

fiscal year. The Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009 is a sprawling, \$410 billion compilation of nine spending measures that lacks the slightest hint of austerity from the federal government or the recipients of its largess.

The Senate should reject this bill. If we do not, President Barack Obama should veto it. The omnibus increases discretionary spending by 8% over last fiscal year's levels, dwarfing the rate of inflation across a broad swath of issues including agriculture, financial services, foreign relations, energy and water programs, and legislative branch operations. Such increases might be appropriate for a nation flush with cash or unconcerned with fiscal prudence, but America is neither.

Drafted last year, the bill did not pass due to Congress's long-standing budgetary dysfunction and the frustrating delays it yields in our appropriations work. Since then, economic and fiscal circumstances have changed dramatically, which is why the Senate should go back to the drawing board. The economic downturn requires new policies, not more of the same.

Our nation's current fiscal imbalance is unprecedented, unsustainable and, if unaddressed, a major threat to our currency and our economic vitality. The national debt now exceeds \$10 trillion. This is almost double what it was just eight years ago, and the debt is growing at a rate of about \$1 million a minute.

Washington borrows from foreign creditors to fund its profligacy. The amount of U.S. debt held by countries such as China and Japan is at a historic high, with foreign investors holding half of America's publicly held debt. This dependence raises the specter that other nations will be able to influence our policies in ways antithetical to American interests. The more of our debt that foreign governments control, the more leverage they have on issues like trade, currency and national security. Massive debts owed to foreign creditors weaken our global influence, and threaten high inflation and steep tax increases for our children and grandchildren.

The solution going forward is to stop wasteful spending before it starts. Families and businesses are tightening their belts to make ends meet—and Washington should too.

The omnibus debate is not merely a battle over last year's unfinished business, but the first indication of how we will shape our fiscal future. Spending should be held in check before taxes are raised, even on the wealthy. Most people are willing to do their duty by paying taxes, but they want to know that their money is going toward important priorities and won't be wasted.

Last week I was pleased to attend the president's White House Fiscal Responsibility Summit. It's about time we had a leader committed to addressing the deficit, and Mr. Obama deserves great credit for doing so. But what ultimately matters are not meetings or words, but actions. Those who vote for the omnibus this week—after standing with the president and pledging to slice our deficit in half last week—jeopardize their credibility.

As Indiana's governor, I balanced eight budgets, never raised taxes, and left the largest surplus in state history. It wasn't always easy. Cuts had to be made and some initiatives deferred. Occasionally I had to say "no."

But the bloated omnibus requires sacrifice from no one, least of all the government. It only exacerbates the problem and hastens the day of reckoning. Voters rightly demanded change in November's election, but this approach to spending represents business as usual in Washington, not the voters' mandate.

Now is the time to win back the confidence and trust of the American people. Congress should vote "no" on this omnibus and show working families across the country that we are as committed to living within our means as they are.

Mr. McCONNELL. Today, Republicans are going to continue bringing up our amendments, amendments that we think are better and more responsible ways to use the taxpayers' money today.

Unfortunately, it has become increasingly clear that most of our Democrat colleagues here in Congress—Senator BAYH notwithstanding—are perfectly comfortable with the breath-taking rate of spending we have been on since the beginning of the year. They want it to continue, without restraint and without any end in sight.

Amazingly, in the midst of an economic crisis, congressional Democrats want to increase the annual spending included in this omnibus by 8 percent, which, compared to last year, is twice the rate of inflation.

At a time when Americans are learning to cut back, Democrats in Congress are suggesting we double up. As Senator BAYH put it in the same op-ed:

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Nobody wants an open-ended recession. But so far the only solution to the economic crisis that Democrats in Congress are offering is open-ended spending without any end in sight. And let's be clear about something: we cannot end a recession by digging the country into deeper and deeper debt any more than one can pay off a credit card by using it more often. And we can't tax our way out of a recession.

February was an expensive month for American taxpayers. In the month of February, Congress spent more money than we did in 7 years on the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan and Hurricane Katrina relief combined.

All of this spending is reason to carefully consider and pare back this massive spending bill, particularly in these areas which contain funding for 122 programs already funded in the stimulus bill.

Remarkably, even Senator HUTCHISON's amendment, which sought to find \$12 billion, or just 1 percent, in duplicative spending from two bills totaling \$1.2 trillion, was struck down.

I hope our friends across the aisle will join Republican efforts to ensure every taxpayer dollar is spent with care, and support amendments to protect taxpayer dollars.

This current spending bill is only one step in the spending process. It doesn't include the President's budget, the housing proposal, or untold trillions to stabilize financial markets and other programs.

Our children and grandchildren can't afford this level of spending. They will

be the ones left to pay off the Federal Government credit card that Democrats in Congress are busy maxing out.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

SERGEANT DANIEL W. WALLACE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise because our country has lost a true patriot. SGT Daniel W. Wallace of Dry Ridge, KY, was tragically killed by enemy fire while serving his country in Afghanistan on October 31, 2008. He was 27 years old.

A member of the Kentucky Army National Guard since 2006, Sergeant Wallace was on his first deployment. For his valor in uniform, he received several medals, awards and decorations, including the Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart.

"Sergeant Daniel Wallace was a true patriot," says Kentucky National Guard Adjutant GEN Edward W. Tonini. He "stood up and answered the call to serve his Nation in a time of need."

Sergeant's Wallace's mother, Karen Wallace, says the same thing, but in a way only a mother could.

"Danny's my fallen hero," she says.

Daniel's family lived in the town of Latonia in the northern Kentucky suburbs of Cincinnati, when he was young. When he was about 9 years old, they moved to Dry Ridge in Grant County. They moved because Karen and Daniel's father, Kenneth, wanted to trade in life in the city for the country. But Daniel didn't take it so well.

"He didn't like the move . . . because of his friends being in Latonia," Karen remembers. "He was always bored in the country, complaining about how there was nothing to do."

It would come as no surprise, however, if I told you that Daniel, like any young boy, found plenty of things to do. He liked to fish, camp and watch and play sports like baseball, basketball and football. And with three brothers and a sister, there were plenty of people to do things with.

"He loved camping," says Karen. "We'd get so tickled because he and [his brother] Alex would bet on who could make the first fire, [or] the biggest fire."

Karen did set some limits for her son, however.

"He always wanted to go hunting but we never did that," she says. And "he got mad at me for not letting him play football because he was so skinny."

Daniel started attending Crittenden-Mt. Zion Elementary School, and when he was in third grade, Karen started working there. "I was able to watch him as he was adjusting to a new school," she recalls. "The teachers liked him. . . . He was very computer knowledgeable [and] . . . the teachers would have him fix computers."

Daniel's father, Kenneth, recalls how his son was quick to look out for others.

"He always felt he had to protect the other kids," Kenneth says. "He wanted

to know who did it if something happened." Karen recalls a few times when Daniel came to the defense of his brother Alex when he was teased by other boys.

Like the rest of his family, Daniel was also very committed to his church. One way they all contributed together was as a gospel band, the Wallace Family Band. Mom and dad sang. Their sons Charles and Brian played the guitar, Alex played the drums, and Daniel played bass guitar. The whole family got into the act.

After high school, Daniel went on to National College in Florence, where he took business classes. He was studying to be an accountant. "Danny liked numbers and he enjoyed math," says Karen.

In high school and college he had a couple of jobs, working at a car dealership and as an apprentice with a steel manufacturer. But just as his family raised him to serve others through his work at church, Daniel felt moved to serve his country through military service.

"He liked the Army one hundred percent," his mother Karen says. "You couldn't have budged him out of that. . . . I've never seen him happier in all my life than after he joined the National Guard."

In the Guard, Daniel trained to be a combat engineer. His dad recalls that after his training, he was named the 218th Regiment Honor Graduate. Part of his training included learning how to deactivate explosive devices—his mother Karen recalls that "on his evaluation, it said Danny likes to blow up things."

Daniel also inspired his brother Alex to join the National Guard, and Alex became a medic.

"I'm proud of my brother," Alex says. "I'm going to keep carrying on. I know he wants me to serve my full time, which is what I'm going to do."

Daniel joined the 201st Engineer Battalion of the Kentucky Army National Guard, based out of Cynthiana, and was deployed to Afghanistan. He wrote his mother letters telling of his experiences, especially of his work to renovate the chapel for the soldiers on base.

"Danny made a library [in the chapel]," Karen recalls. "We'd send him books for the library and Danny read all of them. They were redoing the chapel outside and inside . . . he was always working in the chapel."

Daniel's family shipped him his bass guitar, and he formed a band with his fellow soldiers in Afghanistan. Karen recalls how, before his posting in Afghanistan, Daniel had played with the Wallace Family Band one last time.

"Danny came in for 15 days of R&R, [and] we got one booking in the church," she says. "Everybody was there . . . daughter-in-law, the boys, everybody. God has blessed us with our family. I've always told people that."

The members of Daniel's loving family are in our prayers today as I share

with my colleagues just some of Daniel's story. We are thinking of his son, Cody George Mardis; his daughter, Abigail Rose Wallace; his parents, Kenneth and Karen; his brother Charles, Charles's wife Robin and their children; his brother Brian, Brian's wife Jennifer and their children; his brother Alex; his sister Kim; his grandfather, Arvis Sinclair; and many other beloved friends and family members.

Daniel once asked his mother to write more letters—not to him, but to other soldiers who didn't have moms like her writing to their sons and daughters in a war zone. After Daniel's death, Karen heard from her son's fellow soldiers about how Daniel carried himself, even in the face of great danger.

"The letters I've received from the guys shows me Danny was true to God. He had a true mission over there," Karen says. He'd always say, "Mom, don't worry—God's watching over me."

Nothing could ever take away the pain of this family's loss. But I hope Daniel's loved ones know there is one other thing they should never worry about: that our Nation could ever forget Daniel's great sacrifice.

And this U.S. Senate will forever honor Sergeant Daniel W. Wallace for his service to country.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senator from Iowa is recognized.

PRIVATE DEBT COLLECTION AMENDMENT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I rise for the purpose of discussing an amendment that was filed yesterday that I hope I get an opportunity to offer. I am going to touch on these points, but I thought I would highlight a couple points about this amendment.

First of all, there is bipartisan agreement in this body there is a \$290 billion tax gap—"tax gap" meaning taxes that are owed but not collected. There is also an understanding that is not written that the IRS is not going to go after taxes unpaid, through their own employees, of under \$25,000 a year. There is a feeling by some people in the IRS there ought to be more employees hired to go after the tax gap, but even if those additional employees are hired, they still will not go after those under \$25,000.

Now, we have a program in place I wish to defend in my remarks. That program in place is the IRS contracting with private collection agencies to go after the money that is owed for those under \$25,000; and to make the point, that program is working. But the bill before us, the Omnibus appropriations bill, contains a provision that would essentially kill the IRS private debt collection program, which the Senate, working through the Senate Finance Committee I serve on, only authorized a short period of 4 years ago.

The IRS implemented that program only 2 years ago.

This program, which has never been fully operational in its brief 2-year period, allows the Internal Revenue Service to use private collection agencies to collect money owed to the Government. The program has many critics, and once again they are seeking to destroy the program before we have a chance to gauge how effective the program is.

Before I discuss the merits of the program, I wish to note that an appropriations bill is not the proper vehicle to nullify tax policy. The private debt collection program was created in a tax bill within the jurisdiction of our Finance Committee, and further legislation affecting the program should be done through the committee where the expertise is, the Finance Committee. Whether you would agree with the program, I think everyone could agree on the importance of the committee structure that we use in the Senate. In other words, a committee of jurisdiction where the expertise is ought to work to change a program if it needs to be changed or if it needs to be done away with, as basically the appropriations bill would do. I would assume members of the Appropriations Committee would not want—would not want—those of us on the Finance Committee making decisions against the expertise of the Appropriations Committee.

The IRS private debt collection program facilitates the collection of tax debts the IRS would not otherwise pursue. These liabilities amount to billions of dollars a year.

A Government Accountability Office report issued in June of 2008 reported the unpaid tax debt as of fiscal year 2007 to be about \$290 billion, of which almost \$185 billion was classified as nonpotentially collectible inventory and \$25.5 billion was deemed potentially collectible but not in active collection status. The private debt collection agencies are only permitted to pursue debts taxpayers have conceded they owe.

Opposition to this program is surprising, since the Internal Revenue Service program is intended to run like similar programs at other agencies. In other words, the Department of Education uses private collection agencies to pursue delinquent student loans. The Treasury Department, which houses the Internal Revenue Service, also houses the Financial Management Service, and, ironically, the Treasury Department uses private debt collection agencies to collect small business loans.

So if it is OK for one branch of the Treasury Department to do that, why isn't it OK for the Internal Revenue Service to go after taxes owed but not paid? The only reason I can think of that private debt collection is so controversial at the Internal Revenue Service is simply the opposition to the program from the National Treasury