

Is this a balanced budget? By any definition of that word, this is a balanced budget.

Mr. SCHUMER. I thank the Senator from South Dakota and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. I wonder if my leader, Senator DASCHLE, will engage in just a bit more of a colloquy at this point?

Mr. DASCHLE. I will be happy to.

Mrs. BOXER. I have been on budget committees for years, 6 years in the House and now, since I came to the Senate, it is a total of 13 years. This is a remarkable moment in history, as my friend has pointed out. I wanted to talk to him about why we are where we are.

It has been very difficult for quite a while, back to the days of the burgeoning deficits that started under President Reagan and escalated under President Bush and only were brought under control with the Clinton-Gore team. Finally, we now can do something for the American people, do something they need. Now we can do something they need in education. We talked about Senator MURRAY's push to reduce class size. We see in this budget the ability to do that. We see in this budget \$1 billion for afterschool care, for which we have struggled mightily, which means millions of kids are going to have that. We see the targeted tax breaks.

So my question to my friend is, we are at this point and we are at this point for a reason. It was hard to get here. Fiscal responsibility does bring rewards. We tell that to our children: Save for the time you need to spend; be careful with your resources. We have done that. I wonder if my friend can recall the key vote, back in 1993, when, without one Republican vote, we were able to get through a budget which has led to these kinds of surpluses and the surpluses, in turn, are giving us the ability to pay down the debt, save Social Security, save Medicare, and make these targeted tax cuts and investments? Could he recall for us what it was like to get that through?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair will advise the Senator from California, under the previous order she has a minute and a half remaining.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I ask the colloquy be taken off my leader time, if I could.

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

Mrs. BOXER. I am done with my remarks. I want to get my friend to evoke for us how hard it was to get to this particular point in which we find ourselves.

Mr. DASCHLE. It was so hard that there are some colleagues who are no longer here because they paid the price. Before we could see the results, of course, there were some across the country who made a judgment about the prudence of their very difficult decisions in 1993 and chose not to send them back to Washington. They paid

the ultimate political price so we could enjoy the fiscal glory we are enjoying today.

I can recall so vividly talking to some of my colleagues who, up until the very last moment, weighed whether this was the right thing to do. Only in the last few moments they made the decision to take the chance. But this was in the face of tremendous opposition, vocal opposition from the other side, projecting recessions and unemployment and extraordinary fiscal repercussions that we would feel for perhaps the rest of our professional lives. There were warnings, extraordinary in their scope and depth and visceral disgust, for what we were attempting to do.

It was an overpowering moment, to see the Vice President cast that tie-breaking vote to give us the opportunity to put this budget on the fiscal path, a moment that we now look back on with great pride. What remarkable opportunities it presented. Twenty million new jobs—how do you put a value on that? We have an economy that has taken the stock market to heights we never dreamed. We have more homeowners than at any time in our history; two out of every three people have their own homes today, in large measure because of our fiscal responsibility and the incredible success we have enjoyed. I would say these did not come easy.

Maybe the fight this year will not be in any way near the proportions or depth of feeling as when it was fought out on the floor of the Senate back in 1993. But it has the same repercussions. How fragile this all is. How easy it would be to go back and cast our votes for a huge tax cut that would destroy all of this in one fell swoop. It could happen again. If we don't understand the repercussions of a tax cut by now, it could happen again.

I urge my colleagues to read this budget, to think carefully about what it is we have been able to do and how we have been able to do it, and make absolutely certain, before we depart from a blueprint that I think demonstrates remarkable balance, that we think long and hard about alternatives.

Mr. President, I appreciate the question proposed by the Senator from California.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 10:30 a.m. shall be in the control of the Senator from Wyoming.

The Senator from Wyoming.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I appreciate the opportunity to comment a little. I suppose I might have a different view than what we heard in the last 35 minutes, about what a wonderful budget we have and that we can now return to the era of big government. Not everyone is happy about that, as we might have heard over the last few minutes.

As we look realistically at these things, we have to look at a time that has been prosperous. It started in 1991, in fact. We moved forward. We have a surplus projected, largely because of the strong economy, of course. Also, it is a result, frankly, of a majority in this Congress that, since 1994, has held down spending. That is a little difficult for my friends to accept, of course, but we have now an opportunity to take a look at a relatively prosperous time. Certainly, we want to continue that. We want to take a look at the things that ought to be done for the people of the United States, using their tax money. We ought to take a look at how we strengthen education and return the opportunities to make the decisions about education to the local level rather than doing what the President wants to do, and that is to decide in Washington what each school district ought to have.

We have quite a different philosophy on how we approach this, and that is reasonable. That is why we are here, to represent different views. The things we heard this morning would all represent the idea of more Government, more Government spending, more decisions made in Washington. That is a legitimate point of view. It is a point of view of many in the minority. It is not the point of view of most of us in the majority. So that is what we will be up to, over the next several months and, indeed, this year: deciding as best we can how to come together on these decisions.

It was not long ago, you will recall, when President Clinton suggested in his State of the Union Address that the era of big government was over. That seems now not to be the issue at all. In fact, apparently the era of big government has returned. If this budget is put into place, that is exactly what we will see. Many think that is the greatest way to go. I think that is legitimate. So that is what the debates will be about.

We have before us suggestions of substantial amounts of surplus. This is the first time in 25 years the budget has been balanced. That is largely because of some controls on spending. We have been increasing spending over the last couple of years, I think amply, but still in the level of about 3 percent. Prior to that time, in the early 1980s and the early 1990s, we were expanding as high as 12 percent. That has been reduced some, and that is part of it. Certainly the President's tax increase, back in 1994-1995, had some effect.

Also, the tax reduction brought on by the Republicans helped stimulate the economy. We will have a lot of basic things about which to talk.

This is a huge budget, \$1.8 trillion. What is that, 1,800 billion dollars? We will have to talk about each of the areas in which that spending will take place.

Basically, there are some philosophical things. If we think about

where we are going with our Government and the decisions we will be making in elections—that is what politics is about, to set the direction of Government, and we will be doing that.

We start with some basic things. We start with putting priorities on the role of the Federal Government and then funding those priorities. Again, not everyone will agree, but that needs to be done, it seems to me. There is no end to the way we can spend money. There are many programs on which we can spend it. I believe we can start by saying to ourselves: What are the legitimate functions of the Federal Government? What should the taxpayers' money be used for, and what are the priorities?

When we come to some agreement on that and, in fact, have begun to fund those priorities adequately—I just came from a breakfast with the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Having been in the Marine Corps, I was happy to be there. The defense of this country is one of the real priorities, and certainly we need to fund the military adequately. We need to fund education. We need to fund health care. There are a number of things, perhaps, at which we ought to take a long look.

The President has proposed 43, I believe—in the neighborhood of 40—new programs. There is a surplus, he says, so let's spend the money. Fine, but let's take a look at the priorities and see, with respect to local governments, if this is where it ought to be done.

Social Security: I do not think there is anyone who does not agree that Social Security is an issue that is a high priority. As I said yesterday, these young people who are starting to pay into that program will pay the largest percentage of their income for a longer time than they will pay in any other tax. Are they going to have benefits at the end of 40 or 50 years? The answer should be, yes, they will. To do that, we have to make some changes.

There are no proposals in this budget to make any significant changes in Social Security, other than to take something out of the general fund, which is not a long-range proposal. We have some ideas how we can do that.

The other thing we have to recognize, even though certainly it is a step in the right direction, is the idea of reducing the deficit with Social Security funds. We have to take a long look at that. It is a good idea, and we should put that Social Security money there as opposed to spending it in the general budget, but the fact is that we are replacing publicly held debt with some other debt that has to be repaid by the taxpayers when that Social Security is drawn out. It is less expensive as well, so it is a good idea, and it does get it out of the grasp of the Congress.

What we ought to be doing, if we are serious about the debt, is instead of spending more, we ought to be saying: Let's take a certain amount of that money out of the operating funds, decide over a period of time we are going

to pay off this debt, and do it as one does with a home mortgage—we are going to pay so much every year for 15 years; not Social Security money, but regular operating money.

That Social Security money also needs to be taken out of our grasp, and we are hoping we can do that by having individual accounts where Social Security money belongs to the older person who paid into it, where those dollars, as a way of ensuring there will be benefits, can be invested in equities or bonds and will produce a higher return. It will also belong to the person. If they are unfortunate enough not to live to get all the benefits, it will go into their estate.

These are the things we ought to be talking about, not spending \$400 billion on new programs, not going through a State of the Union Message in which there is \$4 billion a minute proposed. That is, I believe, a reckless budget, and I do not think that budget is going to move in this Congress without a considerable amount of change.

There are, hopefully, some things on which we want to agree with the President. He wants to talk about strengthening the military. We ought to do that. We ought to do something to encourage recruiting, to encourage retention, and to provide what is necessary to carry out the missions of the military. We certainly should do that.

We want to do some more things for schools based on the idea that it be given to the districts, that they can make the decisions as to how that is done, so we can strengthen education.

We ought to be doing something about Medicare prescriptions. We have a program that can be done that keeps it in the private sector generally and allows those who have supplemental programs to continue to have them, perhaps supplement them with a tax reduction but not to do an overall health program, as the President tried before. That is not what we want to do.

It is interesting that, of course, we have this great surge of enthusiasm over the idea of spending all the money we possibly can, but we ought to be thinking about taking a minimum amount of money from the taxpayers of this country to run the Government. It has to be paid. Everybody understands that. But when we do have things like surpluses over time—certainly we do not want to be reckless—but to call every tax reduction reckless is distressing. That money belongs to the people who paid into it.

If we do not have something to limit these kinds of surpluses, the very thing will happen the President is talking about now, and that is, we will find a way to spend it. What we are looking for is a way to adequately finance the Government, to deal with those things that are high priorities for America, to do something about the national debt, to secure Social Security, and then return this money to where it came from so that it is not here, so it has an opportunity to be in the communities, to

be in the towns, to be in the States, and to strengthen this economy. That is what keeps the economy going is people having money to invest and create jobs and these are the directions most important to us.

I wanted to let everyone know there are certainly more directions we will take. There are different ideas, all legitimate, as to where we should go. I hope as we proceed, we have an idea of where we want to end up.

I was reading "Alice in Wonderland" the other night. Remember when Alice fell down and she did not quite know where she was going. She ran into various people. She talked to the rabbit who did not have any ideas, except to promote himself, and the mushroom, who was very unpleasant, and the queen who was going to cut off everybody's head. Finally, she came to a juncture in the road, and there was the Cheshire Cat sitting in a tree. She said: Mr. Cat, what road should I take?

He said: Where do you want to go?

Alice said: I don't know.

The cat said: It doesn't make any difference then, you take whatever road you choose.

We need to know where we want to be when we look at this budget, what it has to do with principles of government, the principles of smaller government, the principles of adequate government, and then try to avoid the idea that there are some bucks out there. So let's try to find a way to spend them.

I suspect that is what we will hear a great deal about in this session. Unfortunately, I believe we will hear more about issues that can be used politically than we will about trying to solve problems. There are some we have identified and with which we agree. We need to come together and find some solutions to those particular issues. The country will be much better off.

I thank the Chair for the time, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, momentarily I will ask consent for the Senate to go to S. 1287, the nuclear waste bill. I know there have been negotiations underway in an effort to reach a comprehensive agreement on a manager's amendment to the nuclear waste bill. I thank Senator MURKOWSKI for the work