

there is a real possibility of achieving meaningful progress in this effort to reach common agreement on a balanced budget, that is a breakthrough.

This is no time to abolish or to abandon our goal of attempting to reach a balanced budget. A piecemeal approach, Mr. President, is unnecessary. We can do it now. We can take that \$711 billion in mutually agreed to savings and find the kind of long-term resolution to this balanced budget challenge that we have now faced for many months.

So it is our opportunity. Apparently the Speaker now agrees that achieving that in a meaningful way is possible, using the common ground approach. Let us not abandon that goal. Let us not take anything less than a balanced budget over that 7-year period. Let us do it now.

I think it is very important that we also recognize that to do it in the context of either a debt limit or a continuing resolution is not practical. We recognize that by encumbering and perhaps endangering either the continuing resolution or the debt limit resolution we may again find ourselves in a complex series of difficulties and crises that neither side wants.

We need a clean continuing resolution. We need a clean resolution on the debt limit. And we can work simultaneously in continuing our negotiations to find a clean budget agreement that achieves the meaningful deficit reduction that we want using the common ground proposals that both the Speaker and the President have now accepted.

Mr. President, I think the last critical issue to recognize is the importance of the next several weeks. It is very important that we not let this opportunity slip, that we not wait until the last moment to resolve these issues. We cannot afford to wait until the 27th or 28th or 29th of February. We cannot wait until that very crisis moment to resolve all these issues relating to the debt limit.

Let us use the 28th and 29th and 30th of January. Let us use the first few weeks of February to resolve these issues. Let us, in other words, stay here and do our work. Let us not take the chance that we will not be able to solve these problems at the end of February when the crisis truly looms.

So let us stay here, let us do what we must, let us recognize the opportunity that is before us, let us accept the challenges the President has now laid out so articulately and so clearly last night. Let us do that, recognizing that there are common goals and much common ground upon which to base our progress. With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who seeks recognition?

Mr. LOTT addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). The Senator from Mississippi.

CONSIDERING THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. LOTT. First, Mr. President, if I might expand just a bit on the opening announcement. I understand now that we are in the process of receiving the House-passed Department of Defense authorization conference report that passed overwhelmingly, I believe something like 287 to 129, something of that magnitude. So we hope that we will be able to get an agreement to get the Defense Department authorization conference report up shortly, tomorrow or Friday.

I know the chairman is very anxious for us to get that done tomorrow if at all possible. We will be working to see if we can come to an agreement on that. We have worked across the aisle with the distinguished chairman from South Carolina and the distinguished ranking member from Georgia, Senator NUNN. I believe he would like to see us get that done as soon as possible, and we will continue to work in that effort.

BALANCED BUDGET AND DEBT CEILING LIMIT

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, in response to the comments from the distinguished Democratic leader, certainly we should continue to find a way to move toward a balanced budget agreement. The President said last night he wanted to do that, and even though he vetoed the balanced budget when we sent it to him, that should not deter our efforts.

I believe from what I saw last night that the majority leader, Senator DOLE, indicated we are, in fact, going to continue to pursue this, and he intends for us to send balanced budget legislation to the President.

So we need to think about how we do that. The Senator from South Dakota mentioned, even though we want to avoid, if we can, a protracted, cumbersome process, perhaps we can have an agreement that would allow us to avoid that. But we will continue to have that as our goal. We are going to work to give the President an opportunity to, in fact, sign bills along the lines of what he said he wanted to sign last night.

I know that the House, where continuing resolutions must begin, is in the process of developing a continuing resolution, or a balanced budget downpayment is the way I think it should be appropriately described. They will be acting on that, I believe, on Thursday, and then we will have that legislation before us. I certainly hope and expect it is going to be legislation that the Senate will be able to pass and that will go to the President.

With regard to the debt ceiling extension, there, again, I believe the history of that has been the House will act first. I know the House is thinking about that and is working on it.

With regard to it being a clean debt ceiling, I went back and checked the

record in 1990 and 1989 and 1987, back to 1984, and found that in most years debt ceilings did, in fact, have riders on them. Those were put on by a Democratic-controlled Congress when we had a Republican President, so it would not be anything out of the ordinary if it worked the other way this time.

I must say, as a Senator who has voted in the Senate and in the House both ways on debt ceiling—sometimes for them, sometimes against them, and not just when there was a Republican President, sometimes Democratic Presidents—sometimes my vote has been influenced by the riders. Quite often, they are agreed-to things, things that need to be done. I hope that we will wait and see exactly what will be the best way to proceed on that, keeping in mind the House will act on it, and we will certainly be communicating with them.

I have said publicly that I think we should do that, and I fully expect that we will. The timing, of course, will be determined by a whole series of meetings that will be underway. I assure the Senator from South Dakota that we are going to be very busy during the next few days and weeks, and we have a lot of work to do. We have to begin on the next fiscal year. Hearings must begin soon on budgets and appropriations bills and even authorizations. We certainly intend to begin that process.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor for others who might have comments.

Mr. HEFLIN addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama is recognized.

BALANCED BUDGET AND THE STATE OF AGRICULTURE

Mr. HEFLIN. Mr. President, I feel like we ought to start negotiations again in regard to the budget. I think there is an opportunity to get a balanced budget now and in the immediate future. I think if we have a long recess that we will stand a chance of losing what momentum there is, and it may well be that in the near future, we can narrow the issues by adopting some of the various issues that have been agreed upon.

Mr. President, for the first time in over 40 years, farm programs have been allowed to expire. As of December 31, with a few exceptions, the authority for farm programs has run out.

It is the responsibility of this Congress, to pass a farm bill every 5 years or so, and create stability and certainty in rural America. Instead, with the failure of passing a farm bill, there is uncertainty, frustration and confusion in the agriculture producing areas of the country. Congress has failed in its responsibility to rural America and we must, therefore, act now to resolve this situation.

What can be done at this late date, what are our options? As I see it, we have three options: First, we can do nothing and allow the Secretary of Agriculture to implement the Agriculture