

Price: ""The question should be, 'How did this country get in so much fiscal trouble in the first place?'"

Washington, D.C. - Talking with a Hurricane Katrina Survivor

Tonight, US Rep. David Price (NC-04) participated in a "Special Orders" on the House Floor. During this hour, Democrats highlighted a Republican plan to amend the budget resolution with spending cuts even deeper than the budget resolution now requires. (That resolution was later pulled from the floor schedule because Republicans lacked the votes to pass it.)

The text of Price's remarks follows:

"Mr. Speaker, we are having this debate as yet another potentially catastrophic hurricane churns toward the US mainland.

"Once again, our country is not prepared. And this time, I'm not just talking about FEMA or the Department of Homeland Security.

"I'm talking about being unprepared – fiscally.

"Former National Economic Adviser Gene Sperling put it best when he said recently that the Congressional leadership is asking the wrong question. The question should not be, 'How do we pay for Katrina?'

"The question should be, 'How did this country get in so much fiscal trouble in the first place?'"

"The answer is not 'Katrina,' or 'Rita,' and it won't be 'Wilma.' The costs of natural disaster response are significant, but they are not the cause of our problems.

"What these hurricanes have done is laid bare not only our country's troubling racial and economic divides, and not only the sorry state of our disaster preparedness, but also the dangerous deterioration of our nation's fiscal health.

"In the wake of Katrina, our colleagues on the other side of the aisle seem to have 'got religion' on fiscal responsibility.

"After engineering an unprecedented fiscal reversal of some \$9T, from budget surpluses and paying down debt in the Clinton Administration to record deficits and deepening debt under George. W. Bush, our Republican friends are suddenly wringing their hands over the deficit.

"They are using Katrina as a pretext for doing what they wanted to do all along: cutting the very safety net program on which the victims of Katrina depend.

"One look at the content of their proposed reconciliation package shows just how much they care about the budget deficit:

"To begin with, the reconciliation bill would still increase the deficit by more than \$100 billion over five years. This is particularly ironic, given that the reconciliation process was intended to facilitate the passage of deficit reduction measures. Now this leadership has turned the process on its head by using it to push through measures that will only drive us further into debt.

"The spending cuts called for in the bill will do absolutely nothing to offset the costs of hurricane recovery. From the beginning, the \$35 billion in cuts contained in the reconciliation package were intended to partially offset the \$106 billion in tax cuts included in the FY06 budget resolution – and \$15 billion more will still not make up the difference.

"Instead, the cuts will threaten vital services that the victims of Katrina are counting on to help rebuild their lives. Food stamps, Medicare and Medicaid, student loans, and low-income energy assistance could all be cut, just to name a few.

"Wealthy Americans, on the other hand, will get off without sacrificing a dime of the Bush tax cuts. Quite the contrary: the reconciliation bill is being used to fast-track new and extended tax cuts for those who need them least.

"Is that the Republicans' idea of a 'shared sacrifice?'

"The very notion that we should offset the \$200 billion it could cost to help millions of American families and communities get back on their feet after a tragic disaster – while not offsetting the nearly \$2 trillion cost of the Bush tax cuts, or the \$250 billion we are spending in Iraq and Afghanistan – reeks of hypocrisy. And it actually worsens the fiscal meltdown of the last four years.

"As my colleague Mr. Spratt put it, why should we offset the cost of rebuilding Biloxi but not the cost of rebuilding Baghdad? And even worse, why should we make the very people we are claiming to help bear the lion's share of the costs?

"You won't find any honest answers from the leadership of this chamber. You'll just find false promises, deception, and deficits as far as the eye can see. It's disgraceful, Mr. Speaker. Anyone who votes for this bill should be ashamed of themselves for what they're doing to the most vulnerable among us...and to the country's future."

Go to Price's issue pages for more on the budget and Hurricane Katrina.

###