

Representative Keith Self Opening Statement for Member Budget Hearing

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Congressional Budget Office has now put before the American people a staggering projection: \$62 trillion in federal debt by 2036. That is not a rounding error. That is not a distant hypothetical. That is the path we are on today, with no change in policy.

So the question is, and I'll put it plainly: What is the plan to address this? Because pretending this will somehow self-correct is not a plan. Hoping for growth that magically outruns the debt is not a plan. And assuming Congress will endlessly borrow to paper over collapsing trust funds is not a plan.

Let's be blunt about the impact. Under current law, mandatory spending is consuming the federal budget. The Social Security and Medicare trustees have already warned that their trust funds will run out. Yet the CBO baseline assumes that Congress will borrow the missing trillions and continue paying full benefits. Interest payments alone grow from roughly \$900 billion today to over \$1.4 trillion in the next decade, money we will spend for nothing except servicing past mistakes.

Discretionary spending, which is the only part of this Congress that actually debates, shrinks as a share of the economy. Meanwhile, the CBO Baseline project's revenues stay relatively flat. The deficit sits at roughly 6% of GDP every year as far as the eye can see. Growth stays fixed around 3.8%, interest rates creep up, and yet every projection shows the same outcome: debt climbing past 136% of GDP.

That brings us to the unavoidable question: How exactly are we going to pay for all of this?

We can either pretend this is manageable, or we can recognize that this debt is the single greatest long-term national security threat we face. No adversary can do to us what our own fiscal negligence is already doing. Every dollar we spend on interest is a dollar not spent on defense, not spent on innovation, not spent on the competitiveness of the American worker.

Congress must confront three realities:

First, mandatory spending must be part of the conversation. We cannot save these programs by ignoring their structural challenges.

Second, economic growth alone will not bail us out. A one-point increase in growth helps, yes, but it doesn't erase multi-trillion-dollar structural deficits baked into law.

Third, we need a real fiscal framework, one that addresses spending, restores budget discipline, and stops Washington from assuming future Congresses will borrow indefinitely to cover promises we never intend to keep.

Mr. Chairman, the American people deserve honesty. There is no responsible path that leads to \$62 trillion in debt. There is only avoidance or action. And the longer we choose avoidance, the more painful the action will eventually become.

It is time for this Congress to choose action.

Thank you, and I yield back.