

two-thirds of the funding versus one-third for the Democratic side. It does not take a rocket scientist to conclude that with a 51-to-49 division in the Senate—consistent with what we did in the most recent Congress—a funding division of two-thirds to one-third is not fair.

I appreciate that there is precedent going back a number of years for that kind of divide, but most recently, with the then-majority leader, Senator DASCHLE, in place, we accommodated our Republican colleagues with a much narrower divide of committee budgeting. That is the right way to proceed. It is the only way that will allow us to go forward with our work. It certainly is my hope that the majority leader will see the error of his ways and return to a more moderate, more responsible approach to the funding of these committees and concur with the recommendations of Senator DASCHLE, the Democratic leader, so we may get on with the work of the people.

Secondly, I have to share with my colleagues some thoughts on the budget tax proposal submitted by President Bush. I stand here as 1 of 12 Democrats who joined in an effort of moderating President Bush's initial \$1.35 trillion tax cut. Our thought was that by participating in that effort, we could moderate its cost, make it more fiscally responsible, as well as redirect some of its benefits to middle-class and working families, to people who really make our economy go, and certainly in a way that is consistent with the interests of my home State of South Dakota.

We did that, but we did that at a time when the projections were that we were going to run up a \$5.6 trillion budget surplus over the coming 10 years. We had just come from 4 consecutive years—the final 4 years of the Clinton administration—of budgets in the black, and we were paying down the national debt. There was concern about whether we would pay down the national debt too quickly. That, believe it or not, was the concern at the time. We had budget surpluses as far as the eye could see, and there was no war on the horizon. So the environment was considerably different.

Now we find ourselves, with the passage of that tax bill, with changes in the economy and with a war possibly imminent. We hope not, but we certainly are very cognizant of the fact that we may wind up in Iraq and expending literally hundreds of billions of dollars in that effort to make sure that our men and women in uniform have the resources they need if, in fact, we wind up in that kind of conflict.

So the environment is radically different. Now we find ourselves with deficits as far as the eye can see. Now we find ourselves utilizing Social Security trust fund dollars, according to the administration's Office of Management and Budget, for the remainder of this decade. Now we find ourselves not paying down the accumulated national debt at all, much less paying it down

too quickly, as President Bush and his administration coached us to fear a short time ago.

So now we find ourselves with this radically different environment. Yet the President comes to us with a plan which would cost \$675 billion over the coming 10 years. If you take into consideration the interest payments that would have to be made—because every dime of that will have to be borrowed; we will have to borrow that money out of the Social Security trust fund to pay for these tax cuts—if you take into consideration the interest costs, it comes to cost roughly \$933 billion over the coming 10 years. We would be deep in the red as far as the eye could see. And this is before you take into consideration the added costs of war, before you take into consideration what else could happen to the economy.

This would involve about a \$108 billion tax cut in the coming year, primarily for Wall Street and for the superwealthy, although there are a few grains of benefit for middle-class families. But, by and large, that is a very modest part of the overall plan we would borrow money to pay for.

Yet at the same time that we are considering this ill-considered, irresponsible plan, we are being told by the administration that we have to cut about \$9 billion out of next year's budget. That comes out of veterans health care. That comes out of education; it comes out of economic development; it comes out of infrastructure; it comes out of highways and airports; it comes out of law enforcement; it comes out of so many areas that are fundamental and vital to America's national interests. That will have to come out this year alone. But that is just the beginning compared to where we would be in future years.

My constituents—Republicans and Democrats alike—in my home State, which is a very agricultural State, are asking me: Why has the President threatened to veto a \$6 billion drought relief bill, for droughts in 2001 and 2002, that has the support of 32 agricultural organizations, from the Farm Bureau to the Farmers Union, liberal to conservative, because of the natural disasters they faced? Why is the President threatening to veto \$6 billion of relief but talking simultaneously about \$108 billion of economic stimulus this year that would go primarily to Wall Street?

What would be more stimulative of the economy than to provide that drought relief across the dozens of States that suffer badly this year? Because of the circumstances the States face, schools in my State are literally on the verge of closing their doors. My hospitals and my nursing homes—because we did not pass the Medicare reimbursement changes last year and seemed to be in no rush to get it done this year—are at risk of closing their doors as well.

Our veterans are standing in lines, 10 and 12 and 14 months long, in my home

State, waiting to gain access to the health care benefits that they fought and struggled for in defending our Nation but for which we do not now have the money to provide.

The priorities laid on the table are astonishing, that the President would recommend \$108 billion of tax cuts this year, to borrow the money to pay for that when we can't come up with the drought relief and the VA health care and can't keep our schools and nursing homes open. What sense does that make?

I am willing to consider some additional tax relief for middle-class families, but the environment has changed radically from what it was a couple years ago. Now we find ourselves in a situation where the most fundamental needs of our people are in jeopardy. We need to take that into consideration.

It is my hope that there will be strong bipartisan opposition to the plan as presented by the President, that we can in fact go forward, come to an equitable division of resources available for committees, promptly take up the 2003 budget, take up the 2004 budget, deal with the shortfalls that we have in rural America for our veterans, education, health care, seniors. And when we have done that, we will see what we can do relative to tax relief for our middle-class working families who struggle so hard every day to meet health care payments and house payments and to keep their kids in school. We will work with them as well, but we can't give away the store. We cannot, regardless of the libertarian political drive behind it, support a budget tax proposal as wildly out of keeping with where most South Dakotans and most Americans of either political persuasion want to go.

I express my frustration that this Nation needs to meet its commitments, it needs fiscal responsibility, and it can only do that by rejecting the President's enormous \$933 billion, over 10-year proposal, and returning to taking care of the needs of our people, returning our budgets to the black and setting the stage for additional prosperity and making sure that we have the resources to deal with whatever military eventuality we may have to face very soon.

I yield the floor and 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. THOMAS. 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. THOMAS. I rise to speak in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are in morning business.

FIGHTING THE WAR ON TERRORISM

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I rise to talk about several issues. First, of

course, we all know so well that we are involved now in this war on terrorism, and I wanted to speak a moment about that, the fact that it affects us all. Since that terrible day on September 11, virtually none of us have been untouched by those acts of cowardice and the effort to break the American spirit. Fortunately, they did not succeed. We were shaken but probably strengthened from that. Our efforts to combat the production and proliferation of weapons require that we prepare forces in the Middle East, and everyone has a role in that.

I just learned that one of my staff members will be called in the Reserve to active duty tomorrow. Sgt John Travis Deti of the Marine Corps Reserve will be serving as an operations specialist with the Marine Corps combat engineers.

He was promoted from legislative correspondent to legislative aide just 1 day before learning of his orders to report to duty. As a fellow marine, I know that Travis is ready to do what he can, prepared to serve his country. I am very proud of what he is doing during this difficult time. Travis, *semper fi*.

SENATE ORGANIZATION

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I wish to talk a little about the congressional session we are in now for our second week. We have lots of things to do. Certainly, the American people are anxious that we move on to do those things. Yet we find ourselves in sort of a stall on the floor, which is disappointing. We know we have actions to take. We know we have to be organized. Yet we are held up in being organized. That is discouraging to many of us.

The fact is that 2 years ago, when the Senate was 50-50, we had an agreement as to how to work and how to fund the committees. Now we find, particularly on the other side, that we can't come to agreement.

As I understand it, we had then a 50-50 arrangement with 10 percent going to the majority committee because there are lots of common costs. So it broke it down really into a 60-40 arrangement. That was satisfactory.

Now it seems that we can't find a satisfactory agreement. I urge the leadership to move forward so we can get on to do the things we are here to do. We have a lot of things to do, many of which are held over from the last session.

One of the most pressing is ready to be acted upon whenever we are ready to act on it, and that is 11 of the 13 appropriations which we did not even get to last year. The other is to begin on a budget of which we had none last year. A lot of people say it doesn't make much difference whether you have a budget anyway; You always break it. The fact is, it is important because it has a restriction in it. When a budget is set and the spending goes beyond

that budget, you can raise a point of order, and it takes 60 votes instead of 50. That is a protection from overspending. We hear a lot about spending. I am one who wants to control spending.

So here we are with things to do in the new year. We are here with items left over from last year, and we are not able to get going with it.

Everyone, of course, has their own priorities, but there are some fairly commonly agreed upon. Certainly education is one. There is nothing more important. When I talk to people about Government programs and things they want to do more about, education is always among the top. It is true that the Federal contribution to the financing of education is only about 7 percent of the total. But nevertheless, it is an important part, particularly when Federal rules and regulations provide some unfunded mandates to the States to do the things they must do.

I am in favor of having some common methods of having an assessment of how schools are doing partly because now we move so freely in this Nation; if you are educated in Wyoming, you may end up working in New York. You need to know that your education is comparable so you will do as well there as you could anywhere else.

We are talking about funding. We are talking about IDEA, funding for special education, which is very important. I hear a great deal about that. My wife happens to be a special education teacher, and it is terribly important that we give everyone an opportunity. To do that, you have to have special education.

The Perkins Act, which funds vocational education, whether it be agriculture, business, whatever, is apparently in somewhat of a controversy at the moment. It is very important that we be able to provide vocational education and opportunities for young people to become trained in what they want to do.

Testing, of course, is very controversial, but I believe it is a test as to whether or not schools are keeping up with others. Some argue, well, you just teach to the test. I suppose there is some danger of that. If the tests are adequate, perhaps that is not a bad idea, but there has to be accountability. So that is where we are with education.

On energy policy, we spent a great deal of time with that last year, more probably than we should have had to spend because it was pulled out of committee and the committee did not make the decisions. We brought it to the floor. I believe we were here 7 weeks on energy policy. Then it went into committee to facilitate the differences between the House and Senate and, frankly, we never did come to a successful conclusion.

Energy policy is very important at any time because nothing touches more of us than does energy—whether it is light, heat, automobiles, what-

ever. Even more important now, as we deal with economic difficulties, is that we find the price of energy going up, partly because of the unrest in the Middle East. So energy policy, it seems to me, is very important, and we ought to get back on that.

We can have an energy policy. We have not had one for years. We need to have one that has to do with domestic production, so that we are not 60-percent dependent upon exports as we are now. We need a policy that provides for more research into new sources of energy, so that we have renewables, so that we have various other kinds of opportunities. We have to have research to make sure that what we use now—coal, for instance—is as clean as it can be for air quality. That is the kind of balanced policy we need. But here we are with that need to move forward and we are not able to do that.

Certainly, health care is one. In my State of Wyoming, health care has become particularly important over the last couple years, largely because of cost and accessibility. Often, when we talk about health care, we talk about Medicare, and certainly we should. Medicare is very important to a large number of people who have higher costs generally. Nevertheless, Medicare is there and we need to make some changes with it, particularly as we look forward to what we are going to do over the next few years—a program that gives some choices and hopefully brings in more private operations and a more private distribution of resources that will fund a program that is needed over a period of time. The one we have now isn't going to do that.

We have to make some changes. I suspect we will be looking at more short-term changes originally, as we first go about it. We need to look at the long term, what we want to have over time and what it takes to provide a health care distribution system that is useful. It is not all Medicare. For example, in our State the prices have gone up substantially. There are a number of reasons, of course. Part of it is liability insurance for physicians. Many have given up certain kinds of practices because the cost of liability insurance is out of sight. We can do something about that, and we can do something about it here as well as in our States.

We have a problem with the number of uninsured in this country. Of course, the notion of insurance, the concept of insurance is that you have a broad participation of people, some of whom are less likely to need services than others, so that it levels out the costs. But when you have a large segment of the most healthy people who do not carry insurance, then that concept is weakened. So those are broader issues that we need to have. We have a shortage of nurses. We need to do something about that. It has very little to do with Medicare.

The other one that is important, of course, and I suspect will be dealt with