

We all know the problem. The federal government's overspending has our nation stuck in a deepening hole of debt, \$15 trillion deep. That's \$48,000 of debt per American.

The question Congress must answer now is how to stop digging the hole, and how we eventually climb out of it. Finding the right solution helps protect generations of Americans into the future. Failure leaves our children and their children a legacy of unpaid bills and economic uncertainty.

America's recurring deficits and debt are a structural problem, and they call for a structural solution. This week in the House of Representatives I voted in favor of a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. This constitutional amendment would require that the U.S. government operate under a balanced budget each year and not run any deficits. An annual deficit would not be permitted unless authorized by a three-fifths vote of each chamber, and a similar three-fifths vote would be required to raise the debt limit. Unfortunately, it did not pass.

I have long supported a balanced budget amendment as a key tool for budgetary reform. That said, I don't take lightly the issue of amending our Constitution, which has endured through strife and dramatic historical shifts with very few amendments. Constitutional amendments should be exceedingly rare, as they have the power to spur sweeping change. In these circumstances, though, I believe it is necessary that the same process that guaranteed our hallmark freedoms of speech, religion and freedom from slavery be used to protect our children and future generations from economic collapse.

I served on the Lincoln City Council. We had to balance the city's budget, as do communities across our nation. Most states, including Nebraska, have balanced budget requirements. Our state has to live within its means. The federal government needs to do the same.

This week I also joined a diverse group of congressional members in calling for the "super committee," the congressional panel tasked with recommending at least \$1.2 trillion in debt reduction, to go beyond that minimum level and shoot for a target of \$4 trillion, a number many economists agree is necessary to stabilize our debt in relation to the economy. Our group, consisting of a coalition of conservatives, libertarians, and liberals, wanted to make clear that now is the time to make sacrifices and work together to achieve meaningful debt reduction.

We are standing at history's door. We can either lead and be bold, making the hard decisions necessary to correct our fiscal trajectory — or stay in our timeworn political lanes, continuing with the status quo that has left our nation this unsustainable debt burden. We can do something big for this country and our future.