

**Testimony of Congressman Bob Goodlatte**  
**Subcommittee on the Constitution**  
**May 13, 2011**

March 2, 1995 was a pivotal day in the history of our country. On that day, the U.S. Senate failed by one vote to send a balanced budget amendment to the states for ratification. The amendment had passed the House by the required 2/3<sup>rd</sup> majority previously and the Senate vote was the last legislative hurdle before ratification by the states.

If that amendment had passed, then we would not be facing the fiscal crisis we now face. If that amendment had passed, then balancing the budget would have been the norm, rather than the exception over the past 25 years and we would have nothing like the annual deficits and skyrocketing debt that we must address today.

The good news is that like 1995, this Congress is again standing at a crossroads at this very moment. The decisions we make today will steer the direction of the country for the next 25 years. We have an opportunity now to take action to ensure that 25 years from today, our children will face a much brighter fiscal picture. We must not allow ourselves to miss this opportunity.

Here's what we know: experience has proven time and again that Congress cannot for any significant length of time rein in excessive spending. The annual deficits and the resulting debt continue to grow due to political pressures and dependency on government programs.

Budget plans that purport to cut spending over long periods of time are great goals, but in order to achieve the results these budgets promise, a majority of fiscally conservative Members must be elected into perpetuity. While it is one of my strongest desires that this will occur, we simply cannot afford to bet our children and grandchildren's future on this happening.

In order for Congress to be able to consistently make the very tough decisions necessary to sustain fiscal responsibility over the long term, Congress must have an external pressure to force it to do so.

I believe that the most realistic chance we have today to enact the institutional reform necessary is through a balanced budget amendment to our Constitution.

Many Members of Congress have introduced balanced budget amendments this Congress. I introduced two versions on the first day of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. H.J.Res. 2 is the exact text that passed the House in 1995 and failed in the Senate by one vote. This amendment requires that total annual outlays not exceed total annual receipts. It also requires a true majority of each chamber to pass tax increases and requires a 3/5 majority to raise the debt limit. This legislation also has limited exceptions for times of war.

H.J.Res. 1, which I also introduced, goes much further. In addition to the provisions of H.J.Res. 2, it also requires a 3/5 majority to raise taxes and imposes an annual spending cap that prohibits spending from exceeding 20% of GDP.

In the U.S. Senate, 47 Republican Senators have cosponsored a balanced budget amendment that is similar to H.J.Res. 1, which is a strong sign that the Senate is ready to engage in debate on this subject.

While my preference is to pass the stronger version of the balanced budget amendment, I want to be very clear in my testimony today. The 2/3 majority requirement for passing an amendment to the Constitution demands that we achieve bipartisan support for any balanced budget amendment.

Our extraordinary fiscal crisis demands an extraordinary solution, so we simply cannot afford to succumb to political posturing on this issue at a point in time so critical to our nation's future. We must rise above that and move forward with a strategy that includes legislation that will get at least 290 votes on the House Floor.

So, as we consider a balanced budget amendment, I encourage the Members of this Committee to devote our effort to passing the strongest balanced budget amendment that can garner 2/3 of the House of Representatives.

We are at a crossroads in America. We can make the tough choices and control spending, paving the way for a return to surpluses and ultimately paying down the national debt, or we can allow big spenders to lead us further down the road of chronic deficits and leave our children and grandchildren saddled with debt that is not their own.

The choice is ours. The stakes are high. Failure is not an option.