

Washington and the talk shows are captivated by talk of the “fiscal cliff”: the combination of automatic spending cuts and revenue increases scheduled to take effect at the end of the year. Unfortunately, this is the wrong conversation for America to be having.

The fiscal cliff is an artificial crisis created by renegades who used America’s statutory debt limit to hold the nation hostage in August of 2011. (How absurdly irresponsible to say we will teach ourselves a lesson by not paying our debts!) Just as the cliff was created by a vote of Congress then, it could be dispensed with by a vote of Congress today. Yet negotiators in Congress and at the White House are continuing to operate within the narrow, artificial framework imposed by last year’s hostage-taking: debating, for example, whether cuts to Medicare should be balanced with an appropriate increase in marginal tax rates to 39.5 percent.

We would do better to put today’s challenges in their proper context. From time to time in our history America has faced very large public debts before, most notably after the end of World War II. Each time, we got to work, worked hard as Americans always do, and built the economy by building and doing things. We did not wring our hands over what America cannot do, but rather set about doing what we can do. There’s no question that the debt is an important problem – but the United States is not, as some would have us believe, defined by its debt. It is defined by its people, its infrastructure, its creativity, its innovation, its drive. We are not a “poor debtor nation,” as one might think listening to the debate this month. Our budget deficit is not an existential crisis.

Remember that, as recently as a decade ago, the United States had a balanced budget and was paying down the debt – not because of a gimmick or a response to a perceived crisis or a constitutional balanced-budget amendment, but because of rational lawmaking and policies that led to a thriving economy. We are still the richest, most productive, most capable country in the world. We should be asking how we will set about making certain that all Americans have food, housing, schooling, jobs, and vibrant culture. If we do those things, the resulting growing economy will make our fixation on a phony fiscal crisis recede into the past.

Those renegades held us hostage in 2011; we shouldn’t hold ourselves hostage today by arguing within the false framework they set then.

Central New Jersey’s 2012 Blue Ribbon Schools

The Secretary of Education recently honored two Central New Jersey schools as [2012 National Blue Ribbon Schools](#) in recognition of their overall academic excellence: Saint Leo the Great School in Lincroft, and Saint Paul School in Princeton.

The Blue Ribbon honor is a true mark of excellence. Out of the roughly 130,000 public and private schools in the country, fewer than 300 received the distinction this year. As a former teacher and a current member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, I admire and appreciate the work of the teachers, staff, and students at these and other superb schools in New Jersey.

Changes in Disaster Recovery Center Locations and Hours

Earlier this month, I wrote [to provide you with information](#) on disaster recovery centers set up to help Central New Jersey residents recover from Hurricane Sandy. Since then, the hours of some of the disaster recovery centers have changed, and the Hunterdon County center has closed.

For the most up-to-date information on the hours and locations of disaster recovery centers near you, you can always use the [Disaster Recovery Center](#) locator on FEMA's website. Please know that you can find assistance and apply for disaster relief at *any* disaster recovery center – even one that is in a different county or state than your residence. You can also apply for disaster relief online at [DisasterAssistance.gov](#).

Sincerely,

Rush Holt
Member of Congress