

also agree with what President Clinton said in the State of the Union Message that we want a balanced budget? The answer is right there in the Chamber where he spoke. We can vote for it, and he can sign it, and we can do that without amending the Constitution.

The Constitution has been amended only 17 times since the Bill of Rights. Is that correct?

Mr. DORGAN. That is correct. As I pointed out, if the Constitution is amended at 2:25 today, at 2:26 the deficit will not have decreased by one penny. Why? Because altering the Constitution will not decrease the deficit. Only individual choices by men and women of goodwill in this Chamber who are willing to take some risks and take a little heat for it will cut the deficit and finally balance the budget.

I am willing to do that. I demonstrated that in 1993, as did the Senator from Vermont. We had the fiscal discipline.

If we can get some others to join us, we can balance this Federal budget. I just do not want us to play games, saying we balanced the budget, only then trying to explain to our children why the Federal debt continues to increase at the same time. That is not balancing the budget.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I thank the Senator. I believe the other side wishes to have time, and I yield the floor.

Ms. SNOWE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SESSIONS). The Senator from Maine.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Ms. SNOWE. I ask unanimous consent that at the hour of 2:30 p.m. today, the Senate turn to executive session to consider the nomination of Rodney Slater under a previous consent agreement.

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

Ms. SNOWE. For the information of all Senators, a rollcall vote is now scheduled to occur at approximately 3 o'clock on the nomination of Rodney Slater.

I yield the floor.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, could I just ask the distinguished Senator from Maine, and obviously I have no objection to this request, is it my understanding that the Senate will then go into a short recess for a caucus, or what is the plan? I just want to be advised.

Ms. SNOWE. That is correct. We are going to recess from 3 to 4 for a Republican conference.

Mr. LEAHY. The reason I asked that, Mr. President, we have been trying, Senator HATCH and I and those who filled in for us, to go back and forth on this debate, so I just alert people. Obviously, it is the proponents' of the amendment turn to go, and I yield the floor.

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Senate continued with the consideration of the joint resolution.

Mr. GRASSLEY addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I rise in support of this constitutional amendment. I have had an opportunity each and every time—and I suppose this is the fifth or sixth time now—in the period of time I have been in the Senate to vote for a constitutional amendment because I believe that such a statement in the Constitution would be a legitimate part of the Constitution. I learned that from serving in a State legislative body where I worked with such a statement within our State constitution, and I saw it bring discipline to both Republicans and Democrats in State legislative bodies to balance the budget, to be fiscally responsible, and have each generation pay its own way.

I have also voted for it because there is not such a statement within the Federal Constitution, and I have seen the lack of discipline in the Congress of the United States to balance the budget. Since I have seen that discipline work at the State legislative level and since State governments tend to be laboratories for our political system, I think we can, with a great deal of certainty and ease of mind, feel confident that we are doing the right thing by placing that discipline on Members of Congress.

The rule of law is something that is traditional to our British-American legal system. Other societies as well might have a rule of law not exactly like ours but still have a respect for basic documents. The purpose of the rule of law is predictability and stability for the future.

Constitutions are part of the rule of law. Constitutions are adopted by societies because it brings discipline to policymakers in Government. It brings a certainty to the relationship of people who govern and the people who are governed. Part of that certainty is discipline on the part of policymakers like those of us in the Congress. So we have a Constitution, and it has worked well to bring stability, to bring discipline, and to bring predictability to the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed.

We see that discipline works in most of the policymaking between the Federal Government and our people, but we have not seen discipline work in the fiscal arena. Has it always been that way? No, it has not always been that way, because for the first 160 years of our country, except during times of war, we had more years where we had budgets balanced and surpluses than years we ran deficits. It was pretty well understood that fiscal discipline, even though it was not written in the Constitution, was an integral part of the tradition of America.

Since the year 1969, or for most of the time since World War II, that has not

been the case. We have shown anything but discipline when it comes to being a caretaker of the tax dollars we raise. The American public sees that. That is why, overwhelmingly, in mail and surveys and everything else, the people of the United States are telling the Congress we need discipline in fiscal matters and that they see a constitutional amendment as bringing that discipline.

It has been 28 years since the time we last ran a surplus. Congress in that period of time has made some feeble attempts to bring our national debt under control—but has failed. I have served with many fine Congressmen and Senators who have made valiant efforts to curb runaway spending. Regardless of their good faith, no balanced budget was produced. The goal has remained out of reach. In the end, then, we must conclude the will to balance the budget has been weak. That is why we desperately need the discipline of a constitutional amendment.

The scope of the national debt is immense. Every year this monster grows as it gobbles up the American dream for our young people. That American dream says that our children should have a better life than our generation as we had a better life than our mothers and fathers, as our mothers and fathers had a better life than our grandfathers and grandmothers. But the American dream is being snuffed out because of fiscal irresponsibility.

This situation has gotten so bad that we now spend nearly 40 cents of every dollar that we collect in income taxes just to pay interest costs on this national debt. The danger of this for the economy and the potentially disastrous effects for future generations have become impossible to ignore. You have to look long and hard these days to find public servants who do not say that they support balancing the budget. That is on both sides of the aisle. Rhetoric in support of budgetary control is at an unprecedented level. But it ends up that talk tends to be too cheap. I am sorry to say, and, as a result, the budget still remains unbalanced.

We must then have the structural discipline of a balanced budget amendment. Fortunately, there has been some progress made lately in bringing down the deficit. For the most part, this is the result of two actions—one by the Republican-controlled 104th Congress, and the other by President Clinton. In the case of the Republican-controlled 104th Congress, some spending restraint that we enacted; in the case of President Clinton, it was his suggestion for the largest ever tax increase that passed in 1993.

Now, of course, some of this reduction in the deficit can be explained by better than expected economic growth, which was mainly the result of the Federal Reserve's wise economic policies. And, despite initial budgets of President Clinton which projected deficits as far as the eye can see, the Congress has been able to submit a budget which balances by the year 2002. This is

all good news. But the political balance is fragile, and we are still waiting for the debt to be tamed.

The American people have had enough. That is why they are telling us, by an overwhelming percentage: Adopt the fiscal discipline of a constitutional amendment. They sent us here to work to restore the American dream for our children and grandchildren.

I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will work with us on this amendment. The national debt has become the gift that keeps on taking. It is unconscionable that we would saddle our children and grandchildren with such a backbreaking public debt. But, if we do not impose the fiscal restraint that only the balanced budget amendment can provide, this debt will be passed on to future generations, and they will be faced with crippling high taxes. Americans will be working harder and longer for less and less.

Such a scenario simply cannot be tolerated, and is not tolerated today at the grassroots. It is only tolerated here, in this Disneyland of Washington, DC.

Passing the buck of the Federal debt to our children and grandchildren is not just an economic problem that they face. It is an immoral problem for us. Because, when you get right down to it, this deficit spending is evidence that this generation, my generation, can live high on the hog and leave the bill to our children and grandchildren to pick up. We must bring the spending binge under control. And the only way to do this in a serious and lasting way is to pass the balanced budget amendment.

I say this after having served as both a Congressman and a Senator and having worked through several attempts to get the national debt and deficit under control. Everything we have tried to date has failed. The Budget and Impoundment Control Act, Gramm-Rudman I and II, and so many other well-intentioned acts and procedures have all come up short. I'll have more to say on this later.

Mr. President, now, more than ever, we have a moral duty to pass the balanced budget amendment. It will force both the Congress and the President, regardless of which party is in control, to live up to their constitutional responsibilities of confronting the national debt. And when those of us here in Washington are forced to live within our means, just like American families do, every American will benefit. Interest rates will go down, which will mean lower payments for car loans, student loans, and mortgages. And by reducing the cost of living, the American dream will still be attainable. This is especially important today when it often takes two wage earners to make ends meet.

When I talk with the folks back home in Iowa, they let me know that we have to get our fiscal house in order. An overwhelming majority of

them support the balanced budget amendment. It has been our experience in Iowa that the state constitutional balanced budget requirement works. Whether the legislature is controlled by Democrats or Republicans, our elected officials have abided by it. We here in Washington have a great deal to learn from Iowa and the many other States where similar procedures have been successful.

As the only family farmer in the Senate, I think it is also important to note that the American Farm Bureau Federation supports the balanced budget amendment. Even though many farmers, including those in my home State, have had to shoulder a large part of the load in budget reduction recently, they know that their livelihood depends on the long-term economic health of the country. They know that there can be no future for the American farmer, or anyone else, if deficit spending is not reined in. We need the budget discipline mandated by the balanced budget amendment in order to guarantee the survival of the American dream for farmers and everyone who benefits from their labor.

Another alarming aspect of our Federal debt is the growing percentage which is held by foreign interests. The proportion of overseas holdings in our debt is approaching 20 percent. In essence, we have seen the slow drip of national sovereignty going down the drain. If we do not control the Federal debt soon, this drip will become a steady stream. So, in a very real sense, irresponsible Federal budgeting has compromised our national security. The time to put a halt to this trend is now.

So, Mr. President, I conclude today by saying it is a moral imperative that we pass the balanced budget amendment. This is not a decision I come to lightly. I am very hesitant about making additions to our Constitution. But our Founding Fathers knew that there would be critical moments in our Republic's history when problems of great difficulty would arise which would require constitutional force in order to solve them. That is why the Constitution was designed to be amended in such circumstances. I would remind my colleagues that all we in Congress can do is send this measure to the States and let the people of America decide whether it will become law. Why is a vocal minority here in Congress so afraid of letting democracy work and letting the people decide?

Our ever-expanding national debt is a problem of fundamental importance which justifies a constitutional solution. We cannot let another Congress go by in which we do not confront this issue and impose discipline on this institution. Our future and that of our children and grandchildren depend on it.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate began debate on the balanced-budget constitutional amendment, of which I am an ardent sup-

porter. Passing this amendment, and abiding by it, is the most important action we can take to protect the future of our children, grandchildren, and future grandchildren. Congress' insatiable appetite for spending is mortgaging the prosperity of these future generations. Not only is this irresponsible, but it is immoral.

Our Founding Fathers recognized the basic principle that the Federal Government must not spend beyond its means. Thomas Jefferson said, "We should consider ourselves unauthorized to saddle posterity with our debts, and morally bound to pay them ourselves." Unfortunately, we have strayed far from Mr. Jefferson's wise advice.

The Federal Government's uncontrolled spending has built up an enormous national debt that currently stands at \$5.3 billion. Apportioned equally, this means that every man, woman and child in this country currently owes almost \$20,000. Put another way, if you spent a dollar every second, it would take 150,000 years to spend our current debt. And our debt is still growing by \$4,500 per second—about the same amount it would cost to send three people to a community college.

The economic rewards for balancing the budget should be reason enough to act. Many well respected economists predict that if the budget were balanced, interest rates would drop by about 2 percent. This would mean annual savings of \$1,230 on a middle-class family's home mortgage; \$216 on an average student loan; and \$180 on an average auto loan. In the Federal budget world of billions and trillions, these savings are all too often ignored, but these are real savings that would lead to a better life for America's families.

Although Congress has talked endlessly about balancing the budget, the budget has not been balanced since 1969. Without a balanced-budget constitutional amendment, I doubt the President or Congress will ever have the political courage to balance the budget. We simply lack the discipline to control our spending habits. We have ignored our responsibility to put our fiscal house in order, choosing instead to leave future generations of Americans with an overwhelming legacy of debt. It is simply immoral to allow this deficit spending to continue. Our duty as elected officials must be to preserve a strong and solvent nation for the next generation.

Let us show the American people that we take our duties seriously. We must prove we are ready to embrace fiscal responsibility permanently. The moment has finally come for Congress to pass the balanced budget amendment and send it on to the States. Let us begin a national debate, in every State legislature in this country. Americans have waited decades for this opportunity. They have waited long enough.