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Martin O. Sabo: Republicans have shown their idea of fiscal responsibility

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While there have been some positive economic signals recently, our nation has lost 3.2 million jobs and added \$3.6 trillion to the national debt in less than three years under Republican leadership in Washington, with the GOP controlling both the White House and Congress.

Nine million people are out of work and President Bush has the worst job creation record since the Great Depression, including a loss of 2.5 million manufacturing jobs. People are having trouble finding work with national unemployment at 6.1 percent and 5 million Americans are working part time because they can't find a full-time job.

Just a decade ago, Democrats had the same control in Washington. We reduced the deficit, set a course to balance the budget for the first time in a generation and created 22 million jobs. Unfortunately, the Bush White House squandered the \$5.6 trillion surplus it inherited from President Bill Clinton and has racked up record annual deficits, \$400 billion in 2003 alone.

When I chaired the House Budget Committee, I believed fiscal discipline was the way to create prosperity. Republicans in Washington now, at best, pay only lip service to such fiscal discipline.

Republicans claim their tax policies didn't cause the deficit; it was caused by out-of-control government spending, a weak economy, and Sept. 11, 2001. But the White House's own Office of Management and Budget shows that its tax changes account for 54 percent of the decrease in revenues -- not increased spending on defense, homeland security or any other program.

Republicans also claim this is Bill Clinton's recession. The recession officially began in March of 2001, two months after Bush was sworn in. Regardless of the date you choose, Clinton was responsible for the longest and strongest economic expansion in American history.

Are Democrats crying wolf? Well, in the 58 years since the end of World War II, the budget deficit as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) has never been as high as it is today: 6.2 percent. The fact remains that Democrats passed budget-deficit reduction legislation that turned around our economy in 1993 without the support of a single Republican.

The fiscal mess created since Bush took office has also resulted in most working families having to work harder for less. Household income has fallen and 3.4 million more Americans lack health insurance.

Finally, Bush's decision to start a war with Iraq has severely damaged U.S. credibility in the international community and has already cost taxpayers \$165 billion. After overselling the reason to begin the war, Bush continues to undersell the costs and obligations to our country - measured in money and, more importantly, in human lives.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld recently described the greatest cost, the loss of life, as "necessary." War brings casualties, but it is wrong to say that any one of the American deaths in Iraq has been

necessary.

Martin O. Sabo, D-Minn., is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

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