

Statement of Congressman Bob Goodlatte
House Budget Committee Hearing
Budget Resolution for FY 2010
March 11, 2009

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote: "To preserve [the] independence [of the people,] we must not let our rulers load us with perpetual debt. We must make our election between economy and liberty, or profusion and servitude." Unfortunately, it increasingly appears that Congress has chosen the latter path.

We have a spending addiction in Washington, D.C., and it has proven to be an addiction that Congress cannot control on its own. We have gone in a few short years from a deficit of billions of dollars to a deficit of trillions of dollars. We are printing money at an unprecedented pace, which presents risks of inflation the likes of which we have never seen. Our debt is mounting rapidly and so is the waste associated with paying the interest on that debt. Yet, Congress has so far refused to address these unsettling problems.

This is not a partisan addiction. It reaches across the aisle and afflicts both parties, which is why neither party has been able to master it. We need outside help. We need pressure from outside Congress to force us to rein in this out-of-control behavior. We need a balanced budget amendment to our Constitution.

Families all across our nation understand what it means to make tough decisions each day about what they can and cannot afford. According to a recent Zogby Interactive survey, approximately 70% of Americans said they have reduced spending on entertainment in the past year. 40% have limited or canceled vacation plans due to the economic environment. 40% have decreased spending on food or groceries. Almost 10% have either changed their education plans or have chosen not to pursue education plans at all. Most troubling, 16% have foregone medical treatment or prescription drugs. These numbers show how sobering our economic recession is, but they also show something more. They demonstrate a basic principle that honest, hard-working American citizens understand – when your income drops, your spending must drop, one way or the other.

Yet far too frequently this fundamental principle has been lost on a Congress that is too busy spending to pay attention to the bottom line. If Americans must exercise restraint with their own funds, then government officials must be required to exercise an even higher standard when spending other peoples' hard-earned income.

On the first day of the 111th Congress, I re-introduced legislation to give Congress the necessary pressure to rein in spending. My legislation would amend the United States Constitution to require a balanced federal budget each year. Over one-third of the Members of the House of Representatives have joined this effort to date. It would require that total spending for any fiscal year not exceed total receipts and require the President to propose budgets to Congress that are balanced each year. It would provide an exception in times of war and during

military conflicts that pose imminent and serious military threats to national security, as well as in other emergency situations. It would make it harder to increase taxes by requiring that legislation to increase revenue be passed by a true majority of each chamber and not just a majority of those present and voting. Furthermore, the bill requires a 3/5 majority vote for any increases in the debt limit.

Our nation faces many difficult decisions in the coming years, and Congress faces great pressure to spend beyond its means rather than to make difficult decisions about spending priorities. Unless Congress is forced to make the decisions necessary to create a balanced budget, it will always have the all-too-tempting option of shirking this responsibility. The Balanced Budget Constitutional amendment is a common sense approach to ensure that Congress is bound by the same fiscal principles that America's families face each day.

I urge this committee to demonstrate leadership by balancing the federal budget by 2014 and each year thereafter, and I urge support of a balanced budget Constitutional amendment to ensure that future Congresses are not allowed to continue to saddle our children and grandchildren with debt that is not their own.

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