



Sacrifices in Times of Hardship

By Rep. Mike Coffman

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I believe there is no single issue we face as a nation more critical to our future than the crushing national debt which now sits at \$13.5 trillion. I have been extremely outspoken about the need to balance the federal budget and reduce deficit spending. I am also a strong proponent of a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced federal budget. While balancing our federal budget is a critical component of setting the nation on a sustainable course, we must also cut federal spending, and we must do so immediately.

To that end I recently introduced a bill that if implemented would save American taxpayers more than \$5.5 billion next year. The measure, H.R. 6134, would subject federal civilian employees to a non-consecutive two week furlough next year, correspondingly reduce appropriations for salaries and expenses for offices of the legislative branch and cut pay for Members of Congress by 10 percent.

Although \$5.5 billion may seem like a drop in the bucket when considering our \$1.4 trillion budget deficit this year, there is simply no single silver bullet to fix the problem and the solution to closing the budget gap will come in form of many smaller measures. H.R. 6134 is one of those measures.

One of the most uncomfortable adjustments a former small business owner or former state legislator - and I am both - faces in coming to Washington is the unlimited ability of the federal government to deficit spend. We all know that small businesses have to balance the books, or they go out of business. At least, that was true before the bailout culture took hold in Washington. And unlike the spendthrift ways prevalent in the U.S. Capitol building, state governments generally have to balance their budgets.

Currently, at least 24 states, and nearly three quarters of a million workers, are undertaking a proven budget-cutting maneuver that I believe we must consider at the federal level: short term employee furloughs.

Here in Colorado, due to the painful reality of budget shortfalls and reduced revenues, state employees will be furloughed eight days this year. In California, furlough Fridays have become common occurrence and workers are required to take 36 days unpaid leave.

Colorado, California, and other states across the nation, along with city and county government counterparts, recognize that occasional worker furloughs are necessary to cut budgets and hold down spending in times of hardship. Using the same austerity measure at the federal level also has the benefit of ensuring that federal workers are not sheltered from the harsh realities of life in today's economy.

The legislation I have proposed does however provide for exceptions for national security and reasons relating to public health or safety, including law enforcement.

Make no mistake, Congress should not be immune from these hardships either and that is why my bill includes a 10 percent cut in salaries for members of Congress and a corresponding reduction in the budgets for their offices. This provision may not be popular among many of my colleagues in Washington but we all have a responsibility to U.S. taxpayers to recognize these difficult economic times and to restore greater fiscal accountability in the nation's capital.

The fact is the federal government continues to grow faster than we as a nation can afford, and because there is no requirement for a balanced budget the federal government continues to

deficit spend, racking up debt. I will be the first to admit that furloughs are unpopular and they present slight problems but they are a proven cost cutting measure and provide larger, immediate solutions to the budget troubles we face. I firmly believe it is long overdue that the federal government become as cost conscious as the states and my legislation is a start.