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Our fiscal crisis

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By Jeb Hensarling - As Labor Day weekend approaches, moms and dads across America will be loading up minivans, station wagons, and SUVs for the annual family vacation to grandma's house, to the beach or to Disneyland. Meanwhile, Congress will be preparing to return to Washington, where we will continue to debate the government's spending patterns that will help determine, in part, if Americans will be able to afford that same trip five years from now.

According to the Heritage Foundation, the federal government now spends more than \$23,000 per household. Indeed, Republicans controlled both Congress and the White House for the past six years, and we bear some of the responsibility for the acceleration of government spending. While I am disappointed that we were unable to do more to slow the growth of government and make spending more accountable when we had so many tools at our disposal, I've discovered that too often the only truly bipartisan effort in Washington is the desire to spend taxpayers' money. Each year that I have been in Washington, Democrats have proposed spending even more money than Republicans, Democrats have proposed creating more government programs than Republicans, and Democrats have tried taxing the American people far more than Republicans.

Despite election-year promises to the contrary, the new Democratic majority did not take long to act like the Democratic majorities of old, revealing to Americans who supported it in November that it intends to tax and spend as usual. On their first day in control of Congress in 2007, Democrats blocked efforts to maintain a protection, put in place by Republicans on their first day in the majority in 1995, requiring a 60 percent supermajority to approve federal tax increases.

They followed by passing a budget that included the single largest tax increase in American history, which will cost the average American family more than \$3,000 per year. This tax increase on hardworking families and small businesses will no doubt be used to press the spending accelerator on government that has too little accountability and too much mismanagement, waste and duplication. And finally, for 2008 alone, they want to give the federal government a 9 percent raise in non-Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid programs — the easiest spending to control.

Who pays for this? You do. So far this year, Democrats in the House have authorized more than \$950 billion in new spending. Not surprisingly, they have also authorized more than \$425 billion in new taxes.

House conservatives have been fighting for a slow-down in federal spending for years, even

when our own party was in power. Most Americans understand that a raise is a raise. And this year, instead of a 9 percent raise, the federal government should be able to prioritize and live with a slightly smaller raise for the sake of our children and grandchildren. Now, as we move another year closer to the fiscal crisis that will force Congress to decide between a spending plan that pays for only Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid or the doubling of taxes on the American taxpayer just to balance the budget, we have drawn a line in the fiscal sand.

Earlier this spring, President Bush vowed to veto any spending bill Congress sent him that exceeded his fiscally accountable request. On behalf of the Republican Study Committee, a group of more than 100 of the most conservative Republicans in the House, Rep. John Campbell of California and I personally delivered a letter to Mr. Bush signed by more than 146 Republicans — the veto-sustaining requirement — in the House of Representatives who pledge to uphold his veto of any spending bill because it exceeds his request for next year.

Republicans in the House will continue a unified effort to force accountability in Washington and make House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid explain the outrageous tax increases that will take money out of your pocket to fuel runaway government spending. Our commitment will empower the president to break out his veto pen and bring more accountability to the federal budget. The time to show taxpayers that we are dedicated to protecting the most important budget, the family budget, is now.

Rep. Jeb Hensarling, Texas Republican, is chairman of the Republican Study Committee.
