

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There are 4½ minutes remaining controlled by the Democratic leader.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I will make a couple of other comments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

THE FEDERAL DEFICIT

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, on a completely different subject, as a Nation, we are recklessly careening down the road toward bankruptcy. In the fiscal year that ends in a week, September 30, we are going to be hemorrhaging in our budget to the tune of \$500 billion. That is a half trillion dollars.

In the new fiscal year that starts October 1, it is estimated we are going to be hemorrhaging to the tune of \$600 billion, well over a half trillion dollars. Just to put it in perspective, in the decade of the 1980s, when we ran up so much of our national debt, the max in any one year in the late 1980s was a deficit of \$280 billion. That means we were spending \$280 billion more than we had coming in in revenue. Therefore, we had to go out and borrow it, and that added to the national debt.

The next fiscal year starts in a few days. We are going to spend more than we have coming in tax revenue to the tune of \$600 billion and we have to borrow it. Now, where do my colleagues think we borrow it from? We borrow it from folks like you and me, when we buy Treasury bills. We borrow it from institutional investors like pension funds. But it will shock people to know that a good bit of the debt that is being acquired, or debt that is being bought—or to put it in the vernacular of the street, the people who we are borrowing from are the Chinese and the Saudis. Does that not portend some uncomfortable things for America to have a good part of its national debt owned by folks who from time to time we have serious policy differences with?

How did we get into this? September 11 clearly was part of the problem. To protect this Nation, the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq have caused additional spending, but that is not the only reason for the \$600 billion deficit. It was because in the spring of 2001, by a one-vote margin, on a technical part of the budget bill, this Chamber of the Senate passed an instruction that by a majority vote we could pass a tax bill and that tax bill, once we passed it, diminished the revenues so much that the deficit started to swell. We are on a reckless fiscal course, headed toward bankruptcy. Is it any wonder that earlier we heard the majority leader and the Democratic leader going at it over this question of addressing the President's \$87 billion request? That is going to add all the more to the budget deficit. We are going to pass the \$67 billion that is going to the troops because our troops are going to be provided what they need. But for the remaining

\$20 billion that is for building 1,000 schools in Iraq, what do we tell our constituents at home about building schools here? For that \$20 billion that is to fix water systems and roads and bridges in Iraq, what are we to tell our constituents in America about the water systems and the roads and the bridges?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I thank the Presiding Officer for giving me the remainder of the time.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, I wish to first associate myself with the comments of my friend and colleague, the Senator from Florida, with regard to concerns he raised about all the stress on the National Guard and Reserve. I have been to a number of deployments of troops of the National Guard and Reserve from Minnesota. Our folks are serving admirably and bravely, and there is great stress. I think it is clearly important to make sure we do the things to alleviate the strain, not just on the folks on the front line but on the families, and creating a bit of certainty would be good thing to do. It is not a partisan thing. It is the right thing to do for the folks who are serving so bravely and for their families. So I thank my distinguished colleague from Florida for raising this concern and wish to let him know there are many of us on both sides of the aisle who share that concern and would like a greater sense of certainty.

What does it mean to have boots on the ground? When are our folks coming home? We do have to give them every bit of support we can when they are there. But certainly for the families, the words of my colleague ring true and I associate myself with them.

I do disagree with my colleague from Florida when it comes to his discussion about the economy and the cause and the impact of debt. By the way, debt is a bad thing. I am not going to spend a lot of time talking about that right now, but I do certainly want to raise the issue. The national debt today is not as great as it was in the 1980s, not if you measure it as a percentage of the overall economy. That is the way we have to do it. If you bought a house in the 1980s and you spent \$30,000 and you put \$15,000 down, \$15,000 in cash, you would be in debt 50 percent. As time went on, inflation went on, and you made a little money and you bought a second house in the 1990s, or today, for \$100,000, and you borrowed only \$30,000, you would be twice as much indebted as you were in the 1980s, but the \$30,000 as a percent of the overall value of the house would be less, only 30 percent.

The reality is that the debt today is less than it was in the 1980s. That is not to say debt is ever a good thing, but I think you have to make the facts very clear.

It is also important to understand the cause of that. Let's never forget

that September 11 had a devastating impact on the economy of this country. Let's not forget that WorldCom and Enron and the corporate scandals that undermined the confidence of investors in corporate America—undermined it—had a devastating impact on the American economy. And let us not forget this economy was rolling into recession, was moving into recession at the time President Bush was elected. All these things had an impact.

The other concern and observation I have to make, as a Senator who has been here at this point only about 9 months, is my distinguished friends and colleagues on the other side of the aisle, many of them, have consistently talked about the debt, they have great concerns about the debt, yet the reality has been that every time we have acted on budgets, one of the first things that I and, as a newly elected Member of this body, the Presiding Officer did was we had to resolve the budget for 2003 as soon as we got here. On issue after issue, my friends and colleagues from across the aisle, who loudly proclaim concern about the debt, sought to raise the spending. They sought to increase spending, I believe to the tune of perhaps \$1 trillion of new spending.

So it is hard to hear folks being concerned about the debt when, on issue after issue, they seek to raise spending. We have experienced that as we have gone through the process of approving the 2004 budget. On issue after issue, whatever amount is set in the budget to spend, my colleagues from across the aisle seek to increase that, again to the tune, calculated over 10-year periods, of trillions of dollars. Even for the Government, a trillion dollars is real money.

So, yes, the debt is of concern. The way you deal with the debt is you get the economy moving. That is what the President has done. That is what the tax cuts have stimulated. And then you have the will and resolve to keep a lid on spending.

Again, I urge my friends from across the aisle, every time you vote to increase spending, time and again, take a breath then before you talk about the debt.

I came here this morning to support the President's request for a supplemental appropriation of \$87 billion to support our troops in Iraq and to accelerate the redevelopment of that country to a stable, democratic, and peaceful member of the community of nations. As Senators, we have two responsibilities in this matter. As members of the legislative branch of Government, we must put the administration's proposals to the test to ensure they are prudent, practical, and can achieve the promised results. That is what we do as a legislative body. We also have a responsibility to support our Commander in Chief as he leads us as a nation.

I love the story told about Abraham Lincoln during the time he was leading our Nation in the Civil War. He was

getting, on a regular basis, communications from an elderly woman who said to him that God was talking to her and God was telling her which general to hire and which general to fire and where to attack and where to retreat. He got this series of letters. Finally, President Lincoln wrote back to this lady and said: Ma'am, I want to thank you for your correspondence and thank you for your advice, but isn't it fascinating how the Lord Almighty has given you all the answers but gave me the job.

We have a Commander in Chief. We have the right to question and modify the things he proposes. But it is our responsibility, I submit, to work expeditiously and to approve these urgently needed resources.

I express my strong hope that this bill will not be held hostage to political ambitions or become the vehicle of high-profile second-guessing. Our effort in Iraq has many challenges, but lack of politics is not one of them. This debate falls in a tempting place on the electoral calendar, but I do hope we rise above a talk show mentality.

There was talk this morning: Why do we have to move quickly on the President's request? What is so urgent about it? Does the money need to be spent right away? Kind of a slow walk and no sense of urgency.

I do hope those concerns are not raised so that we simply can extend the possibly to have in the political arena debate for the sake of taking political potshots. That is not what this is about. That is not what this body is about. We need to send a message to our troops in the field that we support them and will provide them the resources they need. We need to send a message to the Iraqi people that we are committed to working with Iraq to ensure that democracy is there. You can't have democracy when the lights are out 8 hours a day. We are seeing in Washington and Virginia how difficult it is to operate when the lights aren't on. Multiply that many times over.

I am concerned about the nature of the debate that comes with our involvement in Iraq. Debate is what this body expects and understands, but there is a tone about the debate that is of great concern because others watch. There is discussion now about whether this is the President's war.

Before you and I entered this body on October 11, 2002, there was a debate about what action we should take regarding Iraq, what authority we should give the President regarding Iraq.

There was a full debate. There was a great dialog. There was great discussion. This body voted. The sense of this body was 77 to 23 to support the President and to give the President the authority to do the things that had to be done to make sure Saddam Hussein complied with the United Nations resolutions. Let us not forget that for a period of 10 years he disregarded United Nations resolutions.

By a vote of 77 to 23—not 51 to 49, not a 50 to 50 tie asking the Vice President

to break that tie—a broad bipartisan coalition, an overwhelming majority of the Senate, said: This is our battle, this is America's battle, and the responsibility we have as elected representatives to speak for the people we represent and give voice to their hopes and concerns was reflected in that debate.

When others now talk about the "President's war," it causes great concern.

I like the words of the "Serenity Prayer." I hope we have the wisdom to address ourselves in the things we can change and not try to change the past.

I say to my colleagues that one of my pleasures as a Senator from the State of Minnesota is to represent the western shore of Lake Superior, the world's largest body of freshwater. If you visit this area during the right time of year, you will see the enormous iron ore boats that transport Minnesota iron ore to the steel plants of the eastern Great Lakes. These gigantic boats are so large that it takes them many hours and many miles to execute a turn into port.

The bigger something is, the longer it takes to turn it around. Such is our challenge in Iraq. We are attempting to turn a large society from a generation of tyranny and totalitarianism to democracy and free enterprise.

For over 25 years, the people of Iraq suffered under the brutality of Saddam Hussein. For over 25 years, the people of Iraq didn't even have a budget. Its infrastructure was eaten away as resources were simply given to Saddam for his friends and for his palaces, and the country suffered.

I find it ironic that some critics of our policy who said we could never defeat Saddam Hussein are now loudly complaining that it takes too long. In our instant-everything, drive-through, microwave society, we perhaps have lost sight of the fact that some things take time. The bigger the thing, the more time it takes.

To those who lament our supposed slow progress in Iraq, we are exceeding any realistic expectations of success. Rome was not built in a day and Iraq won't be, either. The lasting social structures in Iraq need to rest on firm foundations and progress. And those foundations are being made.

To those who say we need to turn Iraq over to the Iraqis, we want to turn it over to the Iraqis. We want the Iraqis to be in charge. We want the Iraqis to be guarding the hospitals and the oil wells. We want the Iraqis to be responsible for the future of Iraq. But in order to have that, you have to have a foundation. Iraq has to develop a constitution. It needs to be affirmed. When it is affirmed, it then needs to have free and fair elections. That is how to develop the foundation.

As we are developing that foundation, we are making progress in developing Iraqi security forces and police units which can begin to take the load off the American and coalition military units.

We are helping the Iraqi oil industry and its power generation come back to some semblance of functionality. The Central Iraqi Bank has taken bold steps to create a secure currency. Some of the most dramatic steps that any government has to set for itself is to be open to trade, to be open to entrepreneurship, and to be open to opportunity. These are bold moves in any part of the world but certainly in Iraq.

The Governing Council has just taken steps to open the country to foreign investment.

You heard earlier today my colleague, the distinguished chairman of the Energy Committee, Senator DOMENICI, talking about the Ministers of Iraq and the number of Ph.D.s—one of the most educated governments anywhere in the world—and the caliber of folks we are bringing to the table.

The Poles have already assumed command of a multinational division in Iraq with NATO support. We have captured or killed over 40 of the 55 most-wanted Iraqis, including one more over the weekend, Saddam's Minister of Defense.

I mentioned the Governing Council being formed. I am told there is even a city council in Baghdad. I must say as a former mayor that when I heard there was a city council in Baghdad, my first thought was, Haven't the Iraqis suffered enough? But a city council is there and operating.

Thousands of Iraqi policemen and soldiers are being hired and trained to help provide security for their nation. Every hospital and clinic in Baghdad is operating, as are most of the others around the country. Every hospital and clinic in Baghdad is operating. The clinics and hospitals in Iraq have 7,500 tons of medicine distributed by the coalition since May, an increase of over 700 percent over the level at the end of the war.

For the first time in its history, all of Baghdad has garbage collection service. No longer is garbage collection a privilege reserved for neighbors favored by the Government.

Again, I reflect back to my days as a mayor and the importance of basic services being provided to all of the citizenry and not just for the rich neighborhoods. We are doing that in Iraq.

Iraqi workers are producing over 1 million barrels of oil per day, the proceeds of which will benefit the Iraqi people rather than Saddam Hussein's corrupt regime. Ninety-two thousand Iraqis receive social security and welfare benefits at levels four times higher than they received under Saddam. One point three million Iraqi civil servants are drawing salaries under a new salary scale. Many of them, such as teachers, are being paid four times what they were paid under Saddam.

The test of our efforts is that the Iraqi people are voting with their feet. They are staying put. There has been no humanitarian crisis. There has been

no flood of refugees as had been predicted. The \$87 billion in this bill will bolster all of these critical efforts.

We all need to put the daily events so effusively reported in Iraq in perspective. We see this, by the way, even in our own Nation. A lot of good is being done but somehow that doesn't always qualify as news.

I believe the President's leadership is beginning to pay dividends, even at the United Nations. It is a slow boat to turn as well, but I believe we will soon see progress towards broad international cooperation for the rebuilding of Iraq. Even the French say they will not now veto a resolution.

The President met with the head of Germany yesterday and had a good conversation.

Let there be no mistake. We are in a state of war against terrorism. Our decisions and the tone of our debate must recognize that fact. Forces that seek to destroy us are measuring our will and our resolve at each turn. Their view is that we are weak and easily distracted and divided. We must prove to them the truth—that we are not. We do that by what our military does on the ground every day. We do that by how we as leaders conduct this debate in this body.

Again, I recognize the importance of debate and challenging ideas and propositions. But there is a tone about debate and I worry that we are crossing the line. I worry that when we talk about this being the President's war, again disregarding the fact that this body, in a broad bipartisan way, raised its hand and understood the dangers of Saddam, understood the evil of Saddam and the evil impact he had on the Iraqi people, the impact that it was having on the region, the impact it was having on Israel, and the impact it was having on terrorism; understood that we had in Saddam and Iraq a nation which took care of and catered to the persons who masterminded the terrorist acts in the airports in Rome and Vienna; a nation that coddled, took care of and exalted the terrorists responsible for the execution of an American in a wheelchair, Leon Klinghoffer on the Achilles Lauro in Athens—everybody understood what we were dealing with.

We rose together in unison. Let us not now forget. Let us not now pull apart. Let us not now send the signal that we are weak and in disarray. It is important to have a sense of strength and purpose. Let us have the debate but let us make decisions.

In World War I, the French soldiers came up with the saying that "the difference between a hero and a coward is the hero is brave 2 minutes longer." We cannot afford to lose our nerve at the point of victory or all the sacrifice and the progress to date could be lost.

For those who question this amount of money being spent at times of economic difficulty and high deficits, I understand that concern. It is so easy to say, with anything we do, if we put dollars into something, why aren't we

taking care of the needs of kids? Why aren't we taking care of the needs of schools? Why aren't we taking care of seniors? The arguments can certainly be made, and they touch a sympathetic chord, a sympathetic note.

The reality is we have to understand again and again that you cannot have economic security, you cannot have peace of mind, you cannot have the opportunity for your kids to go to good schools, and folks to live in peace in their neighborhoods and go about their daily lives if we live in fear. The world changed after September 11. We have to reflect on the impact of September 11, not just psychologically but economically.

What happens when we allow terrorism to visit our shores? The folks in Washington, DC, saw this very graphically during the terrible period when the sniper was on the loose in Washington, and people would not go out of their homes. They were afraid to go to a gas station, afraid to shop, afraid to go to a restaurant. I have not seen the final bills, but I am sure the economic impact was enormous. When people live in fear, they cannot prosper economically or emotionally.

America has a responsibility at this point in history—for the sake of our kids, for the sake of our seniors, for the sake of our parents—to do those things necessary to live in peace, to confront and deal with terrorism. We learned on September 11 we cannot contain terrorism. We have to aggressively reach out to make sure we do all we can to make sure terrorism does not visit our shores.

It is not a matter of saying, if we did not put this money here we would put it there. The reality is, of the \$87 billion, \$67 billion goes directly to the military. It is also to rebuild the infrastructure of Iraq so that the military ethics can take hold. We cannot have such short memories.

Ambassador Bremer visited with many Senators this last week and gave a little historical lesson. He said: Look at what we did after World War I. We did not step in. We did not have the sense of heart and purpose to come together and say we were going to deal with the destruction left in the wake. We gave rise to Nazism, to fascism. What happened is, ultimately, millions of lives were lost.

I am of the Jewish faith. In our faith we say: We shall never forget; we shall never forget the Holocaust. The seeds of that were laid in the actions after World War I that were not taken to deal with the plight, deal with the economic plight, deal with the disarray, deal with the disintegration.

After World War II, we took a very different path. After World War II, we enacted a Marshall plan, and we came together, with the United States taking the lead; the international community then joining in building up and restoring the economy, doing things that restored hope, doing things that restored water and electricity. The result

is Europe has been safer. We have been safer until the rise of terrorism.

Let us not forget those models. Let us not forget that history. Success will build world confidence and investment far beyond this investment in Iraq. Failure would cost far more.

All of these practical arguments notwithstanding, I close with a simple argument for the passage of this supplemental appropriation: It is the right thing to do. Our troops need our support. The people of Iraq, present and future, need our help. The world that hopes for far more freedom and less terror needs what only the United States can provide. We can reach out and set an example to the international community to join with us.

This bill is the right thing to do. It is the right for the people of Iraq who are free from the torture chambers so they may never come back again. It is the right thing to do for the young women of Iraq who are raped and assaulted by Quday and Usay Hussein. It is the right thing to do for the memory of thousands murdered and buried in mass graves, and for their justice; for the millions of Iraqi people who will choose their own path, live their own lives, and decide their own faith when we set the foundation, set the table for restoration of democracy, firm and lasting in Iraq.

It is the right thing to do for the millions of neighbors of Iraq who will not fear the unbearable fanaticism of a dictator more concerned about power than the moral obligation of leadership. It is the right thing to do for our democratic ally in Israel who no longer will face the threat of Scud missiles from Iraq. It is the right thing to do for the courage of our American soldiers who have performed their duty and lived up to their oath to defend and protect the national interests of their Nation.

It is the right thing to do for the memory of American soldiers who have given their lives so that others may live in freedom. It is the right thing to do for the millions of Americans and the 3,000 who died on September 11 that American determination, resolve, and will are not things of the past but are ironclad promises for the future.

It is the right thing to do for the message it sends to those who support terrorism, that they will have no refuge; for the message it sends to those who kill, who terrorize, who destroy the hopes, dreams, and happiness of men and women and children that this is a new day, a better world. Their days are numbered. No more can we accept the crying faces, parents holding their dying children, parents burying their dead children. To those who seek to destroy, those who choose to unravel the fabric of society and civilization, this bill is the right thing to do because it makes it clear their time will come; our resolve is strong. We will support our fighting men and women and give them what they need to do the job.

We will work with the Iraqi people to rebuild and create a foundation where

democracy and hope will take place. Good will triumph over evil. Democracy will triumph over tyranny. Security will triumph over terrorism. Peace will come to Iraq. And all of us in America will be safer as a result.

SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, in the time remaining, I raise one other issue, the issue of opportunity scholarships, of expanded choice for students, the issue of the debate we are having over the opportunity for the children of the District of Columbia to take advantage of a "voucher" program. We do not like to use that word. In my State, it is a pretty divisive word.

The Mayor of Washington, Anthony Williams, says this is the right thing to do. As a former mayor, I will stand with Mayor Williams. This is a very divisive issue in my city of St. Paul. When I ran, I said I would not push vouchers for the people of Minnesota. We had our debate. We have gone a different path, expanding charter schools. St. Paul, my city, had the first charter school in the Nation. As mayor, we started 20 more charter schools, providing tax incentives and tax credits so parents could get money back and use money they need to support their kids' education, to give their kids more choice. That makes sense.

But more needs to be done. I recognize that. This is a divisive issue. When the Mayor of the District of Columbia is saying we need to do this for our kids, why not do it? It is not taking any money from my kids in Minnesota. It is not taking any money from any kids in any of the other States. We have a local, elected official saying we need to do this; our kids are failing and we need to give them more hope and opportunity. Why not do it? What are we afraid of?

When I was mayor of St. Paul, the Governor offered, I believe, \$13 million to any community that would simply do a pilot project offering opportunity scholarships to the poorest of the poor and only the kids who were not succeeding.

So you were not going to take the cream of the crop. You were not going to cherry-pick. You were going to take those who were not making it. You have to do something. In fact, the offer was that out of this \$13 million, he would give \$10 million to the school district to do whatever they wanted. Only \$3 million would be for this pilot project. And not a single elected official, other than myself, would stand up and do it.

What are we afraid of? If all you keep doing is what you have been doing, all you are going to get is more of the same. Our children need more hope and opportunity. I hope we have the courage to give it a shot and a chance. The downside is minimal. The opportunity is great. Let's seize the opportunity. Let's do this for the kids. Let's do the right thing. Let's make change. Let's give hope.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2658, which the clerk will state by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2658) making appropriations for the Department of Defense for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes, having met, have agreed that the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate, and agree to the same with an amendment, and the Senate agree to the same, signed by all of the conferees on the part of both Houses.

The Senate proceeded to consider the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of September 24, 2003.)

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. STEVENS. 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. STEVENS. Mr. President, I am pleased to present to the Senate, on behalf of myself and the Senator from Hawaii, Mr. INOUE, who is currently chairing the Indian Affairs Committee, the Defense appropriations conference report for fiscal year 2004.

This conference report was approved by the House of Representatives by a vote of 407 to 15. It has overwhelming bipartisan support. The agreement provides for a total of \$368.7 billion for the Department for fiscal year 2004. Throughout our conversations with the House over the past months, Senator INOUE and I have sought to strike a balanced agreement that we believe addresses key requirements for readiness, quality of life, and reconstitution of our defense force.

As we take up this conference report on the floor today, there are hundreds of thousands of men and women in uniform deployed and serving our country at home and abroad. They are performing superbly, and we are extremely proud of what they are accomplishing. This agreement is a dem-

onstration of our support, the Congress's support, for our men and women in uniform.

It provides a 4.1 percent average pay raise for all military personnel. It funds an increase in basic allowance for housing to reduce average out-of-pocket expenses from 7.5 percent to 3.5 percent for our military people. It provides an additional \$128 million for the continuation of increased rates for imminent-danger pay and family-separation allowances.

This agreement honors the commitment we have made to our Armed Forces—one we will maintain. It helps ensure they will continue to have good leadership, first-rate training, modernized equipment, and quality infrastructure. The agreement provides \$115.9 billion for operation and maintenance, \$74.7 billion for procurement, and \$65.2 billion for research and development.

Defense is a very expensive concept for our country. That is so not only because we have a volunteer service but because we are modernizing our force for the future. This agreement is the result of a bicameral, bipartisan approach. I urge the Senate to adopt this conference report.

Let me once again thank my co-chairman, Senator INOUE, for his support and invaluable counsel on this bill. I would also like to note the dedicated work of his chief of staff Charlie Houy, Betsy Schmid, and Nicole DiResta.

I thank my hard-working staff led by Sid Ashworth and including Tom Hawkins, Kraig Siracuse, Bob Henke, Lesley Kalan, Jennifer Chartrand, Menda Fife, Brian Wilson, Mazie Mattson, Nicole Royal, and Alycia Farrell. They have helped put together this conference report and worked with us through the year to bring us where we are today with the largest defense budget in history and the best bill we have ever presented to the Senate.

I yield to my good friend from Hawaii.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. INOUE. Mr. President, before I proceed, I wish to commend my chairman, Mr. STEVENS, for bringing this conference report to the Senate. In doing so, I commend him for his leadership. I realize Members of the Senate may not be aware of this, but because of the leadership skills and because of the hard work of the staff, the conference committee concluded its work on this important measure in 2 hours. In 2 hours, we concluded a bill that was filled with controversy and issues. At the end, the vote was unanimous.

The conferees recommend \$368.7 billion in mandatory and discretionary appropriations for the coming year. It is a huge sum, but it is a sum that is absolutely necessary.

This is nearly half a billion less than recommended by the Senate and \$3.6 billion less than requested by the President. We have tried our best to trim what some would call "fat."