it done, but we're not getting it done—and we are on absolutely no path to get that done.

I received today a petition from Jim Keffer, a State representative from Texas, signed by 969 other good Texans, urging me to support this balanced budget amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all of my colleagues to think about the future of this country, how much better off will this country be with a balanced budget amendment. This is the only thing that we are contemplating doing over the next 15 years that has a remote chance of fundamentally changing for the better the future that my seven grandchildren face. It is a bleak future they face today. We can fundamentally change that future for the spending efforts of this country with a balanced budget amendment that will force us to do the things that everybody else does.

I urge all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this balanced budget amendment.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
DISTRICT 60,
Austin, Texas, November 16, 2011.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN CONAWAY, it's time for us to stand together and teach Washington the first lesson in Texas economics: Don't spend more than you make!

We Texans know the importance of fiscal responsibility and how to live within our means, and I'm proud that our state constitution reflects these principles by requiring the state legislature to pass a balanced budget each session. This valuable tool allows us to keep the size of our state government in check and our economy stable and job friendly!

I am grateful that through your leadership and the leadership of our party, Congress now has the opportunity to debate and vote on a proposed constitutional amendment requiring a balanced federal budget like we have here in Texas.

You and I have the high honor of representing the hard working men and women of this great state in our respective governing bodies, and I submit to you the names of close to a thousand concerned citizens urging you to vote in favor of this constitutional amendment.

This is a critical moment for our nation's future economic health and stability, and I encourage you join us and stand together as Texans to demand that Washington follow our lead!

Please vote in favor of the constitutional amendment requiring a balanced federal budget!

I sincerely appreciate your consideration on this matter. We value your leadership, and I look forward to the opportunity to continue working with you on the important issues facing our state and nation.

God Bless America and the Great State of Texas!

STATE REPRESENTATIVE JIM KEFFER,
District 60.

FEDERAL BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT PETITION

It's time for Washington to follow our lead and pass a balanced budget amendment.

Sign the petition TODAY!

James Abbott, Floyd Abbott, Robert Abresch, Timothy Ackerman, Peggy Adams, Marza Adams, Cecil L. Adams, Ron Agnew, Francisco Aguilar, Alan Ahlberg, Ronnie Ainsworth, Sharron Albertson, Hale Alderman, Earl Alexander, Dennis Allen, Douglas Allen, Ann Allen, Jack R. Allen, Robert Allen, Brandon Ammons, Linda Amos, Jadell Anderson, Zanna Anderson, Rose Anderson, Belinda Angerer, Steve Angerer, Ky Ash, Ryan Ash.

Juana Ash, Bill Ash, Paul Athas, Evan Autry, Brett Autry, Charles Aycock, Royce Anne Baethge, Caroline Baggett, Judith Bailes, Joy Bailey, Charles Bailey Jr., Martha Baird, Ron Baker, Martha Baker, Sally Baker, Sally Baker, William Baker, Sharon Baker, Walt Baldwin, Juania Ball, Mary Barboza, Andrew Barg, Fawn Barrington, Christopher Barrington, Manuel Barrios, David Barton, Teresa Baty.

John Baumann, Bob Baumgartner, Robert Beadel, Regina Becerra, Carrie Bellamy, Linda Bellomy, Willard Bennett, Jo Bennett, Lewis Bergman, Tom Bernson, Paul Bernstein, Steve Berry, Joni Berry, Bob Berry, Mark Bielamowicz, Robert Bielamowicz, Steven Bilbo, William Binyon, LaVonda Black, Ealy Black, Joel Black, Jonathan Black, Diron Blackburn, Bill Blanchard, C.T. Blomstrom, Daina Blount, Fred Bogar, Chris Boggs.

Melissa Bohannon, A.H. Booth, Theodore Bordelon, Roger Borgelt, James Boswell, David Boucher, Kathy Bower, Donald Bowne, Boyce Erwin Boyce, Linda Bradford, Randa Bradley, Don R Bradshaw, David Branch, Cara Branch, Dianne Brandt, david braun, Sherry Breedlove, Mary Breitung, Glenn Breitung, Melvin Brewer, Thomas Brewer, Charlene Brewster, Jim Bright, Janet Bright, Noel Brinkerhoff, Sherry Britton, Jerry Britton, Judy Britton, Eve Brock, Starling Brock Sr., Kevin Brockus, Dale Brooks, Roberta Broussard, Roy Broussard, Linda Brown, Gina Brown, Stan E Brudney,

Alana D Brudney, Kimberly Bruton, Jeanene Bryan, Freddie Buchanan, Lesli Buchanan, Terry Buchanan, Greg Buenger, Robert Bullis, Aletha Burgess, Gerald Burgess.

Melissa Burgin, Travis Burke, Paul Burns, Susan Burns, David Butler, Wilma Butler, Angie Button, Carl Byers, Matt Byrd, Larry Byrd, Carol Cahill, Billy Campsey, Mike Canaday, Bob Cantwell, Dorothy Caram, Harold Carnathan, Bryan W Carpenter, David Carroll, Brenda Carroll, Jane Carter, Watt Casey, Dosia Casey, Watt Casey Jr., James Cashion, Greggory Cassady, Maggie Catherall, Deborah Catsonis, Ruth Cezar, Floyd Chambers, Ira Chambers, Rhonda Chancellor, Jesse Chaney, Barney Chapman, C Dan Chenoweth, Karey Chilson, Sandy Chisholm, Curt Christensen, Willie Christian, Brian Christopher, Danny Clack, Jack L. Clack, Vera Clack, Eugene Clark, James Clark, David Clemens.

Kenny Clement, Calvin Click, Sandra Clinard, Pat Cloud, Carole Cockerham, Darrell Cockerham, Lisa Cody, Bill Cody, Joe Coffey, Betty Cole, Q. Coleman, Glenda Collins, Tom Conley, Janis Connally, Dan Connally, R. Kelton Conner, Michael Cook, Mary Cook, Carol Cook, Suze Cook, Jim Cooley, Robert Cordova, Donald Corley, Edith Corley, Tim Coulter, James Cowan, Jerold Coward, Chris Cox, Chris Cox, Shari Craig, Marsha Cranford, Jerry Criswell, Sharon Crittenden, Leon Crockett, Geri Cronenworth, Ronald Crossman, Jesse Crowell, Carrie Cuoghi, Sherrie Curry, Sherry Curtis, Dolores Dailey, Barbara Daniel, Richard S Davenport, Thomas Davies, Sherrill Davis, J. Davis.

Betty Davis, Russell Davis, Lana Davis, Ronald Davis, Elizabeth Davis, Willie Davis, Jim Dawson, Amy Day, Harry Deal, Karen Deatherage, Theodore Dickinson, Elaine Dippel, Robert Dixon, Mary Donalson, Donald Dorenbach, Richard Dormier, Cynthia Dormier, John Dowling, Frank Drake, Wade Driskill, Margaret Dunham, C. Briscoe Dunn, Trevor Dupuy, Diane Durbin, Adam Dwire, Louis Dyess, Amy Dykes, Rick Dykes, Herbert Earnest, Natalie Earnest, Janet Ebersole, Eleanor Edmondson, Mona Edwards, Joseph Edwards, Angela Edwards, Jerry Edwards, Pat Edwards, Cha Edwardson, Joy Ellinger, Tom Elliott, Mark Elliott, Nancy Emmert, Katy Encalade, Bryan Eppstein, Troy Evans, Bettie Evans.

Brenda Evans, Gary Evans, Kirt Fadely, Shirley Faetcha, Al Faetcha, Larry Fann, Frank Farmer, Terry Farquhar, Robert Favor, Annabeth Favor, Linda Ferguson, Clint Ferguson, Jr., Dale Fessenden, Judy Finch, Linda Finkle, James Finley, Jimmy Fisher, Rosemary FitzGerald, Judy Flanagin, Cheryl Flatt, Pat Flatt, Lowell Fletcher, Grace Fletcher, David Fletcher, Sarah Floerke, Naomi Flores, Christopher Flores, Shirley Ford, Shiela Foreman, Allen Foreman, Steve Fortner, Stephen Foster, Susan Fountain, Justin Fowler, Pat Foy, Barbara Francisco, Mark Francisco, M Dawn Frederick, Steven Freeman, Kathie Freeman, Rodger Frego, Judy French, Jere French, Shai Frietze, Claud Fry, Lorine Fuessel.

Linda Fulks, James Fullen, Donald Fuller, Billy Gaddis, Judy Gaddis, Blake Gaines, Garry Galpin, Leonardo Garcia, Gaye Garner, Crystal Gause, Joe Geer, Lee Gibson, DeAnna Giesick, Lawrence Gill, Robert Gillespie, Joy Gillespie, Richard Girouard, Jo Ellen Glasgow, Gtrady Glenn, Delaine Godwin, Gabriele Goins, Daniel Gonzalez, Victor Gooch, Peggi Gooch, Peggy Goodson, Bernelle Goodwin, Billy Goodwin, Joe Gordy, Diane Goutchkoff, Hans Graff, Rosemary Graves, Joneta Griffin, krista grimes, Steve Grimes, Sue Grisham, Victor Guevara, Paulette Guion, Vel Gurusamy, Stephen Haas, Ken Hackett, Glenn Haefner, OG Hahn, Ruth Hahn Hahnm, Robbie Hamby, Todd Hamilton, Rick Hamm.

Virginia Hammock, Sam Hampton, Michelle Hanks, Janet Hanna, Michael Hansard, Eli Harden, Amber Hardin, Norval Hardy, Harry Hardy, Tyler Hargrave, John J Hargreaves,LuEtta Hargreaves, Nicki Harle, Terry Harman, William K Harner Jr. Terri Harris, Curtis Harris, Steve Harris, Marilyn Harrison, Karen Hartsfield, James Hasik, Quinton Hayden, Stephen Haynes, Don Hays, Leonard Heathington, Kris Heckmann, Kate Heim, Janice Heiskell, Nell Helfenbein, Sharlene Hetzel, Bob Hieronymus, Amber Higgins, Michael Higgins, Carl Hill, Ann Hill, Waytelle Hill, Deborah Hines, Harry Hingst, Amy Hingst, Jonna Hitt, Jim Hix, Heath Hodges, John Hoffman, C. Suzann Hoffman, Tom Hollaway, Johnny Holcombe, Ralph Hollingshead.

Randy Holson, Carol Holt, Bob Hopkins, Zeda Hopkins, William Horick, Carolyn Houston, Terry Howard, Jane D. Howell, Irene Howell, Glenna Huber, Virginia Huff, Carl Huff, Neal Huffman, Janelle Huffman, Bob Huffman, Ellen Hughes, Alice Hull, Tom Huskey, Bill Hutson, Joe Hyde, Chuck Iannaci, Thomas Imre, Jack Jackson, Robert Jacobs, Treena Jacques, Rodney Jaemsq, Tammy James, Christopher C Jamison, Joe Jessing, Butler Jim, Norwood Johnny, Sheron Johnson, Herma Jean Johnson, Judy Johnson, Keith Johnson, Kim M. Johnson, Martin Johnson, Christine Johnson, Russell Johnston, Dean Johnston, Lori Jolly, Shirley Jones, Judi Jones, Lew Jones, Delnita Jones, Charles Jones, Travis Jones, Marilyn Jones, Thomas Jones, Bettye Jordan, Roger Jordan, Webb Jordan, Louis Jupe, David Kaltenbach, Ronald Karcher, John Kaufmann, Terri Kaufmann, Marvin Kays, Bill Keffer.

Scott Keffer, Leslie Keffer, Ashley Keffer, Charles Keller, Wesley Keller, Brice Kelley, B.R. Kelso, Margaret Kerby, Shirley Keyes, John Keyes, Don Kincaid, Nita King, Dale King, Bill King, Kimberly King, Wanda King, Tracy Kirsch, Daniel Kirsch, Clent Kniffen, Doodie T Knox, Jack L Knox, Sally Koch, Rebekah Kodrin, Louis Kodrin, Lisa Koiner, Doris Konduros, Robert Kostelnik, Leona Ruth Kowis, Sandra Kozak.

Richard Krantz, Judy Krause, Russel Krueger, Elsie Kwok, Dusan Lajda, Dennis Land, Jim Lange, Terry Largent, Ron Latta, Jim Lattimore, Bernice Launius, John Laurance, George Lavender, George Lavender, Jim Law, Jim Law, Catherine Lawson, Ron Lazaro, Donna Leech, Joyce Leidig, Joyce Leidig, Roy Lenoch, Denise Leopard, Thomas LePage, William G. Lewis, Tryon Lewis, Carl Lindberg, Mary Little, Lavada Lockhart, Steve Long Jr., Jorge Lopez, David Lopez, Alice Lott, Pat Lovell, James Lovell, Larry Lowrance, Daniel Luckett, Jerry Luster, Franklin Luttrell, Virginia Lymbery, Robert Lynch, Chris Lyon, Nat Lyons, Walter MacArthur, Hartley Mackintosh, Kerry Magee.

Sandra Magers, Larry Mahand, Wallace Maness, Wallace Maness, Ginger Mangum, Sarita Maradani, Kirk Marchell, Mike Margerum, Ronald Marks, Greg Martin, Carl May, Mitzi Mays, Kay McAfee, James McBroom, Barbara McBroom, Susanne McCaa, Mark McCaig, Kimberly McCleve, Robert McClure, Barbara McCollum, Gary McConnell, Doris McConnell, Stan McCormick, Ron McCormick, Gay McCormick, Roy McCoy, Stan McCracken, James McCutcheon, Bert McDaniel, Tom McDonald, Elizabeth McGill, Patricia McGuire, Dean McIntire, Donald McIver, Denis McKillip, Alex McLean, William McLeod, Lowell McManus, Douglas McNeill, Lee McNutt, MaryAnn Means, Earl Medlin, Sam Mercurcio, Sam Mercurio, Sandra Midkiff, Barry Miller.

Rick Miller, Douglas Miller, Dutch Mills, Michael Moehler, Ed Moers, Patty Moncus, Ross Montgomery, Cameron Moore, Frances Moore, James Moore, Jan Moreland, Michael Morgan, Michael Morris, Debbie Morris, Harold Morris, John Morris, Mary M. Morris, Duane Morrison, Karolyn Morrow, John Morton, Pauline Mountain, Rex Moxley, Lawrence Mulholland, Brent Mullin, Tom Munson, Marilyn Murray, Cynthia Myers, Thomas Myers, Myra Myers, Wanda Nall, Vernetta Nance, B. A. Narramore, Stuart Neal, Patricia Neel, Rexford Neely, Elizabeth Nelson, Rick Nelson, Garrett Newman, Sally Nicholas, Jennifer Nicholas, Sue Nicholls, Teri Nine, Tom Noble, Jim Nobles, Malaisae Norfleet, Keats Norfleet.

Michael Norris, Robert Norris, Lynn Norris, Jack Noteware, Kirk Novak, Marilyn Nowell, Wanda O'Leary, Ruby O'Neill, Wyatt Oakley, Glen Oberg, Lisa OBrien, Darlya Oehler, Claudia Offill, Linda Ogden, William Old, Gloria Olney, Lynard Olson, Stephanie Ooten, Michael Openshaw, Kerry Orr, William Panek, Bob Pannell, Julia Pannell, Phil Papick, Stephen Parker, Robert Parmelee, Charlotte Parrack, Jack Parrott, Tommy Parson, Jerita Parson, James Parsons, Drew Parsons, Tony Pate, Dennis Patience, Penny Patterson, Alan Paul, Nancy Paul, Susan Payne, Stephen Pazak, Al Peabody, Tom Peabody, Julio Pedrogo, Danny Pelton, Krystal Pence, Jane Penny, Rick Penny.

Sheilah Pepper, Suzanne Perry-Coomes, Jimmie Perryman, Kevin Peterson, Thomas Petross, Lisa Philbrook, Deborah Phillips, Michael Phillips, Charles Phillips, Joan Phillips, Bob Phillips, Deborah Piacente, Steven Pierce, Burris Pigg, Robert Pigg, Chad Pigott, D. Pinion, Kent Pippin, Kent Pippin, Jack Pirkey, Roy L Poage, Monti Pogue, Patricia Pokladnik, Lisa Polasek, Coyote Shadow Pons, William Potter, James Potter, Alyda Luann Pratt, William Prazak, Anita Prescott, Glenda Price, Willie Price, Gaylene Price, Allan Price, Gwynn Prideaux, Thomas Pritchard, Jennifer Pruett, Janie Pryor, Justin Pugh, Chris Pumphrey, Dick Pumphrey, James Quintero, Beverly Rackler, Wallace Rackler, Kate Raetz, Robert C. Ramirez.

Francine Raper, Gary Raper, Lonni Raschke, Nancy Ray, Melvin Reams, Jim Reaves, Mary Reid, Lauren Reiter, Kennon Reynolds, Lorrie Rice, Scott Rich, Nita Richardson, James Richey, Wanda Rickaway, Cynthia Ridgeway, Pam Ridlehuber, JackPatty Riley, Jon Rimbey, Juan Riojas, Mark Risley, Mike Rivard, James Roach, Laura Roberts, Joann Robinson, Charles Rodenburg, Doug Roeber, Henry Roeber, Dorris Roeber, Gerald Roehrig, Janice Rogers, Joshua Rogers, Arnold Romberg, Suzy Romberg, Douglas Rood, Grant Ross, Barbara Rozell, Lisa Rubey, Michael Rudnik, Michael Russell, Michael Rutherford, Loyd Rutledge, John Ryan, Joseph Sadowski, Wayne Sanderson, Frederick Saporsky III, Thomas D Saunders.

Kathy I Saunders, Thomas D. Saunders, Barbara Schatz, Dan Scheffel, Cathy Scheffel, Cody Schilling, Thomas Schneider, Jim Schroeder, Charles Schwertner, Gordon Scott, Dennis Scullion, L. Seale, Susan Seider, Leonard Seitz, Chuck Senter, Dennis Sessions, Vicky Sexton, Carter Sharpe, Taylor Sharpe, Ann Shaver, David Shaw, J. Shaw, David Shaw, Karen Shaw, James Shelton, Doris Shields, Doris Shields, Lucy Shipman, James Shipman, Jr., Lawler Shirley, Foster Simmons, Franky Simon, Maurice Simpson, Rose Simpson, Judy Singer, Harold R Skelton, Paula Skipworth, Tommy L Sloan, Susan L Sloan, Harold Smith, Dr. Derek L. Smith, Billy Smith, Colleen Smith, Charles Smith, Sara Smith, Norman Smith.

Lynn Smith, C.L. Smith, Joan Smith, Barbara Smith, Gary Smith, Codie Smith, Jonathan Smythe, Dickie Wayne Snider, George

Sobata, Elizabeth Solomon, Brad Somers, Bill Spencer, James Squires, Karen Stack, Martha Stalkfleet, Brad Stalkfleet, Ron Stanfield, Sherri Stanfield, Cherri Stanley, Bob Stewart, Betty Stewart, Nancy Stewart, Joe Stewart, Robert Stewart, Stephen Storm, George Strake, Jr., Janice Strunk, Julie Su, Franklin Sullivan, William Sumerford, Kathy Sumerford, Linda Swening, Al Swening, Roy Swift, Jane Swift, Steven Sykes, Jeane Syring, Michael Tabinski, Daniel Tague, Sherri Tally, Joline Tate, Herbie Taylor, Joan Terrell, Janis Terrell, Amy Terrell, Roy Thackerson.

Donna Thackerson, Ray Thompson, John Thompson, Mary Ann Thompson, Bill Thrailkill, Kay Tibbels, Michael Tibbets, David Tickner, Danny Tollison, Richard Tondre, Saundra Tongate, Warren Tongate, Martha Townsend, Amy Traylor, Mark Traylor, Cherly Troxel, JaneIle Truex, Charlotte Tucker, David Tucker, Kathleen Tully, Betty Turner, Beverly Uhlmer, Steven Vandiver, Elizabeth Vannett, Susan Vela, Camille Vela, Colby Vidrine, Michael Vieira, Wilfred Vincent, David Vinyard, Hansel Von Quenzer, Pat Wade, Wilda Wahrenbrock, Joy Waldrep, Milton Waldrep, Aric Waldron, Tena Walker, Joseph Walker, Toby Marie Walker, Letitia Wall, Patsy Wallace, Susan Waller, Doug Walters, Patsy Walton, Mary Ward, Dan Ward.

Regina Watkins, Ken Watson, Dean Watson, Phyllis Weatherston, Stanley Webb, Oren Webb, Susan Webb, Priscilla Weisend, Jo Ellen Welborn, Melissa Welch, Erin Werley, Patsy West, Ronnie Westfall, Lawrence Whaley, Debbie Wharton, Randy Wharton, Kenneth White, Lewis White, Jack Whitele, Leona Whitele, Don Whitney, Jane Whittaker, Lynn Whittington, Matt Wiederstein, Birt Wilkerson, Birt Wilkerson, Jennifer Williams, Larry Williams, Jack Williams, Paul Williams, Jack Wilson, Donna Wilson, Peggy M. Wilson, Betty Wilson, Mark Wilson, Bob Wilson, Gary Wilson, Lawrence Winkler, Gerri Winkler, Tom Wisdom, Marie Wolfe, Richard Womack, Candace Womack, Martha Wong, Betsy Wood, Blake Woodall, Roy Wooten, John T Wright, Roger Yates, Gene Yentzen, Judy Yentzen, Joseph Yeo, Tammy Youngblood, Byron Youngblood, Carolyn Zapata, Victor Zengerle, Joseph L. Zimmer, Coy Zumwalt.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, it is now my privilege to yield to JESSE JACKSON, Jr., a distinguished Member from Chicago, Illinois, as much time as he may consume.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to H.J. Res. 2, the balanced budget amendment. We do need to responsibly reduce our budget deficits and debt, but the best way to do that is by investing, building, and growing our economy, or through balanced economic growth, not a balanced budget amendment.

What is the most important question to be raised with respect to the BBA? We have serious gaps in our society that need to be narrowed. Economic gaps between the rich and the poor—ask the 99 percent. Social gaps between racial minorities and the majority population. Gender gaps—woman earn 76 cents for the dollar of what men earn. Generational gaps—will Social Security be there for the next generation? Infrastructure gaps—upgrades to roads, bridges, ports, levees, water and sewer systems, high-speed rail, airports and more in order to remain competitive in the world marketplace.

So the most important question, Mr. Speaker, is this: How does the BBA narrow these economic, social, gender, generational, and infrastructure gaps? It won't. It simply exacerbates them. The BBA will permanently establish the United States as a separate and unequal society. The BBA will balance the Federal budget on the backs of the poor, the working class, and the middle class.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Citizens for Tax Justice say that the BBA would damage our economy by making recessions deeper and more frequent; heighten the risk of default and jeopardize the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government; lead to reductions in needed investments for the future; and favor wealthy Americans over middle and low-income Americans by making it far more difficult to raise revenues and easier to cut programs. And it would weaken the principle of majority rule.

Before this Congress affirms a balanced budget amendment, we need to consider our future—not just the future of America's debt, but America's future. Do we want a future that is bright with promise; a future with innovation; a future with the best schools, the brightest students, and the strongest and healthiest workers? Do we want to continue to lead in the world? My answer is yes.

Mr. Speaker, I respectfully urge my colleagues to vote ''no'' on this irresponsible and shortsighted amendment.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 30 seconds to answer the question, what do the 99 percent want? Well, CNN asked them in July. The answer was 74 percent favored a balanced budget amendment; 74 percent of men, 75 percent of women, 76 percent of white voters, 72 percent of nonwhite voters, 72 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds, 74 percent of 35- to 49-year-olds, 75 percent of 50- to 64-year-olds, 79 percent of 65 and older voters want a balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution.

At this time, it is my pleasure to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CULBERSON), a member of the Appropriations Committee.

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Speaker, I first of all want to thank the Congressman from Virginia. BOB GOODLATTE has been a relentless and tireless advocate for balancing the budget of the United States of America with a constitutional amendment. And we are here tonight debating it because of his perseverance. I want to thank Speaker BOEHNER. I want to thank the people of America for electing a constitutional majority to the House—elections make a huge difference.

We must pass this amendment to the Constitution tonight. The Senate must take a vote on it. And the people of America should hold every Member of Congress accountable for their vote because this is a defining vote on a defining evening for the United States Congress. How much more prosperous would America be today if the Senate had passed this amendment 16 years ago? How much stronger would America be today?

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has said, as has been pointed out earlier, that America's greatest strategic threat is our national debt. What better evidence of that is there than that the people of Europe tonight are facing panic selling of European Union debt. Greece, Italy, and Portugal are all on the brink.

We cannot let America continue down this path. We have an obligation to our children and grandchildren to ensure that the Nation's books are balanced just as every American must do, just as 49 out of 50 States must do, just as every business in America must do.

This is just fundamental common sense. No amount of confusion or distraction on the part of the opponents can divert the country's attention from the simple, commonsense fact that an amendment to the Constitution requiring a balanced budget requires America to live within its means, to spend no more than is brought in by revenue.

□ 1850

My hero, Thomas Jefferson, said, and his words ring so true today in light of the problems we face, that to preserve our independence as Americans, we must not let our rulers load us down with perpetual debt. We must make our choice, America, between economy and liberty and perfusion and servitude.

I want to thank Congressman GOODLATTE for his leadership and perseverance on this vitally important issue. And I'm looking forward to the day, in 15 to 16 years from today, when this amendment passes the Congress, when it passes the States overwhelmingly, so that my daughter and her children will inherit an America that's more prosperous and more secure because of BOB GOODLATTE and JOHN BOEHNER's leadership in bringing this to the floor tonight so that we will, as a Nation, continue to live within our means.

Mr. CONYERS. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MEEHAN), chairman of the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee of the Homeland Security Committee.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for yielding.

One trillion $1 bills. We're talking about trying to make sense of a trillion dollars. If they were stacked on top of each other, they would reach nearly 68,000 miles into the sky, about a third of the way from the Earth to the Moon. As of yesterday, our national debt was 15 times that $1 trillion.

Fifteen years ago the balanced budget amendment passed the House with bipartisan support, only to lose by one vote in the Senate. Since that time, our Nation's debt has grown $9.2 trillion more.

Every day families make tough decisions in order to live within their means. But when it comes to our country's bank account, both parties in Washington simply don't practice these responsible habits.

It is wrong for us to accumulate this mounting debt that we know we're never going to repay. Instead, we expect our children and our grandchildren to do so. It's our obligation to pass on the blessings of liberty, not a crushing debt to our posterity.

A certain way to ensure that is that Congress and the President will not allow the U.S. to be driven further into debt, and that is to pass an amendment to the Constitution forcing our government to balance the budget each year. Promising to make cuts in Federal spending is one thing, but an amendment to the Constitution demanding it is quite another.

A balanced budget would legally force Congress to spend only what it takes in, and it protects taxpayers and small businesses from the threat of higher taxes to cover Washington's spending habits. This will be for a better future for our children and our Nation.

Mr. CONYERS. I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FARENTHOLD), a member of the Homeland Security Committee.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Every month, millions of American families make tough financial decisions about how they'll pay their bills, balance their budget, and make ends meet. They make tough choices and do without things they want so they can have the things that they need. The American people have to make these tough choices, and we, as their elected leaders, need to do the same thing. America cannot continue to spend more than we take in.

A balanced budget amendment to the Constitution will ensure our grandchildren do not have to deal with the reckless mistakes Congress has already made by overspending and excessive borrowing. Our vote on this amendment will show hardworking American taxpayers who have a hard time balancing their own budgets which Members of Congress get it and who are doing their jobs that they are elected to do.

The current national debt is over $15 trillion, and that's way too much. Passing a balanced budget is the best way to ensure that we don't spend money we don't have on programs we don't need.

The American people want a government that is responsible and accountable. A balanced budget, like almost every State has, like almost every family lives with, is a key to this responsibility and accountability. It makes our economy stronger and healthier and preserves this great Nation for generations to come.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, how much time remains on each side, please?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Michigan has 86¼ minutes remaining. The gentleman from Virginia has 91 minutes remaining.

Mr. CONYERS. I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, at this time it is my pleasure to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Utah (Mr. MATHESON).

Mr. MATHESON. I thank the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) for introducing the bill, and I thank the gentleman from Virginia for the time.

You know, I'm part of the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of conservative Democrats, and for 16 years the Blue Dogs have been advocating a balanced budget amendment.

It really shouldn't be about Democrats and Republicans. Since I've been in Congress, I've been here when Democrats controlled Congress and Republicans controlled Congress. I've been here when Democrats controlled the White House and Republicans controlled the White House, and neither party has the best track record on the deficit issue. And that's why I think the balanced budget amendment makes sense, because I think we need a structural requirement that brings everyone to the table and says this is what you've got to do, Democrats or Republicans.

This shouldn't be a partisan issue. This should be an issue about setting a path forward that creates stability and sends the right message to the American people and to the rest of the world that we know how to live within our means.

Now, I have to say that I wish we had more support on my side of the aisle than we do because, as I said, I don't think it's a Democratic or Republican issue. I think it's an issue that we all ought to be looking at—balancing the books, balancing your budget. Families do it every day. States do it. At least 49 States have a requirement for a balanced budget. I think that this country needs that, too, and I urge all my colleagues to support this amendment and put us on a path to fiscal responsibility.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 minute to ask the speaker who just finished, if I could gain his attention for a moment. I thank the gentleman for coming back into the well.

Does the gentleman agree with me, in examining this bill, that this bill risks default by the United States by requiring a supermajority to raise the debt limit, which is not the case now?

I yield to my friend.

Mr. MATHESON. I think it's the same threshold that requires us to make a decision to deficit spend. It's the same supermajority for that as well. So I think that what we do is we're putting a requirement in where, if you want to default or if you want to raise the debt limit or if you want to deficit spend, it requires a supermajority. But if you want to pass a budget that is within balance, it doesn't require a supermajority. It requires a simple majority, and that's the way the bill is structured.

Mr. CONYERS. Did the gentleman say yes or no to my question?

Mr. MATHESON. I said no.

Mr. CONYERS. That a supermajority is not required to raise the debt limit under this bill?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I yield myself an additional minute, and I yield to my friend.

Mr. MATHESON. As I said, let's not do apples and oranges here. Let's do apples and apples. If this Congress wants to act in a way to pass a balanced budget, it doesn't require a supermajority. If this Congress wants to make a decision to deficit spend, it can do that with a supermajority, and that's the same requirement as if it wants to raise the debt limit.

By the way, if a simple majority balances the budget, there is no need to raise the debt limit. There's no need to raise the debt limit if we have a balanced budget, and that would be a simple majority to pass a balanced budget each year.

Mr. CONYERS. I want to thank my colleague for answering the question.

I would like now to turn to the gentleman who represents the majority, a distinguished member of the Judiciary Committee, Mr. GOODLATTE.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has again expired.

□ 1900

Mr. CONYERS. I yield myself 2 additional minutes.

I would like to ask him if he is aware of the fact that H.J. Res. 2 would require a supermajority to raise the debt limit.

I'm pleased to yield to the gentleman.

Mr. GOODLATTE. As the gentleman from Utah correctly noted, it requires the same supermajority of 60 percent to not balance the budget or to raise the debt limit. Quite frankly, if you have a constitutional amendment in place that requires a balanced budget, you're going to generate surpluses most years, and therefore raising the debt limit will occur less and less frequently. But those two requirements are in place in order to have an enforcement mechanism so that Congresses of the future will not do what Congresses of the past have been doing.

Mr. CONYERS. Did the gentleman answer me with a ''yes''?

Mr. GOODLATTE. Would the gentleman repeat that question?

Mr. CONYERS. Did the gentleman understand the question?

Mr. GOODLATTE. I understand it and answered it.

Mr. CONYERS. Was the answer ''yes'' or ''no'' to my question?

Mr. GOODLATTE. The answer is, yes, it requires a supermajority to raise the debt limit and a supermajority to not balance the budget, which would be an unusual thing in the future because in the last 50 years, it's only been balanced six times.

Mr. CONYERS. Then let me ask my colleague this question: Does it presently require a supermajority to raise the debt limit?

Mr. GOODLATTE. No, there is no such requirement today.

Mr. CONYERS. Thank you. It isn't. And there would be in this bill, would it not?

Mr. GOODLATTE. Absolutely.

Mr. CONYERS. And the gentleman supports a supermajority to raise the debt limit?

Mr. GOODLATTE. Very much so.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. CONYERS. I yield to the gentleman from Illinois.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Is the gentleman aware that under such a scenario, a budget crisis in which a default becomes a more threat is more likely because the limits placed on the fluidity of the debt ceiling—

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman from Michigan has again expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I yield myself an additional 3 minutes and continue to yield to the gentleman from Illinois.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. I thank the gentleman. My question is of the chairman as well.

Under such a scenario where a three-fifths vote of the House would be permitted to raise the debt limit, a budget crisis in which a default becomes a more threat is obviously more likely. And because of the limits placed on the fluidity of the debt ceiling, that default becomes more likely to occur.

Is it the gentleman's opinion that a small minority within the Congress could indeed hold the entire Nation hostage to such a vote?

Mr. GOODLATTE. I don't agree with that at all. In fact, in the greatest debt limit crisis you might ever say we've had, which was just this summer, close to, if not in excess of, 60 percent of the Members of the House voted to raise the debt limit. So I don't believe that future Congresses would be any more irresponsible. I think future Congresses are likely to be more responsible than prior Congresses because we have not balanced the budget for but six times in the last 50 years.

We have a $15 trillion debt.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. May I reclaim the time?

Mr. Chairman, in the event that Congress fails to act, obviously under this amendment the courts would be empowered to provide remedial orders for when Congress failed to provide a balanced budget. The decisions would then force the courts to be political in nature.

Is it the gentleman's opinion that the judicial branch and that members of the court are in a better position to make judgements about congressional budgets and about the Nation's budgets than Members of Congress?

Mr. GOODLATTE. It's my opinion that Members of the United States Congress will uphold the oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States. And that scenario will be very unlikely to occur; and when it does, judges will, as they historically have on matters involving the internal business of the Congress, exercise judicial restraint.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Respectfully, Mr. Chairman, the courts could then mandate a government shutdown once revenue has been expended, unlike the CRs that Congress passes.

Mr. NADLER. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. I would be happy to yield.

Mr. NADLER. Just two comments.

First of all, going back to what you were discussing a moment ago, the answer to your question is that under this amendment, 40 percent of either House could hold the entire country hostage against the other 60 percent. Sixty percent could want a balanced budget and there may be a necessity for an increase in the debt ceiling, but 40 percent could say no. Forty percent could hold the country hostage as we saw the country was held hostage this year. With this, it would be much easier to hold the country hostage because the minority, not a small minority, but 40 percent could do it.

Secondly, if the gentleman's answer is correct that the courts would exercise judicial restraint and not make decisions on tax increases or revenue or spending cuts, then there's no point to this whole amendment because you're saying it's unenforceable. Either the amendment is enforced by action of the court or it's not enforced.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman from Michigan has again expired.

Mr. CONYERS. I yield myself an additional 3 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Does the gentleman from Michigan wish to yield the time to the gentleman from Illinois?

Mr. CONYERS. I would yield time to the gentleman from Illinois.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. I thank the gentleman, the distinguished ranking member, and I thank the chairman for his response, but I want to raise a question with Mr. NADLER, a distinguished constitutionalist.

The courts could mandate, therefore, if Congress failed to pass a balanced budget, it could mandate a government shutdown once revenue has been expended; is that correct?

Mr. NADLER. The amendment is silent. All it says is ''this will happen.'' ''This must happen.'' When this must happen in our system of government, if it doesn't, or if someone thinks it's not going to, they go to court and they ask for a court order to make sure it happens.

The court either will—there are two possibilities and only two. One, the court will say, Here's how we'll make an order. We'll raise this tax, we'll lower that expenditure; or the court will say, in which case you have unelected judges making those decisions—and this amendment gives no guidance on how to make those decisions—or the court will say as the gentleman from Virginia just suggested the court would do, the court will exercise judicial restraint and will say this is a political question. We decline to make any order, in which case this amendment is not worth the paper it's written on because it's not enforceable at all.

Either it's enforceable by the court saying increase this tax, decrease that expenditure, or it's not enforceable and it's a total joke. One way or the other.

Mr. CONYERS. I would like to yield to the distinguished gentleman from Virginia, BOBBY SCOTT.

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I think one of the things we're forgetting is that during that spectacle last August, the United States lost its triple A credit rating, and it was a simple majority.

I just think you cannot make a serious case that it is fiscally responsible to increase the likelihood that we would go through that spectacle again.

The other is we talk about a simple majority for a balanced budget or a supermajority for an unbalanced budget. We forget that a serious deficit reduction is technically unbalanced and you need three-fifths to pass a deficit reduction plan. And if you have a question of three-fifths to pass a serious deficit reduction or new tax cuts and new spending totally irresponsible; and if we know we need three-fifths this year to pass a budget, deficit reduction, as you get closer and closer, how are you going to get those extra votes?

Now, the tradition has been you get those extra votes with a little pork here, a little pork there; and rather than buying enough pork to get to a simple majority, you're going to have to give away enough to get to a 60 percent. And so the question is whether the three-fifths vote will make it more likely that you're going to have a serious deficit reduction or a totally irresponsible budget.

In my view, I think the experience is it's hard enough to get a simple majority to pass meaningful deficit reduction. You will never get to three-fifths, so you get your new tax cuts. You get your new spending. I'm going to get another aircraft carrier out of it. I don't know what you want. But we need to get to three-fifths. You get it by more spending and more tax cuts.

Mr. CONYERS. Could I conclude on this side by asking my friend from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) if he shares the view offered by Mr. SCOTT?

Mr. GOODLATTE. No, I very definitely do not share the view offered by my good friend and colleague from Virginia (Mr. SCOTT).

The fact of the matter is the downgrade that we received in the bond ratings was due to the fact that we have a $15 trillion debt and the Congress has not come to agreement on sufficient reductions in that debt to satisfy the bond rating agencies. A balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution is exactly what's needed to put that kind of pressure on the Congress to make real and meaningful reductions in our deficits.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman from Michigan has again expired.

Mr. CONYERS. Could I get some time from the other side to continue this discussion?

Mr. GOODLATTE. I have a lot of Members who are planning to come tomorrow to debate this issue, and I'm going to have to reserve our time for that purpose.

□ 1910

Mr. CONYERS. The time is already allotted for tomorrow. The time we use tonight will not be put on tomorrow. We have divided the time up, so you have a few minutes left if the gentleman cares to share it.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, a parliamentary inquiry.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman will state his inquiry.

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Can time unused tonight be carried over tomorrow?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Time unused tonight can be used tomorrow.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. BERG).

Mr. BERG. I thank the chairman for yielding.

One year ago, as House freshmen, we came out here. We were elected to change how Washington works.

When we arrived in Washington, there was one thing we agreed on, and that was that our country was on an unsustainable path. As I'm here tonight, listening to some of this debate, I'm stunned that the way you get 260 votes is with pork. This is what's wrong with Washington. This is why it has to change.

We know the crisis we're in. We've heard that the $15 trillion of debt matches our whole country's economy. Fifteen years ago, had we passed a balanced budget amendment, America would be the financial powerhouse of the globe. We would not be comparing ourselves to Greece and comparing ourselves to Europe.

I strongly believe that the one fundamental thing we can do to change the way Washington does business is to have a balanced budget amendment. We wouldn't need this amendment if we actually balanced the budget. We are at a critical stage in our Nation's history, and tomorrow, we have the opportunity to make the future look better—by passing this balanced budget amendment.

This is Congress' opportunity to get it right. We can pass a balanced budget amendment, and we can change the course of our country's future. It's time. Now is the time for a balanced budget amendment.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, how much time is remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Michigan has 76¼ minutes remaining.

Mr. CONYERS. I yield myself 1¼ minutes, the time allotted us for tonight.

I think the instructive discussion that we've had here tonight illustrates an irreconcilable problem with the requirement that a supermajority is necessary under H.J. Res. 2 to raise the debt limit. It's frequently difficult enough to raise the debt limit with a simple majority, so I'm sure that everyone in this Chamber will realize, by raising the requirement by a considerable figure, it is going to make it nearly impossible to raise the debt limit.

We've just gone through a summer of problems of raising the debt limit by a simple majority. Now, tonight, we are told that we're going to make this a constitutional proposition, which will make it even more difficult.

Just for the record, for the last time, I yield to the gentleman from Virginia for an explanation:

Would you explain to me how raising the debt limit to a supermajority is going to facilitate a more progressive or operative Congress.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. CONYERS. I yield to the gentleman from Virginia.

Mr. GOODLATTE. The goal is to balance the budget and to pay down this enormous national debt of $15 trillion.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Does the gentleman from Michigan seek to yield himself additional time or does the gentleman from Michigan reserve?

Mr. CONYERS. We have no more time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. How much time remains on this side of the aisle?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Virginia has 88½ minutes remaining.

Mr. GOODLATTE. I yield myself 30 seconds just to say to the gentleman that the only time you're going to need to raise the debt limit is on an occasion when you've already voted by a supermajority to not balance the budget. Therefore, under those circumstances, it seems entirely reasonable to me that you'd also have a supermajority to raise the debt limit.

That, I think, is the key to that provision. It's a discipline in this bill.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Will the distinguished chairman yield for just one question?

Mr. GOODLATTE. I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Chairman, what is it that qualifies a Federal judge to make a decision about the Federal budget process?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. GOODLATTE. I yield myself an additional 30 seconds to respond to the gentleman.

I will just say to the gentleman that the doctrines that the court has imposed upon internal operations of the Congress have historically called for judicial restraint, so it will be very rare, in my opinion, that you will find courts involved in this process. I believe that there is very good material, which we have put into the record in the Judiciary Committee, that would reflect upon just that process. This is something that the Congress has to resolve for itself, and that's why we need it in the Constitution, because the Congress does not resolve it now.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. RICHARDSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to H.J. Res. 2, the proposed Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and I appeal to my colleagues to join me in rejecting this ill-considered and unwise amendment to the world's greatest national charter.

I oppose the proposed amendment for three principle reasons:

First, it is unfair, since it would roll back Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, unemployment insurance, nutrition assistance, and other programs with expenditures that fluctuate over time.

Second, it is dangerous, as it would effectively cripple the Federal Government's efforts to respond to economic emergencies like the Great Depression and the present crisis.

Third, it will be nearly impossible to enforce, thus opening the door to judicial activism and intervention involving every act of Congress with a mechanism for raising revenue.

Worse, the proposed amendment, if ratified, would result in an unprecedented transfer of power from the Legislature, the first branch of government, to the Judiciary, the third and least accountable branch.

At first glance, the balanced budget amendment seems like a good idea, but its superficial appeal vanishes when one examines its key provisions closely.

Proponents argue that the Federal Government should be required to balance its budget, spending no more than it takes in, like most American families.

The problem with this analogy is that it is simply untrue. In real life, most families and businesses do not limit expenditures to the amount of revenues. They borrow and take on debt to buy homes, send kids to college, and cope with unexpected emergencies.

Forcibly balancing the federal budget would be like telling families that they are prohibited from borrowing or taking out any loan, ever—no matter how good their credit or how prudent their financing plan may be. It bars the government from taking out loans and enforces cuts on social programs while making tax cuts to the wealthy a permanent fixture.

The passage and ratification of H.J. Res. 2 would mean massive cuts to Medicare, Social Security, and many other programs. Obligations will not be met because there will literally not exist enough money in circulation to pay for them.

The destruction of these programs is the true aim of this legislation. It would force spending cuts by requiring a majority vote of the whole number of each chamber for all legislation imposing or increasing a tax, while requiring only a simple majority of those present to cut out funding for vital social programs.

Moreover, without deficit spending, programs intended to combat economic downturns such as unemployment insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and food stamps would be jeopardized. Known as automatic stabilizers, these programs grow when the economy dips and cushion the blow for those hardest hit by recessions.

Increased outlays for these programs, which have no set budgets since they follow the fluctuations of the economy, will come into direct conflict with a balanced budget amendment, meaning harder times for those without work.

Equally bad is that under H.J. Res. 2, necessary stimulus such as the New Deal legislation of the 1930s or the Recovery Act of 2009 would be nearly impossible to pass. We would have no way to stimulate the economy at critical points to respond to downturns of the business cycle.

The result is that what would otherwise be a mild recession could spiral down into a great depression.

Imagine if the balanced budget amendment was in effect in 2008, when this Nation was on the brink of an economic meltdown. Instead of rescuing the savings of millions and saving the nation's automobile manufacturing industry, the Federal Government would have been busying itself with cutting Social Security, national parks, cancer research, Medicaid, defense, and hundreds of other programs.

That was the Hoover response to the Great Depression which was repudiated by voters and replaced by Roosevelt's New Deal.

Like its variants, H.J. Res. 2 is incredibly vague on how it would be measured and enforced.

There is no way to accurately balance the budget, since the Congressional Budget Office, whose job it is to predict expenditures, is often off by hundreds of billions of dollars a year.

If revenues fall short because of a projection error, the Federal Government could conceivably come to a halt toward the end of the fiscal year and stop paying benefits to Social Security.

I Finally, since it is an amendment to the Constitution, it would ultimately fall to the judiciary to define and implement economic policy. This will burden the courts with issues that are intrinsically political in nature.

H.J. Res. 2 also comes with an escape clause, whereby under a three-fifths vote, the provisions of the amendment may be waived. The Constitution is a statement of fundamental principles, such as free speech and equal protection under the law. The fact the proposed amendment can be waived so easily by Congress reveals that this entire exercise is merely theater intended by the Republican majority to placate its fervent base of Tea Partiers.

H.J. Res. 2 is a terrible idea and would be bad for our country. I urge my colleagues to reject this ill-advised and poorly-conceived amendment to the greatest constitution ever devised.

Mr. BACHUS. Mr. Speaker, families across America have to live within their means and balance their budgets. Sometimes it means making hard decisions and giving up things that you might like but can't afford. For too long, Washington has avoided making those choices. Its practice has not been to control spending but to keep borrowing more and more. For families, this approach results in bankruptcy. For countries, it leads to the financially and socially perilous situation that we are seeing in Greece and other debt-ridden nations. It is very clear that the only sure way to bring long-term fiscal discipline to Washington is to adopt a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution. The Balanced Budget Amendment will provide us with a disciplined framework for the important decisions on entitlement changes and other spending reforms that will be needed to place America on firmer fiscal ground. Amending the Constitution is not something that should ever be done lightly. But I truly believe that what is at stake here is the financial integrity of our country and the future prosperity of our children and grandchildren. Our parents left us with a stronger America. We do not want to leave them with a weaker one.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Ranking Member for the time to speak on this horrible legislation. The supposed reason for bringing up this amendment is because this country has taken on a horrible debt over the last 12 years.

Let us not forget how we got in this mess. Institutional memory is in order. When you have your head in the lion's mouth, you ease it out. What happened? How did we get here? When President Clinton left, we were operating with a surplus. But we had 8 years of Bush and two wars and a deficit of $1.3 trillion.

Do you think this mess started when President Obama was elected? No, it did not.

We have been practicing what I call reverse Robin Hood for 10 years. Nobody remembers what happened here just last December? We gave $800 billion to not just millionaires, but to billionaires and now you complain that we are broke.

It is all about your priorities.

Under this balanced budget amendment, elderly citizens are not a priority. Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security would have to compete against all other federal spending. A balanced budget would require Congress to cut all programs by an average of 17.3 percent by 2018. If spending cuts are spread proportionately, Medicare would be cut by about $750 billion, Social Security by almost $1.2 trillion, and veterans' benefits by $85 billion.

Transportation infrastructure is not a priority. We know for every billion dollars that we spend, it generates 44,000 permanent jobs. Without transportation infrastructure, we cannot compete on a global level. While private businesses and households borrow all the time to finance capital spending, a balanced budget amendment would prevent federal borrowing to finance any investment expenditures.

Our priorities are out of whack when we cannot agree to protect those who need our help the most: the poor, the working class and the sick.

I am hoping that the American people will wake up. It is shameful that over and over again in the people's House, in the people's House, we attack the people who do not have lobbyists on Capitol Hill. And so I yield back the balance of my time, but I do know that elections have consequences. The American people are watching you.

Do not support this sham of a policy.

Vote no on the Balanced Budget Amendment.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I oppose this balanced budget amendment. It's not because I support reckless spending, deficit spending, or believe that we don't have a fiscal problem in this country. I oppose this balanced budget amendment because I believe it is a heavy handed approach, which has the potential to harm Social Security and Medicare recipients and will hamstring our Nation's ability to respond to natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and acts of war.

We balanced our budget in the 1990s without a balanced budget amendment to our Constitution and we can do it again. Balancing our budget is good policy, I am even open to the idea of a carefully crafted amendment that will not threaten Social Security and Medicare recipients and not endanger our future national security and emergency preparedness. The proposal before us today does none of this and is just bad policy.

It is true that our Nation's debt has gotten too big and it is projected to expand even more if nothing is done to curtail it. For this reason, I support immediate measures to reduce our debt to a level that is both manageable and sustainable, which will put our country on a path to economic stability and prosperity. I oppose this proposal, but look forward to working with my colleagues, Democrat and Republican, to find better ways to address our fiscal challenges.

Mr. MARCHANT. Mr. Speaker, today the House is scheduled to consider House Joint Resolution No. 2. This bill proposes a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. I am very proud to be a cosponsor of this legislation. The national debt just climbed above $15 trillion. We know that Washington should not spend more than it takes in. We know this, but we continue to rack up massive yearly deficits. We need a balanced budget amendment now more than ever.

Before being elected to Congress, I served as a city councilman for 4 years, as a mayor for 2 years, and as a state representative for 18 years. During my entire twenty-four years of combined state and local government service, by law I was always required to have a balanced budget. We should mandate the same requirement for the federal government that most state and local governments have to produce a balanced budget.

Earlier this year, the Texas Legislature called on Congress to propose and submit to the states a balanced budget amendment. I am pleased that the House is taking the first step to fulfill this request made by Texas and other states. I look forward to continuing the fight for its passage and ratification. Our fiscal problems are not getting any easier. We cannot simply continue to kick the can down the road. The longer that we wait only makes our fiscal problems that much more difficult to solve.

We must act now before we further ruin the economic futures of our children and grandchildren. We cannot ignore our fiscal situation any longer. The Federal Government must balance its budget. A balanced budget amendment is the ultimate solution to our current lack of fiscal discipline.

I strongly urge my colleagues to join me in voting in favor of this bipartisan resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to section 2 of House Resolution 466, further consideration of this motion is postponed.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 3094, WORKFORCE DEMOCRACY AND FAIRNESS ACT

Ms. FOXX, from the Committee on Rules (during consideration of H.J. Res. 2), submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 112–291) on the resolution (H. Res. 470) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 3094) to amend the National Labor Relations Act with respect to representation hearings and the timing of elections of labor organizations under that Act, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Brian Pate, one of his secretaries.

AUTHORIZATION OF CONTINUED PRODUCTION OF NAVAL PETROLEUM RESERVES BEYOND APRIL 5, 2012—MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES (H. DOC. NO. 112–73)

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FARENTHOLD) laid before the House the following message from the President of the United States; which was read and, together with the accompanying papers, referred to the Committee on Armed Services and ordered to be printed:

To The Congress of the United States:

Consistent with section 7422(c)(2) of title 10, United States Code, I am informing you of my decision to extend the period of production of the Naval Petroleum Reserves for a period of 3 years from April 5, 2012, the expiration date of the currently authorized period of production.

Attached is a copy of the report investigating continued production of the Reserves, consistent with section 7422(c)(2)(B) of title 10. In light of the findings contained in the report, I certify that continued production from the Naval Petroleum Reserves is in the national interest.

BARACK OBAMA.

THE WHITE HOUSE, *November 17, 2011.*

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendments of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2112) ''An Act making consolidated appropriations for the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Justice, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related programs for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes.''.

□ 1920

PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS HOUR: THE BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to allow members of the Progressive Caucus to continue this discussion and as well to continue to educate the American public.

It is worth noting that part of the discussion that occurred on the floor of the House is that we have come to this point, if I might say, through a peculiar process. Some might call it hostage-taking, but certainly it is a process that has skewed, if you will, the regular order of this Congress.

This little book, the Constitution of the United States, that can fit into a document of this size, even though it is found in law books and many major large-sized books in the Library of Congress, hopefully convinces the American people of the wisdom of the Founding Fathers. It is noteworthy that they did not include a balanced budget amendment in the first group of amendments called the Bill of Rights. And even as they proceeded, they took the challenge of speaking to any number of issues, the freeing of the slaves in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, giving the right to vote finally in the 15th Amendment, suggesting that there should be no obstacles to voting. They went on to the 24th Amendment to indicate that there should be no poll tax, the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote. But never did they feel the necessity to talk about a balanced budget amendment.

The reason, I believe, that they cast their lot on the responsible thinking of Members of Congress is because that is what we are supposed to do. We are supposed to be responsible Members of the United States Congress with no intervening body, no layered approach, no handcuffing of our deliberation. And that's what a balanced budget amendment is all about.

You've just listened to a portion of our debate. We will go on into tomorrow, mind you, taking up 5 hours of time that could be dedicated to coming together around job creation.

The underlying premise of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is that two-thirds of this body, two-thirds of the other body, and three-quarters of the States must consent to a balanced budget amendment. Thank goodness that our Founding Fathers made amending the Constitution so difficult. And that is because they wanted us to be thoughtful. So when we think of the amendments that are in this book, this little book that starts off with ''We, the people,'' a part of the Declaration of Independence, and then the beginning part of the Constitution says that we have come together ''to form a more perfect union,'' they've made it that challenging so that we could be thoughtful in our moving amendments.

Maybe for those of us who are in certain types of church families, whether it be Baptist or the underlying overriding general Protestant structure, we know that there are pastors, ministers, reverends, board of trustees, a board, or maybe a deacon board, there is some sort of policy board, and then there is a congregation. The reason why I mentioned the faith community is because we can get very sensitive about how our places of worship are run, how the business part of it is run. And you would wonder how many congregations would welcome the overlay of some outside entity—albeit formed by members—that was over the pastor, that was over the board of trustees, that was over the congregation. That's what we have done and forced ourselves to do with the intervening supercommittee that was put together by the concept of needing to raise the debt ceiling and then adding into it another hot pepper pot, and that is, of course, having to be forced to pass a balanced budget amendment.

I want to refer my colleagues again to a headline in a local paper, SHEILA JACKSON LEE can't slow down the Republican balanced-budget amendment freight train. It's not necessarily because it was my name, but that's just what we have experienced, a freight train.

I have no doubt that there will be a strong vote tomorrow. I am hoping that the debate will generate enough thought to cause many of my colleagues to reflect on whether or not we could, in the regular order, do some of the suggestions that have been made. Taxation of investment transactions, where many who are well vested and who have experienced the bounty of this land would be willing to contribute and to understand how we should move forward. The expiration of the Bush tax cuts, another revenue-generator that would, I believe, increase the opportunities for reducing the debt. Getting rid of the mighty, if you will, bungled opportunity to help seniors, becoming a gigantic handout budgetary fiasco. Medicare part D—ask every senior when you visit them at their senior centers, are they begging for the closing of the doughnut hole? But more importantly, are they trying to get relief from Medicare part D? Give them relief, close the doughnut hole, and you will find a huge amount of money going into the Treasury.