

**“Fiscal Year 2020 Budget: Members' Day” – Hearing before the House Budget Committee**

**Wednesday, March 6, 2019**

Testimony as prepared for delivery – Representative Ben McAdams (UT-04)

Thank you Chairman Yarmuth, Ranking Member Womack and Members of the Budget Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

I appear before you today as a proud member of the Blue Dog Coalition – a group of Democrats with a legacy of producing policy that addresses our nation’s ballooning debt. Before I was elected to Congress, I was a mayor who had to balance a budget every year, in bipartisan fashion. I was then, as I am now, accountable to taxpayers for every dollar spent and nothing was more important than to be a good steward of hard-earned tax dollars.

Our \$22 trillion debt is a bipartisan problem. Both parties are responsible for getting us into this mess. In 2017, we saw Republicans in the House jam through an irresponsible tax cut for the wealthy and well-connected that added almost \$2 trillion dollars to our debt total. They sold that tax cut to the public by saying, in part that it would pay for itself. But most economists say that is a myth. That additional \$2 trillion simply piled on to the enormous burden we’ve created for future generations, rather than achieve needed tax reform. Both Democrats and Republicans have acted in a way that suggests debt doesn’t matter. But I am here to say - the debt does matter. The numbers are so large that it can be hard to wrap your head around them but presently every man, woman and child in America owes \$67,000 – enough to send a child to college, or start a small business, or to make a substantial down payment on a home. Any Utah small business would be out of business if that is how it maintained its books.

Unfortunately, the interest on our debt is now the fastest growing part of the federal budget. Next year we will spend more on interest than all the federal funding for our kids. By the year 2025 –six years from now—our interest payments will **exceed the cost of our defense budget**. Growing interest payments will crowd out other investment that would move our country forward, such as education, or housing, or infrastructure. Not only is that fiscally irresponsible, it is morally reprehensible to saddle generations yet unborn with those bills. And someday, those bills will come due.

As has been said before –but it still holds true today--“the first rule, when you find yourself in a deep hole, is to stop digging.” That’s why it was so critical—in our first votes in the House on the rules package—that we kept pay-as-you-go requirements. Every Utah family understands that when you decide to make a purchase, you must first show how you’ll pay for it. Either you find additional revenue, or you cut back on spending elsewhere so that you continue to live within your budget. As mayor, I constantly faced tradeoffs. But you set your priorities and you make choices – sometimes difficult choices. Again, this is what hard-working Utah families do

every day when they sit at the kitchen table and balance their checkbooks and we must do the same.

As one of the co-chairs of the Blue Dog Task Force on Fiscal Responsibility and Government Reform, I'll be working with my colleagues and my fellow co-chair Rep. Ed Case to pursue smart, strategic policies to rein in the federal government's persistent annual deficits and unsustainable debt. We will be responsible for crafting policies that increase transparency, hold Congress accountable to the taxpayers and ensure that money is spent wisely.

Another tool in our toolbox must be a Balanced Budget Amendment and I hope to introduce legislation on this soon. The Blue Dog Coalition has championed this issue in the past and I will work with members to advance the issue again this Congress. By generally prohibiting the federal government from spending more than it receives in a fiscal year, we can start to turn the Titanic of debt around. Lawmakers in both parties must take a hard look at both the revenue and the spending side of the ledger, while also protecting the Social Security and Medicare benefits that seniors have earned. The measure I plan to introduce will have reasonable exceptions for times of war or a severe economic down turn.

I also support my fellow Representative Jim Cooper's "No Budget, No Pay" legislation. Everyone in this country understands that if you don't do your job on time, you won't get paid. The same rules should apply to Congress. If we don't pass a budget and the funding bills by October 1, Congress doesn't deserve to get paid.

I also support taking a hard look at the return we receive from government programs to determine if we're getting good outcomes, or just perpetuating spending with little or no results. We can do this by building a results-driven policy agenda and ensuring scarce federal resources are invested in what works; more wisely using tax dollars and improving outcomes for young people, their families, and communities. During my time as mayor, we launched several evidence-based programs to track and measure what outcomes the public received in return for spending precious tax dollars.

National headlines say that no one in either political party is talking about the debt. We must have that conversation and work until we find solutions to the harm caused by the debt. It is clear our country is on a dangerous and unsustainable course. It is past time for both parties to stop digging. The decisions won't be easy, but our children and our grandchildren are counting on us to make this right.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify.