



## The Budget Bill Is a Stern Test for the Blue Dogs

November 17, 2005

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Some might say the sky is falling and our country is coming to an end. I would have to disagree and argue the opposite. Doomsday prophecies might be a good way to scare the public, but they don't help make policy or help move legislation.

The changes proposed to mandatory spending in the Deficit Reduction Act will merely slow the rate of growth in government spending from 6.4 percent to 6.3 percent. Although a good step forward in limiting the size and scope of government, the amount — given the context of the \$14 trillion that will be spent by the federal government over the next five years — is very small. This is just 0.1 percent of the growth in mandatory spending.

I think it is important to be clear about what exactly the Deficit Reduction Act does. It does not cut spending at all, but merely reduces increases in spending that would otherwise be projected to occur if the federal budget is put on autopilot. This is one step, with still more work to do afterwards, to contain the growth of federal spending.

The debate we are having now concerns some very modest changes to projected mandatory spending. This debate is occurring not just at a time when we have a deficit problem in the short-term, but also with budget forecasters telling us that in just one generation our children and grandchildren will have to bear a crushing tax burden more than twice what exists today. If we do nothing, our dynamic economy will be shackled by European levels of taxation. We can argue about tax policy, but I surely hope nobody in this House is in favor of such a disastrous outcome, which would be brought on by choosing to do nothing.

There are many of my friends on the other side of the aisle who claim they are for lower spending and reducing the federal deficit, yet will not vote for this legislation. I believe these Members have chosen to follow their national party leadership instead of the people they represent. They have placed the dictates of their liberal leadership in the House over the people in their districts that these policies will affect the most. That is something the Democrats usually accuse the Republicans of doing.

The vast majority of Republicans will vote for this bill. Some will choose to vote no, but they will do so because of principle, not politics. I can understand a vote against this bill if it hits at the core of something a Member's constituents oppose. I cannot understand Members who will disregard their principles and the principles of their constituents for partisan games.

It speaks volumes of our GOP Conference that Republicans can hold varying views on the funding levels and priorities of the federal budget. Truly, we are the big tent. I would challenge the liberal Democrat leadership to give their Caucus the same freedom to cast a vote on principle. The appropriate way to conduct the business of the American people is for the leadership on both sides of the aisle to give their respective Members the freedom to vote their conscience. Democrats are failing at this task.

Some say that this vote is a test of the Republican leadership and conference. But I would say this is a test on whether Blue Dog Democrats will fight for the conservative ideals such as fiscal responsibility and lower taxes that they promised their constituents they would support. In 1997, when Congress last voted on these issues, 153 Democrats crossed over the aisle to support much deeper spending reductions than are proposed today. The vote this year will show whether Blue Dog Democrats will continue to represent their constituents and their principles, or whether they will give in to the liberal side of their party's agenda for the sake of perceived short-term political advantage.

The Deficit Reduction Act stands for the radical notion that mandatory spending should be held to 6.3 percent growth a year instead of 6.4 percent a year. And for that, you will hear the other side of the aisle say that passage of this legislation will gut vital domestic programs. And yet, the Democratic leadership has no alternative plan to reduce the budget deficit. Actually, they do have a plan: to raise taxes by repealing the tax cuts Congress enacted over the past four years and use those funds not to lower the deficit, but to increase government spending.

The proposal by the other side of the aisle, to tax our way out of our budget problem, is not only bad economics, it is bad math. For in the process of drawing up new programs, and proposing new spending for existing ones, Democrats have spent many times over what they propose to take from the American people in the form of new taxes.

At the end of the day, the vote on the Deficit Reduction Act is a vote for less spending and a more limited government. This is a vote that in the past would be easier to make, but because of the polarized political atmosphere has become a partisan test of strength.

It is unfortunate, but revealing, that the Republicans will not get one Democratic vote on this legislation. For those Democrats who say they want to lower the deficit and decrease spending, this vote will be a defining moment of truth.

It's time for the Blue Dogs to stand up and be counted. Talk is cheap; votes are what count in the House.

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