

## **If you can't budget, you can't govern**

By U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman

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One of Congress' fundamental responsibilities under the Constitution is budgeting. With large majorities in both houses of Congress, the only hurdle Democrat leaders have in developing and garnering support for the annual budget resolution is themselves.

Yet, this past week House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer officially announced during a speech that Congress will make no attempt to develop and pass a budget this year.

For the first time since 1976, Democrat leaders in the House have brazenly chosen to not even attempt going through the normal budgeting process. Instead, they will pursue a legislative gimmick to dodge making difficult choices in an election year.

Rather than take a recorded vote on a budget blueprint and put their names to a specific proposal, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Hoyer will have their caucus, and all of Congress, vote to "deem" as passed a resolution that promises to vote on recommendations of the president's deficit commission after — yes, after — the elections in November.

Stunned or at least surprised? I'm not.

So why have Democrat leaders in Congress made the calculated decision not to even attempt to fulfill their most basic responsibility?

Congressional Democrats have publicly stated that they don't think any member of Congress will lose an election because of a failure to pass a budget. This sheds a little light on the strategy of Pelosi and Hoyer. They don't want to make the hard choices of choosing one priority over another that the American people are desperately seeking Congress to make.

Put another way, they're betting that the American people will not hold them accountable for their blatant unwillingness to take difficult votes and cut federal spending meaningfully.

A few years ago a lawmaker coined the now-common phrase, "If you can't budget, you can't govern." Ironically, that lawmaker is South Carolina Congressman John Spratt, current chairman of the House Budget Committee.

The fact is, from the smallest school districts in rural America to the largest states in the country, everyone must do serious belt-tightening for fiscal 2011. Revenues have declined as tax bases have shrunk, and the temporary bailout the federal stimulus afforded is quickly coming to an end.

Those same school boards, state legislatures, and every level of government in between must make the unpalatable but critical decisions to reduce spending, raise revenues or often both.

It is unconscionable to me that Congress does not have to make the same difficult decisions. Providing leadership is not doing what is easy; it is doing what is right. What is right is for Congress to stop spending recklessly and impose the fiscal discipline our nation needs to create jobs and spur economic growth. Leadership is not saying you are for a balanced budget and deficit reduction but taking no meaningful action.

Democrat leaders' unwillingness to develop and pass the annual budget is just the latest example that they have no interest in governing and have spent more time pursuing a liberal activist political agenda than addressing our nation's fiscal crisis.

Although I don't often see eye to eye with many of my Democrat colleagues on budget issues, I do agree with Congressman Spratt. Failure to budget is a failure to govern.

At this late a date, it's unlikely that Democrat leaders will change their minds or make an attempt to create a budget. It will be up to the American people to tell Congress this November that shirking your most basic responsibility — budgeting — is not governing, is not leadership, and is not acceptable.