

Rep. Ben Cline (VA-06)
Budget Committee Members' Day Testimony
March 5, 2019

Our continued failure to control federal spending and address our mounting debt truly is the greatest threat to this nation. When I ran for office last fall, I promised the citizens of Virginia's Sixth Congressional District that I would reintroduce four words to Washington – 'we can't afford it.'

These are four words that should have been endlessly repeated over the last 22 years since the last time a Federal budget with a surplus was signed into law was in 1997. Unfortunately, all we hear is silence.

In Virginia, where I served in the House of Delegates for 16 years, we are required to balance our budget each year. And because we have placed a priority on fiscal responsibility, Virginia is frequently listed among the best states in which to do business.

In contrast, the Federal government has an outstanding public debt of more than \$22 trillion. Every year, since 1997, Congress has failed to maintain a fiscally responsible budget and, instead, has relied too much on raising the debt ceiling.

Because of this practice, on August 5, 2011, the credit rating of the United States was reduced by Standard and Poor's from AAA to AA+ and has remained at that level since. Virginia, through its fiscal responsibility, has maintained its AAA bond rating, making it one of only a few states to have that honor.

Not only is the current practice of not passing a balanced budget fiscally irresponsible, it poses a threat to our national security. As part of his National Security Strategy, President Trump has highlighted the need to reduce the national debt through fiscal responsibility, and I commend him for it.

In September 2011, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullin warned: “I believe the single, biggest threat to our national security is debt.” At that time, our national debt was close to \$15 trillion. Now, almost ten years later, our national debt has increased by \$7 trillion, a 46% increase.

As Members of Congress, we must understand that the national debt is indeed a threat to the national security of the United States, that deficits are unsustainable, irresponsible, and dangerous. Committing Congress to restoring regular order in the appropriations process and addressing the fiscal crisis faced by the United States is no longer just an option, it’s a necessity. The future of our great republic depends on it.