

\$344 billion in interest payments. Those resources would be available to return to the American taxpayer, to this Georgia family that is losing half of its income to government, so that they could do the job we are asking of them.

Mr. President, it was a very disappointing vote yesterday. It was exceedingly costly to every American family. A balanced budget would save the average American family \$2,388 a year in mortgage payments, \$1,026 in a 4-year car loan, \$1,891 over a 10-year student loan.

The net effect of having passed a balanced budget amendment, the net effect of having balanced budgets would immediately leave \$3,000 to \$4,000 in the checking account of this average Georgia family—\$3,000 to \$4,000. That is the equivalent of a 10- to 20-percent pay raise. That is what we are talking about.

You get passed it all, talking about the checking account of a typical family at work, doing what they have to do to get the country up in the morning, to get it to school and get it ready. We have impaired, drastically, their ability to do it. Passage of a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, as Jefferson called for, as Senator SIMON called for, as Senator DOLE called for, is the best single thing we can do to protect the integrity of these working Americans all across the land, tomorrow and for the year to come.

I see the time I was allotted has expired. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ABRAHAM). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I may speak as in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MEDICARE TRUST FUND

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, first, I want to commend the distinguished Senator from Georgia [Mr. COVERDELL], and those who spoke this morning on the subject of a balanced budget amendment and the unfortunate consequences of our failure to deal with the problem of the ever-increasing deficits.

We also had a few of those Senators mention, as an aside, the problem with the Medicare trust fund. I wanted to remind Senators that we had a hearing yesterday in the Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the Department of Health and Human Services, and Secretary Donna Shalala came before the committee to present the President's proposed budget for that Depart-

ment for the next fiscal year. She serves, along with others in the administration, on this panel of trustees, whose responsibility it is to monitor and help keep Congress and the administration informed about the integrity of the trust fund, and supports the Medicare Program.

The trustees, earlier this week, talked about the fact that the worst case scenario for future deficits in that program had been exceeded, and that rather than having the program go bankrupt, be hopelessly insolvent by the year 2002, it was going to be bankrupt earlier. By the year 2000, it would be out of balance by over \$30 billion, and the following year, it would be out of balance and in deficit at the figure of \$100 billion.

The consequences of this report have to wake up everybody to the realization that unless Congress and the administration quit playing politics with this issue, it is going to be insolvent. This program is going to be in jeopardy, and benefits are going to be in jeopardy as well.

I think the time has come for us to say, OK, the Republican Congress passed a balanced budget act last year. It included in that suggested reforms in the Medicare Program that would have put it in balance, would have kept it solvent, would have made some needed changes in the program to give older citizens more choices, more protection, so that their medical expenses and benefits could continue to be paid through this program.

The President vetoed the bill. He rejected the balanced budget act. So we started over again. This year, the Budget Committee is wrestling with the problem of reconciling budget resolutions, which contain projected expenditures under this program, as well as all other Federal programs, with an effort to continue to build toward a balanced budget plan as soon as possible. Their projection is the year 2002.

What I am going to suggest is that, in this politically charged environment of Presidential politics and campaigns for House and Senate seats underway—and we have to admit it—it is unlikely that this administration is going to change its mind and embrace the Republican proposals. And so we have to acknowledge that.

The President, at the same time, has made a counteroffer, as I understand it, and has proposed some changes in the Medicare Program, which would achieve savings of \$116 billion over the same period of time. The Republican proposals would have achieved savings of almost \$170 billion.

Let us say, OK, Mr. President, have it your way for the short term. Let us introduce the President's proposed changes in the Medicare Program. Let us accept his proposals for changes and cuts in the Medicare Program and enact them next week, or the week following. If the reconciliation bill from the Budget Committee's resolution is vetoed by the President or not sup-

ported by the Democrats in that area of the budget, let us isolate the Medicare Program changes and enact some changes.

I suggest, let us enact the President's proposed changes and cuts in the program and, at the same time, establish a commission—which the President has recommended, the trustees have recommended in their report, including Secretary Shalala, Secretary Reich, Secretary Rubin, and others, who serve on that trustee panel—to recommend long-term changes in the Medicare Program that would ensure its solvency and protect the benefits for the older citizens in our society over the long term.

I do not see anything wrong with that. As a matter of fact, I have been suggesting that that be considered as an alternative. If Congress and the President cannot agree on what changes ought to be made, get a commission together, much like the Base Closure Commission, or the Social Security Commission, which was formed in 1983 and chaired by Alan Greenspan. It made recommendations to save the Social Security trust fund from bankruptcy, and Congress and the President agreed at that time to accept the recommendation of that commission and implement it.

That ought to be a part of this legislation—that we establish that commission, agree to implement its recommendations, and have a vote on it. If you do not want to implement them, vote no; be against everything. But we have to come to terms with the reality of the situation. The longer we wait, the harder the solution is going to be and the more sacrifices that are going to have to be made by everybody—the taxpayers. If we do not make these changes, do you know what is going to happen? Pretty soon, you are going to see the taxes on the employers and employees to fund this program being increased—and by substantial sums.

Now, the older population is getting older and, thank goodness, medical science is wonderful and it is giving us all opportunities for longer lives. But coming with that, too, are added expenses, as you get older, for medical care. Our senior citizens confront the reality every day of this terrible fear, and that is that they will not have the funds, they will not have access to the care they need to enjoy the longevity that they now have, compliments of medical science, good nutrition, and the advances that we have made for good health in our society.

So I say that it is time to stop the partisan politics. Let us quit throwing rocks at each other across the aisle, blaming each other for not getting anything done. I am prepared to say, as a Member of the Republican leadership in the Senate, OK, Mr. President, let us enact your proposal.

I am going to introduce a bill next week, and I hope there will be Senators on both sides of the aisle who will say, OK, let us go along with this suggestion as an alternative to what we have

been getting. And what we have been getting is nothing—gridlock, confrontation, yelling at each other, people getting red in the face, and nothing getting done.

I think the American people are fed up with that kind of politics, fed up with that kind of Government. I am fed up with it. It is time to change. We ought to do it now—before it is too late.

I yield the floor.

Mr. THOMAS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, are we in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Let the Chair advise the Senator that he may proceed as in morning business.

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

Mr. THOMAS. I thank the Chair. I will only take 5 minutes. I wanted to do a couple of things. I want to thank the Senator from Georgia for bringing some discussion today as a follow-up to this vote on the balanced budget amendment. I am very disappointed that that balanced budget amendment to the Constitution did not pass. I think there are obviously reasons that it should have passed. Obviously, it was very close to passage. The reasons, of course, have to do with responsibility, with morality of Government, with fiscal responsibility.

Everyone accepts the idea that we should not be continuously spending more than we take in. It has to do with the historic performance of the Federal Government for 25 years, or more, since we have balanced the budget last. Everybody gets up, and the first thing they say is, "Yes, I am for balancing the budget"—the same people who have been here for 25 years and have never balanced the budget. They say, "We do not need an amendment; we will just do it." Well, we have not just done it.

So I am very disappointed in that. I suspect that we will have some more opportunities to do that.

I come from a State where the constitution provides for a balanced budget. Frankly, it works very well. It is a discipline, and the government works within that discipline. It is one of the elements of good government—one of the elements that says, "All right. We want a program. Here is what it will cost. Are you willing to pay for it?" If you are not, if we are not, if I am not, then we should not do it. That is what this fiscal responsibility is all about.

I think the best instance of that, of course, is a property tax where we live. The school district says, "We need a new science building. Here is what it will cost." Is it worth it? You vote. Are you willing to pay for it, or are not you?

I want to talk about a change that needs to take place in the budget process. Last year we took the whole year and deferred getting the budget finished. Now we are in a year of budget-

ing, and we are spending such a large amount of our time on the budget. Congress has more responsibilities than simply the budget. Indeed, the budget is very important. The budget is sort of an outline of what we are going to do. But the Congress also has, and the Senate also has, many other responsibilities, such as oversight, such as seeing if bills that have been passed and are up for renewal have, indeed, been effective, whether they need to be changed, whether they need to be renewed. This is a big job, and we are supposed to be doing that. But instead, we are going back and forth spending the whole year practically every year on the budget.

I have a bill that has bipartisan support that asks for reform in budgeting and doing a biennial budget. I think there is a great deal of merit in a biennial budget. No. 1, it is better for the Government. It is better for the agencies. They at least have 2 years of planning for what they can do in their expenditures; 2 years in which they can plan how to manage their dollars. It is much better for the Congress. It is done in most legislative bodies—biennial budgeting. It has been supported by both sides of the aisle.

The resolution that we introduced this year is supported by Senator DOMENICI, who is head of the Budget Committee, and we think we can make this reform next year. I think, as we spend all of this time on budgeting, we spend the whole year practically on budgeting rather than some of the other things that we ought to be doing in addition to budgeting, it makes it more clear that there needs to be some reform. We need to have a biennial budget.

So, Mr. President, obviously, we are not going to get to that this year. There are relatively few working days left. That will not be one of the issues. I am not naive to think that. But I do say to you that I do not think there is anything more important in terms of restructuring our process than to take a look at biennial budgeting. I intend to bring it up again next year. I have been promised support by those who are much more knowledgeable than I about budgeting.

I recognize that there is always resistance from the appropriators. I was on the Appropriations Committee when I was in the legislature. Appropriators have a great deal of influence over all kinds of things because they control spending, and everybody is interested in how spending is done and how it affects their State. So appropriators are reluctant, of course, to lose the authority that they have every year by going through this process. I am sorry for that, but I think they to do a better job if they do it on a biennial basis.

Mr. President, I appreciate the time. I hope we will continue to talk a little bit about how we might change some of the processes in this Congress; that we talk about results rather than procedure; that, instead of saying we have been doing it for 200 years, maybe so,

but we ought to see what the results have been for having done that for 200 years. There are some things that should not be changed. There are some fundamentals that should not be changed. But there are some processes that are not producing the results that we want, and one of them is budgeting. The result is a \$5 trillion debt, the interest on which is the largest single line item in the budget.

Mr. President, I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent I be allowed to proceed under the 1 hour that has been reserved by the minority leader.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REPUBLICAN GRANDCHILDREN

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I have listened this morning to some of the discussion on the floor of the Senate. I felt I needed to come over and speak, at least for historical records, speak to the Republican grandchildren a bit, because the Republican grandchildren have been spoken to on the floor of the Senate about a range of issues. They have been described on the floor of the Senate as victims of legislative problems created this week by a vote on the constitutional amendment to balance the budget.

All grandchildren are affected by what happens in these Chambers, in the Chambers of the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate. Grandchildren will ask the tough questions in the years ahead about the country in which they live, the country in which they are growing up. They might ask some questions about what has made this a wonderful place. There are some who simply cannot concede this is a worthy place to live. They talk about how awful America is. America has gone to hell in a handbasket, they say. America has gone to the dogs.

It is interesting, we have people talking about building fences to keep people out of America because we have so many people who want to come here. This country is a remarkable place, with enormous challenges, to be sure. We have faced challenges before. We faced a Civil War and survived it and came back together. We faced the threat of Adolph Hitler. We faced the threat of a depression. We have survived all of those threats and all of those challenges. Do we have challenges now? Of course; enormous challenges, substantial challenges. But is this a remarkable, wonderful country that the rest of the world looks up to, the rest of the world wants to come to? Of course it is.