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When it comes to federal spending and government influence, Americans are demanding less – much less. Across the country, job seekers, businesses and workers are rightfully frustrated with the uncertainty and runaway spending that continues to overshadow the prospect of sustainable recovery and growth.

Here is a fact worth considering: It took 43 U.S. Presidents, from the time George Washington took the oath of office, to amass \$9 trillion in national debt. But, in just the last 19 months, America has added nearly \$4 trillion to that number, raising the federal debt to a staggering \$13 trillion.

That's right. In less than two years, the national debt has increased by almost 50 percent while our nation's fiscal outlook becomes less promising at every turn. By 2015, the Department of Treasury estimates that national debt levels will exceed \$19 trillion, consuming most of the American economy and effectively constraining most other funding priorities.

First it was the nearly \$1 trillion stimulus that Americans will be paying for well into 2019, even though it was promised to be "timely, targeted and temporary." Then it was the bailouts. After that, it was a government takeover of health care. Add the proposed cap and trade energy policy still under consideration, including its onerous tax increases on households and businesses, and it's understandable why so many Americans ardently disapprove of the direction America is heading.

What's more, there's been no upside to all the spending and new regulation. Even with vast infusions of federal dollars, unemployment nationwide has stagnated at or above 9.5 percent for 12 consecutive months. In San Diego, unemployment sits above 10 percent while state-wide, more than 500,000 jobs have been lost since the stimulus was signed into law. That's far from the level of recovery that was promised or expected.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office put the overall cost of the stimulus in proper perspective, reporting recently that eight years of combat in Iraq, including training Iraqi forces

and diplomatic operations, cost less than the stimulus. And that doesn't take into account all the other costly initiatives, namely the new health care law, contributing to record-high debt levels.

Americans recognize there is a better way forward, without adding to the deficit or inhibiting local job creators. There are two steps that can be taken right away, consistent with a two-point plan put forward by House Republicans for immediate, bipartisan action to help jump-start the economy:

- Cut non-security government spending for the next year to fiscal year 2008 levels – before the bailouts, government intervention and stimulus spending. Exceptions should be made for programs affecting seniors, veterans and national security. This would save taxpayers \$100 billion in the first year alone and provide even greater savings over time;
- Enact a two-year freeze on all current tax rates to stop job-killing tax hikes on families and small businesses. Doing so would help eliminate much the uncertainty employers and entrepreneurs are facing. Worth noting: Peter Orszag, President Obama's former budget director, endorsed a two-year freeze, writing in the New York Times that higher taxes would make a stagnating job market worse.

Taking these steps would lay the foundation for policies that offer the economy a legitimate chance at recovery, while beginning the process of addressing escalating costs. Savings add up quickly, which is why other programs identified as wasteful, unnecessary or duplicative, such as those highlighted by the online forum YouCut (available at www.hunter.house.gov), must also be cut from the federal budget.

Over the August work period, I toured over a dozen San Diego area businesses and talked with owners and employees about their experiences and ideas for moving forward. Their message was consistent: restore confidence by cutting spending and eliminating uncertainty. They all recognize that conditions will eventually improve, but only when businesses are given the opportunity to grow.

More stimulus spending is once again being proposed. But instead of following the same plan that keeps falling short, it's time for a new approach that starts with cutting costs and preventing

tax increases on business and families. That's a good place to start.