

million. They don't need this largesse, and we cannot afford to give it to them.

Taking from the poor to give to the rich is wrong, and I believe that our constituents recognize that it's also un-American.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to this Republican Budget cut package.

First, let me state that I strongly support balancing the federal budget and paying off the national debt. I am tremendously proud that during my first term in the U.S. House, Congress and the White House worked together in a bipartisan manner to balance the federal budget for the first time in a generation and produced record budget surpluses.

Unfortunately, the current Republican Congressional Leadership has produced a budget plan with harmful cuts to essential services that does nothing to reduce the budget deficits or offset the costs of recovery from Hurricane Katrina or the ongoing war in Iraq. At a time when American families are getting squeezed, the budget reconciliation package cuts funding for priorities including Medicaid, student loans, child support and food stamps that assist the working poor and the middle class.

Specifically, this legislation will cut Medicaid by \$11.4 million, student loans by \$14.3 billion, food stamps by \$796 million and child support by \$24.1 billion. The bill also breaks the promise of the Farm Bill by cutting \$1 billion from agriculture support and \$760 million from conservation. Although I am pleased this version of the bill abandons earlier attempts to open the Arctic Wildlife Refuge and coastal areas like the Outer Banks to oil and gas drilling and a few other modest improvements, these changes in no way compensate for the bill's fundamental flaws.

Congress should reject this legislation and go back to the drawing board to produce a responsible federal budget for the American people. I support pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) budget rules to enact budget discipline and restore fairness and equity to the budget process. I want Congress and the President to work together across the partisan divide to balance the budget once again, pay down the national debt and invest in our people and our country's economic competitiveness in the 21st century global marketplace.

I urge my colleagues to join me in voting against these senseless budget cuts.

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, when we passed the federal budget earlier this year, Democrats offered an alternative that would have achieved a balanced budget in 10 years . . . 10 years to spread out the pain of finally paying our bills again and freeing up the future for our children.

When we passed this budget last Spring, we were told there was no fat in it—it was all bone. Well, when you cut bone, you fall down.

Today the House is striking out . . . even if this bill passes today, let it forever be known as the "3 strikes and you're out" budget.

Strike 1: It hits hard our senior citizens, who built this great country . . .

Strike 2: It squeezes our middle class that pays the taxes and struggles to pay the household bills . . . and

Strike 3: It dumps on our children and students that represent the future of this nation. Three strikes . . . congratulations, today Congress hits all 3 components of American society with these budget cuts.

But let's get to why this bill is before us today. We're not here because the hurricanes

busted the budget. . . . It's not the war . . . it's that many people in this House demand that we spend the Treasury's money on tax cuts for wealthier Americans. Period. It's about nothing more than spending this money on tax cuts—or, more appropriately: tax increases on our children.

Budgets are a reflection of who we are and what we value. The budget cuts offered in the House of Representatives today—which I oppose—simply do not represent the values that we say are important to us in this nation.

South Texans have been astounded at the depth of cuts in the federal budget, which means Texas students will be less likely to stay in school or go to college . . . Low income Texas children will be sicker with the cut in health benefits . . . Seniors will lose essential services. . . .

Today's bill will increase the deficit by \$20 billion, give more tax cuts to the wealthy, and hurt those who use student loans, who need health care and who benefit from rural programs.

We have got to come up with a budget that represents the right priorities for students, seniors, Katrina families and rural Americans. We had an opportunity to vote for such a budget last Spring, with the right priorities, that paid down the deficit—authored by JOHN SPRATT—but the House rejected it.

It is incumbent upon all of us in Congress to help all Americans, not just the wealthy few. We can do better than this—and we must.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, budgets illustrate the values of our nation. This year's budget reconciliation bill fails to live up to the values of the people I am privileged to represent in West Central Missouri.

The Republican budget opens the 2002 Farm Bill by reducing farm, rural development, and conservation programs; slashes Medicaid; diminishes financial aid programs for Missouri's college bound students; and denies low-income working families access to food and nutrition initiatives. These reductions in critical rural programs are recommended at the same time as Republicans push for more expansive tax cuts for the wealthiest in society.

Most of us in rural Missouri pride ourselves on being prudent with our money. We balance our checkbooks each month and do not dig too deep into debt. While running a family is much different than running a country, these common sense Show-Me State values ought to be replicated in Congress.

But instead, the Republicans are plunging our country deeper into debt by passing a budget that includes more tax cuts than spending cuts. The budget bill ignores our commitments to rebuild the Gulf Coast after Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. It also fails to properly account for expected future supplemental spending requests for ongoing military operations.

Our nation's fiscal house is not in order and this bill does nothing to fix that. Congressional leaders and the President need to go back to the drawing board and meet in a bipartisan fashion to create a budget plan that more adequately balances the interests—and values—of the American people. When George H.W. Bush faced a similar budget crisis, he had the courage to create a bipartisan budget summit and to implement needed budget constraints. America is better for it, and I hope that our leaders today will follow that example.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican budget reconciliation bill should be defeated. Congress must do better at representing the interests of every American, not just the wealthy few. I stand ready to work with all my colleagues in a bipartisan fashion, ensuring that the budget we prepare truly represents the values of a caring nation.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to oppose strongly the budget reconciliation bill under consideration. Those who support this bill claim it imposes spending discipline to pay for the costs of hurricane relief; in truth, it only continues the majority's pattern of taking from the middle class and the needy to give it to the wealthiest percent.

The American people came together to respond to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. Families donated record amounts to charities and opened their doors to those displaced by the storm. But now the Republicans are using Katrina to divide our Nation again. They claim that deep cuts of \$54 billion are needed in programs like Medicaid, food stamps and child support enforcement to pay for hurricane relief. These cuts will neither pay for Katrina relief nor reduce the deficit. These are being used to pay for a portion of the \$70 billion in tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans that we will be considering shortly.

Mr. Speaker, these cuts are being made on the backs of the working class, seniors and middle class families. In many cases, those who have the least are being made to sacrifice the most. For example, there are about one million Medicaid recipients in New Jersey. Almost half of them are children. This budget reconciliation bill would slash funding for Medicaid by \$11.4 billion, putting our nation's most vulnerable citizens, including those affected by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, at risk of losing the only health insurance they have.

Another provision in the bill cuts \$796 million from food stamps. Again, how can the majority even consider these cuts when the hurricanes cost hundreds of thousands of Americans their homes and livelihoods? Cutting food stamps for the impoverished while giving tax breaks to wealthiest America is not just bad policy, it is immoral.

New Jersey is hit particularly hard by many of the cuts in this bill. We all know that the price of heating a home, either with natural gas or heating oil will be extremely high this year because of rising energy prices. Families are bracing for higher bills. And yet, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which helps people pay their energy bills when it is needed most is being cut by more than \$10 million in New Jersey alone. As a result, about 20,000 New Jerseyans are expected to lose much needed assistance. I assume those well-to-do families receiving tax breaks instead will sleep in warm homes this winter. Why the majority is choosing this path baffles and sorely disappoints me.

The list of cuts goes on. In New Jersey alone 3,000 mothers will be dropped from the Women Infant Children (WIC) program which helps mothers care for their babies before and after birth by ensuring they get proper healthcare, food and training for being a parent. Five hundred children in New Jersey currently attending Head Start will be cut out of this important childhood education and development program. Two thousand, nine hundred low-income and disabled people will be cut from Section 8 housing vouchers, all in New