

April 2, 2007 The fiscal year 2008 budget, passed in the House of Representatives last week, is a monument to irresponsibility and profligacy. It shows that Congress remains oblivious to the economic troubles facing the nation, and that political expediency trumps all common sense in Washington. To the extent that proponents and supporters of these unsustainable budget increases continue to win reelection, it also shows that many Americans unfortunately continue to believe government can provide them with a free lunch. To summarize, Congress proposes spending roughly \$3 trillion in 2008. When I first came to Congress in 1976, the federal government spent only about \$300 billion. So spending has increased tenfold in thirty years, and tripled just since 1990. About one-third of this \$3 trillion is so-called discretionary spending; the remaining two-thirds is deemed "mandatory" entitlement spending, which means mostly Social Security and Medicare. I'm sure many American voters would be shocked to know their elected representatives essentially have no say over two-thirds of the federal budget, but that is indeed the case. In fact the most disturbing problem with the budget is the utter lack of concern for the coming entitlement meltdown. For those who thought a Democratic congress would end the war in Iraq, think again: their new budget proposes supplemental funds totaling about \$150 billion in 2008 and \$50 billion in 2009 for Iraq. This is in addition to the ordinary Department of Defense budget of more than \$500 billion, which the Democrats propose increasing each year just like the Republicans. The substitute Republican budget is not much better: while it does call for freezing some discretionary spending next year, it increases military spending to make up the difference. The bottom line is that both the Democratic and Republican budget proposals call for more total spending in 2008 than 2007. My message to my colleagues is simple: If you claim to support smaller government, don't introduce budgets that increase spending over the previous year. Can any fiscal conservative in Congress honestly believe that overall federal spending cannot be cut 25%? We could cut spending by two-thirds and still have a federal government as large as it was in 1990. Congressional budgets essentially are meaningless documents, with no force of law beyond the coming fiscal year. Thus budget projections are nothing more than political posturing, designed to justify deficit spending in the near term by promising fiscal restraint in the future. But the time for thrift never seems to arrive: there is always some new domestic or foreign emergency that requires more spending than projected. The only certainty when it comes to federal budgets is that Congress will spend every penny budgeted and more during the fiscal year in question. All projections about revenues, tax rates, and spending in the future are nothing more than empty promises. Congress will pay no attention whatsoever to the 2008 budget in coming years.