

<http://pjmedia.com/tatler/2011/11/21/the-balanced-budget-amendment-business-as-usual/>

By Congressman Lee Terry

It is the debtor that is ruined by hard times.

That timely and insightful comment came from our 19th President, Rutherford B. Hayes.

Well, the United States is a debtor. We are \$15 trillion in debt, and our debt rises at a yearly clip of \$1.5 trillion – with no institutional control to stop it.

Yes, we're in hard times. We've officially had over 9 percent unemployment for three years straight, and I've read reports claiming that real unemployment is closer to 15 percent.

We're not looking at a pretty picture. Yet, some members of Congress see no problem with keeping things just as they are. They're content to deficit-spend our future away.

They proved this on Friday, with a vote against a Balanced Budget Amendment (BBA) in the House of Representatives. While H.J. Res 2, a BBA introduced by Rep. Goodlatte (VA-06), was supported by a majority of House members, with a final vote count of 261 to 165, it was rejected by the House, because it did not gain the two-thirds majority needed to amend the U.S. Constitution.

Now for those of you who aren't familiar with BBAs, the concept is simple. A Balanced Budget Amendment does not allow the Federal Government to have higher expenditures than tax revenues. It is pretty much the same principle that you apply to your personal finances. You don't spend more than you take in.

Most states have constitutions with balanced budget requirements. It's what the Nebraska constitution has. It's what the city charter for Omaha has. I know, because before I was elected to Congress, I spent 8 years on the Omaha City Council. On the Council, we had to have a balanced budget, and sticking with it required tough decisions.

I've been there when people have come and said "we need new sidewalks," or "we need new bus routes." If the money wasn't in the budget for a particular project, we on the City Council had to do one of three things in response to the demand: 1) raise taxes, 2) make cuts elsewhere in the budget, or 3) say "no."

This is why Congress needs a Balanced Budget Amendment. Congress has continually proven itself unable to make this type of tough decision. The easiest way out of making this tough decision is to deficit-spend. This is why year after year, Congress plunges our country deeper into debt.

Why has this become the norm in Congress? Simply put, because it's allowed. There's nothing to stop it. There were lots of fail-safes built into the U.S. Constitution, and I think that our Founding Fathers never considered that deficit spending would ever occur in our country (other than during wartime), but it has, for decades now.

Well, this deficit spending has to end, and a Balanced Budget Amendment would end it. This is why I've long-supported a BBA, and why I voted in favor of it on Friday.

Unfortunately, many of your Congressional Representatives made their priorities clear. While I voted for fiscal discipline, many others said that they did not want to make tough budgetary decisions, the very ones they were sent to Washington, DC, to make. They voted for business as usual.