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'No budget, no pay' will help ensure fiscal responsibility

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Contributing Columnist

One of a Congress' most basic responsibilities is to pass a budget. Families and businesses all across America regularly make budgets, yet the U.S. Senate has failed to legislate one in over three and a half years. In fact, as many have pointed out, the last time the U.S. Senate passed a budget, we had never even heard of the iPad. General Motors had never declared bankruptcy. No one had heard of Swine Flu. And the national debt was \$4 trillion smaller than it is today.

Today, our national debt stands at over \$16 trillion and we have racked up over a trillion dollars in deficits in each of the last four years. We can no longer continue on this path. As public servants, we have a lot of work to do to bring down our national debt and rein in deficit spending. It will not be easy. It will take hard work. It will not happen overnight. In the meantime, however, Congress can make some important fiscal steps to show that we

are committed to returning America to a firm fiscal footing.

Just like families and businesses across America, Members of Congress need to be held responsible for their fiscal decisions. To add personal accountability into the process, I introduced the Congressional Accountability Pay (CAP) Act, H.R. 284, to break Congress' addiction to spending by tying members' salaries directly to spending. The premise of the bill is simple - the more Members of Congress spend, the less they make in salary. So, if Congress increases spending by 7 percent, their salaries would be cut by 7 percent.

Last week, the House passed the No Budget, No Pay Act, H.R. 325, requiring Members of the House and Senate to pass a budget, or have their pay withheld. I was pleased that this bill incorporates personal accountability of Members of Congress, in a similar fashion as the CAP Act. I am optimistic that this is a first step toward getting spending under control.

In January of 1995, a constitutional

amendment that mandated a balanced budget passed the U.S House of Representatives. Two months later, the balanced budget amendment was brought to the floor of the U.S. Senate where it failed by one vote. Since then, federal debt has more than tripled in size from \$5.1 trillion to \$16.4 trillion today. I continue to support a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, but in the meantime, we must fix our broken budget process and prioritize spending.

Passing a budget, as called for under the No Budget, No Pay Act, is only the first step toward putting our nation back on a path of fiscal prosperity, but it would go a long way in holding Members of Congress personally accountable for spending decisions in Washington. The status quo is no longer acceptable - Members of Congress cannot remain immune from the economic challenges facing our nation.

U.S. Rep. Randy Forbes represents Virginia's 4th Congressional District. A Republican, he has been serving in the House of Representatives since 2001.