Federal student loan program. Twice in the 1980s, he voted to cut Pell Grants, which he now endorses.

He claims that under his voucher plan, students will be able to go to the private school of their choice. But private schools can decide whether to accept a child or not. The real choice is made by the schools, not parents. The more exclusive the school, the more students will be excluded.

Scarce Federal dollars should not go to schools that can exclude children they do not want. Public schools are already starved for funds. The Dole voucher scheme will inevitably make their plight much worse. We do not have to destroy the public schools in order to save them.

President Clinton and Democrats support true choice—public school choice—where every child has an equal opportunity to go to the school of their choice within the public school system.

President Clinton has been and is a leader in the movement for public school choice, which is supported by a vast majority of Americans. In this year's State of the Union Address, President Clinton said, ''I challenge every State to give all parents the right to choose which public school children will attend.''

Candidate Dole has it wrong. Education is a national priority that requires public effort and commitment to benefit the entire population, not just the few.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Wednesday, July 17, the Federal debt stood at $5,162,069,897,551.43.

On a per capita basis, every man, woman, and child in America owes $19,456.14 as his or her share of that debt.

REDUCE THE DEFICIT WHILE PROTECTING OUR NATIONAL SECURITY: ELIMINATE WASTEFUL MILITARY SPENDING NOT REQUESTED BY THE PENTAGON

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, today I rise in opposition to the FY 1997 Defense Appropriation bill. Once again Senate Republicans have sought to include over $10 billion extra dollars on military projects not requested by the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Quite frankly, it is fiscally irresponsible to spend more than is needed on wasteful military programs at a time when many domestic programs are being reduced substantially in order to balance the budget.

At the request of the Republican leadership, the Appropriations Committee has authorized $10.1 billion more than was requested. That's right. The majority wants to spend $10.1 billion more than the Pentagon has requested, or than they have indicated they will be able to responsibly use, next year. Much of that figure was not even included in the Pentagon's 5-year plan, or on so-called wish lists that were solicited by congressional defense committees. The Pentagon has said clearly: They don't need these funds now, the projects are not in their 5-year plan, and they're not even on their wish lists.

Mr. President, there is no question that there is waste in the Pentagon. In fact, about a year ago, the Pentagon's own spending watchdog, its Comptroller General John Hamre, conceded that DOD could not account for over $13 billion in spending. It's just been lost in the ocean of paperwork at the Pentagon, and likely won't ever be sorted out. In fact, the Comptroller has all but given up on trying to find out what happened to most of the money, arguing it would be more expensive than it would be worth to account for these funds. It is particularly outrageous that the Appropriations Committee has proposed these hefty increases at the same time that the Defense Department is being called to task for not being able to account for billions of dollars in its own spending.

Waste, possible fraud in Pentagon spending, certainly egregious abuses of basic accounting rules—this is a serious problem, and no one seems to be doing very much about it. Indeed, instead of vigorously overseeing spending in this budget, we are trying to foist off on the Pentagon an extra $10.1 billion in military hardware, new weapons systems, planes and ships, and other spending they have not even requested so that certain Senators can protect jobs in their States that depend on continued high levels of defense spending.

If we pass this bill, my Minnesota constituents will continue to pay their taxes to bolster the treasuries of bloated defense contractors, who are building ships and planes and weapons systems that we don't need, and can't use, and that won't make our Nation any more secure. So that there is no mistake, let me repeat that for those who are listening. We are considering today a defense spending bill that spends a full $10.1 billion more than the President requested in his budget. We are doing this despite the fact that there is no sudden, extraordinary threat to justify such an increase. And many of those in this body who are pressing for such a huge increase are precisely the same people who are out here on this floor, day after day, week after week, month after month, howling about how we simply must get the deficit under control.

They are doing this while at the same time larding defense bills with billions in spending for their local shipyard, or weapons contractor, or plane manufacturer. Have we no shame, Mr. President? Is there no sense of limits in this body when it comes to wasteful and unnecessary weapons programs? Now, controlling the deficit is important, and I have supported responsible, fairminded deficit reduction proposals totaling hundreds of billions of dollars. We heard yesterday that the deficit has dropped from about $290 billion to an estimated $117 billion this year, due largely to the President's fiscal policies. And now we again are faced with outrageous overspending on military programs that are not even supported by the Pentagon.

For the past couple of years, we've heard from many of our Republican colleagues who have sought to look like they were reducing the Federal deficit through various schemes and non-specific formulas. And even when they have offered something specific, they tend to first go after funding for education, Medicare and Medicaid; programs for those who cannot help themselves; programs which protect our air, lakes and rivers, and on and on.

While I have serious concerns even about some of the President's underlying defense spending assumptions which require, for example, fighting two major regional conflicts at one time without help from our allies, at least his budget focuses on research and development, maintaining a high level of readiness, and improving the quality of life of our Armed Forces. We can meet our defense needs fully and responsibly. My question is, Why aren't we applying the same standards to wasteful military spending that are being applied to domestic programs that millions of average Americans rely on?

There are three arguments that I want to make to counter Republican assertions that the President's defense request is too low. First, the appropriations bill provides more to defense, in dollar terms, than last year. This is in stark contrast to the fact that non-defense discretionary spending as a whole is frozen or declining precipitously in many areas.

Second, Republicans are claiming that defense spending in the bill declines in real terms and as such their budget recommendation is actually a cut from last year. Think about that argument—defense spending is declining in real terms. Now contrast it with the Republican arguments as they seek to dismantle domestic spending programs. Do they ever seek to portray their domestic cuts in real terms? Or do they consistently recite that they are spending the same or more in the current year than they did last year. They can't have it both ways. Pick one methodology and stick with it, I say.

Third, the administration estimates that due to lower inflation estimates over the next few years, we can buy as much for our defense dollar as we had planned, but spend about $46 billion less for it than was requested last year. By this calculation, the President's budget request actually represents a long-term increase over last year's defense program.

The bottom line is this: The President's defense budget maintains a strong defense, no matter how the Republicans choose to craft their argument. It takes into account all of our