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Still there are those who oppose a balanced budget amendment because they believe Washington ought to be able to hold the line on spending. I wish we could trust that to happen, but over the last decade, both parties have spent taxpayer dollars at unsustainable levels. It is time to change direction and move forward with an approach that will rescue our economy with real and lasting results.

With America's total debt exceeding the gross domestic product for the first time since World War II, we cannot afford to make this issue about politics. It must be about saving our economy and securing the future of our country for our children and our grandchildren.

The debate in Washington comes down to this: Should we hold the government accountable or not? We must seize this opportunity to change Washington's culture of deficit spending. We must pass a balanced budget amendment.

SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SPEIER) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPEIER. I rise again today to draw attention to the epidemic in our military of rape and sexual assault. Nineteen thousand women and men each year are raped or sexually assaulted in the military. Shockingly, almost one-third of female veterans of all generations say they have been sexually assaulted or raped while in the military, and more than 70 percent say they experienced sexual harassment while serving.

In 2008 the Department of Veterans Affairs reported a total of 48,106 female veterans and 43,693 male veterans screened positively for military sexual trauma.

The prosecution rate of sexual assault is alarmingly low. Only 8 percent of sexual assailants were referred to courts-martial or military court compared with 40 percent of similar offenders in the civilian system. This travesty is not being addressed, and I will continue to speak out on this floor until it is. Survivors can email me at stopmilitaryrape@mail.house.gov if they would like to speak out.

Today, I would like to tell the story of one of the 8 percent that were prosecuted, the story of Colonel Michael Robertson, who commanded Fort Bliss' 31st Combat Support Hospital at Camp Dwyer, a military base and airfield in the Helmand River Valley in Afghanistan.

Last week, Colonel Robertson was convicted by a military judge of 14 charges, including having pornography on his government computer, sexually harassing three women, and assaulting five women. Eight women that served under his command testified at great cost to their careers and their privacy.

Colonel Robertson routinely touched them without permission on their breasts, thighs, and buttocks, and encouraged them to look at pornography on his computer. Some testified the harassment occurred daily. Sadly, the military careers of these eight women who bravely did the right thing are almost assuredly destroyed.

A major who filed a claim against Robertson said, "I don't know if my career was in jeopardy for doing the right thing. Who in the corps who supported you is going to trust you in the future?"

Despite repeated warnings, Colonel Robertson also emailed pornography to friends and female subordinates. A lieutenant colonel who was the chief nurse under Robertson's command said his command split the staff and created a toxic environment.

What makes the defense's answer to all of these actions? That all of these jokes and the touchings were attempts to boost morale. How much more outrageous must the excuses become before we do something about it?

So what is the punishment for someone in the military convicted of 14 counts of assaulting and harassing his subordinates who he was assigned to protect? Is he sent to prison for being a predator? Is he stripped of his standing in the military? Oh, no. Colonel Robertson was ordered to pay a \$30,000 fine over 3 months and spend 3 months in prison. Colonel Robertson will retire from the Army when he finishes his sentence. His conviction won't affect his Army retirement or his Federal health insurance, and he will not be required to register as a sex offender.

It doesn't take a military expert or a psychologist to figure out that sexual assault and harassment hurts not only the individual victim but undermines unit cohesion, morale, and overall effectiveness.

The absolute failure to address this behavior is hurting our military. Like Colonel Robertson, the majority of assailants are older and of higher rank than their victims. They abuse not only their authority but also the trust of those they are responsible for protecting.

The current military structure serves as a safe haven for sexual predators. They either are never brought to justice at all, or they receive a sentence like Colonel Robertson's that doesn't come close to matching their crime.

That's why this week I'll be introducing a bill that would fundamentally change how sexual assaults are handled in the military. My bill will take the prosecution, the reporting, the oversight, the investigation, and the victim care of sexual assaults out of the hands of the normal chain of command and place the jurisdiction in the hands of an impartial office staffed by experts, both military and civilian.

I've become painfully aware that if DOD continues to address this issue at its current pace, the epidemic of military assault will never end.

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WOODALL) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WOODALL. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I appreciate the time.

I'm coming to the floor today with joy in my heart, and candidly I would like to come to the floor every day Mr. Speaker, but I don't always get to. But today, I'm here because we're voting on a balanced budget amendment this week. The first time in 15 years.

Now, I'm a freshman in this House, Mr. Speaker. I've been watching the process for a long time, but I've only had a voting card for 10 months. And I came to this Congress to do the big things, not to argue about the petty things. And I tell folks, Mr. Speaker, that very rarely are we arguing about the petty things, that there's a constituent focus to absolutely everything that we do. But the big things. The big things that change the direction of this country that ensure that this experiment in democracy, that our Republic, survives for another generation.

Fifteen trillion dollars in debt, Mr. Speaker.

Do you remember, Mr. Speaker, you don't have the gray hair that I do, but back in the days of Ronald Reagan we were running \$200 billion and \$300 billion annual deficits. And folks thought the world might be coming to the end. Now, it put the Soviet Union out of business, but it was big money. Who'd of thought we would come to a day where we're actually running \$1.4 trillion, \$1.5 trillion, \$1.6 trillion deficits every year?

Mr. Speaker, as you know, in the people's House where the people's will gets done, we have choices here. In my district, for example, folks want to tax less and spend less. I hear it every day. Rob, tax less and spend less. I'm sure I've got some colleagues on the other side of the aisle whose constituencies want to tax more and spend more.

That is a legitimate debate for us to have in this House. We should have it. But we ought to be able to agree that spending money we don't have harms the future of this Republic. That spending money we don't have mortgages the future of everyone under the age of 20 and threatens the security of everyone over the age of 60.

A balanced budget amendment is one of those things that we can agree on, one of those issues that is not Republican, it's not Democrat, it's not conservative, it's not liberal—it is American.

Thomas Jefferson said if he could have added but one amendment to the Constitution, it would have been one to abolish the power of the government to borrow, because with that one amendment alone, he would be certain of the security of these United States.

Mr. Speaker, that chance is here with us this week for the first time in 15 years.

Now, I confess when I came to Congress, Mr. Speaker, I didn't expect to