

I'm sure I am not the only one who sat through President Obama's State of the Union speech last week and noticed something was missing. In a 64-minute address, the president didn't talk about our national debt, he didn't bring up the need to get federal spending under control, and he didn't mention his budget. This is a glaring omission on arguably the most important issue of our era.

This February, however, the president will throw up a last-second shot – a budget proposal he'll release at least a week late, on the Internet, for no apparent reason. His buzzer-beater budget will be full of numbers that will never see the light of day. Instead, we will get sound bites and windy explanations of how the multi-trillion-dollar plan is responsible and realistic.

There may be a good reason why the president won't raise the subject of the federal budget: it is not a serious document. But he has plenty of company. The U.S. Senate, as of the State of the Union speech, had gone exactly one thousand days without passing a federal budget. It's not serious either.

And in the U.S. House of Representatives, where we have adhered to our responsibility to pass yearly budgets, that process is marked by partisanship, sharp disagreement, distortion and people trying to one-up each other.

In the Senate, the lack of a budget for going on four years has meant little accountability in the way lawmakers there spend the taxpayers' dollars. Without the caps and limits imposed by a budget, Senators write their spending bills without really knowing how much of their proposals are paid for. That's a problem.

Through the one appropriations subcommittee I chair in the House of Representatives (there are 12), I wrote and negotiated a bill for Financial Services and General Government spending that cut some 25 percent from the president's budget – billions of dollars the president wanted to spend on new and expanded programs, more money we don't have on agencies with budgets that are too big already.

The problem with the budget process is that the president's numbers are often pulled from thin

air. His first budget, in 2009, counted on \$900 billion in new revenues from a cap-and-trade carbon tax. Congress didn't pass that terrible idea into law, but the president was already spending the money on the federal bureaucracy.

Compound the president's "wishful-thinking" budget with the complete lack of a budget from the U.S. Senate, and you have a recipe for disaster. Who can complain about where the money is going if no one can see the plan for spending it? A plan, I might add, that families all over America make at their kitchen tables not every year – but every month and every week.

The budget process demands accountability from elected leaders. When they aren't accountable, taxpayer money gets abused, wasted and defrauded in federal offices the president will never enter and the public will never see.

Budget reform is important because it is necessary for spending reform. Clearly, this is a problem that many folks in Washington are reluctant to talk about. They should be embarrassed for not taking seriously a problem that threatens the future of our nation – and our children – for generations to come.