

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The United States House of Representatives passed its version of the 2002 Supplemental Appropriations Act (H.R. 4775) early this morning by a vote of 280-138.

Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 30), the only congressional member from Southern California who is on the House Ways and Means Committee, voted against the bill because it contained provisions that would pave the way for Congress to raise the debt ceiling by an additional \$750 billion. While he supported the bill's \$29 billion in supplemental appropriations for the war on terrorism, airline and homeland security, and other needed programs, the debt ceiling provision and its repercussions on Social Security and Medicare was the catalyst for Rep. Becerra's decision to vote against the bill.

Below is Rep. Becerra's floor speech during yesterday's debate.

"I wish to first begin by saying that I stand here today to support our troops fighting terrorism, not just abroad, but certainly here at home; to support all our men and women in law enforcement civilly who are doing the same; to support our medical personnel; our community activists who are doing their utmost to work with our law enforcement; and military leaders to make America safer. We are committed, all of us, to once again make America safe and free from harm.

"Unfortunately, my friends in the majority are using the battle against terrorism to pass what I believe is a dangerous and cynical provision that allows the federal government to break its own spending limit and raid hundreds of billions of dollars from the Social Security and Medicare trust funds.

"America can be strong militarily without becoming weak economically. But our friends in the majority are hoping they can escape today's debate without leveling with the American public. The nation is back into deficit, and now my friends in the majority plan to use Social Security and Medicare trust fund dollars to pay for other programs unrelated to national defense and to counterterrorism.

"With all the conflicting statements said on this floor tonight, it would not surprise me if many

people, including members on this floor or people in the American public who happen to be watching this debate, are confused. But there is one rule that I believe stands the test of time, and that is that sunshine is the strongest of all disinfectants, particularly when it comes to ensuring that the political and policymaking process is untainted.

"The Republican leadership, with this bill today and with the White House, which has endorsed this legislation, are borrowing a page from Enron and using gimmicks and stealth to hide the true nature of their plans for America's future. They are attempting to keep the American people in the dark about our nation's budget challenges and the growing national debt.

"This resort to stealth and secrecy, to me, is tremendously chilling. With this bill, the administration is seeking to raise the debt limit with no strings attached. They have disclosed nothing about their plans to repair our damaged fiscal situation.

"We have already been told by the Secretary of the Treasury that he wants to borrow at least another \$750 billion more to increase that national debt, a national debt which will have to be paid for exclusively, every single cent of that \$750 billion or more in increased debt, from Social Security or Medicare trust fund dollars. What we are essentially doing is pulling out the Federal credit card and borrowing and adding to our massive debt of nearly \$6 trillion.

"I will say that one more time: every single penny that would be used to increase the size of the debt and the deficit for this year would come directly out of only two pots, Social Security and Medicare trust fund dollars. Not only are we jeopardizing our seniors, not only are we jeopardizing those who need prescription drug coverage under Medicare, but we are jeopardizing all of our children. I do not intend to use the government's credit card and mortgage my children's future, but that is what we are being asked to do today. But it is being done under the cloak of national defense and antiterrorism.

"Let us stop the secrecy. Let us have a clean vote and not mortgage our children's future."

The Senate version of the bill recently passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee, but has not yet been scheduled for a floor vote. The Senate bill has no provisions to raise the debt ceiling.