A BIENNIAL BUDGET FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, all of us have been various places during the recess. I have been back in Wyoming listening to people and to a number of things that people are concerned about. We are back now, basically, to spend this month, I suppose, almost totally immersed in the appropriations process, which we must do. I have been interested for some time in making some changes in that process. It seems to me now to be appropriate, perhaps, while we are into it, to talk about the possibility of changing a bit.

What are some of the things we are going to have confronting us now? First of all, we have talked about appropriations, in most years, for about 40 percent of the time. About 40 percent of the time the Senate and House spends in session is spent on appropriations. During this last period of time, we will be confronted with trying to move quickly to complete that work, which has to be completed, of course, for the Government to go on. And that is OK. But as part of that, we will see a great deal of nongermane amendments being put onto appropriations bills, which really have nothing to do with appropriations. They are put on there partly because the year is nearly over, and if they are going to happen, they have to happen now.

Often it is easier to move an appropriations bill with an amendment than it is a freestanding bill. We will be confronted again, I suspect, by the administration threatening, where they don't agree with the Congress on the payments in certain areas and appropriations for certain areas, that they will close down the Government and blame the Congress. We have to guard against that. It is not the intention of the Congress to close down the Government—nor was it several years ago. But that is the pressure that is used. So what could we do to change that?

It seems to me that we ought to consider going into a biennial budget process—a process in which every 2 years we would spend our time on the budget. We would budget for a biennial time and have the remainder of the time to do the other business of the Congress. I am persuaded that the Congress spends too much time on budget issues.

One of the really important things, after the budget is completed, is for the Congress to ensure that those programs that have been funded and the money that has been spent is spent as efficiently as possible, spent in the way in which the appropriation was designed and for the purpose for which it was designed. That doesn't always happen. So oversight, it seems to me, is certainly one of the more important things Congress has to do. We have relatively little time to do that.

We don't always complete our work. Since 1997, we have had 60 continuing resolutions. That means that we didn't complete the appropriations and that we simply continued what had been done in the past. As I mentioned before, we have devoted roughly 40 percent of our time to budget resolutions, reconciliation and appropriations. We have too many repetitive votes on the same issues. There are lots of things for the Congress to do and lots of things that the Congress has a responsibility to do. Many of them, I think, are neglected because we spend too much time each year on appropriations.

There is not enough time for vigorous oversight. We continue to let inefficient and inappropriate programs continue. One of the other things that brings it to mind—and I am sure the Presiding Officer had the same experience at home—is when you hear about all these programs being operated in quite a different fashion than was the concept of the legislation, and that is part of our responsibility in Congress.

In the last Congress, I introduced a bill that creates a 2-year authorization for appropriations and budget resolutions—partly, I suppose, because of my experience in the Wyoming legislature in which we operated with biennial sessions. Most States operate with biennial appropriations, as a matter of fact. One of the arguments against it, however, is that some of the States are going to annual appropriations. I will tell you why. They are going to annual appropriations to be consistent with the Federal Government, and there is so much Federal funding, it is difficult. If the Federal Government would do it, I think you would find these States going back to it, and it would eliminate some of the redundancy in budgeting and help to reduce the size of Government, and I think it would help put a bridle on unchecked Government spending. It would encourage agencies and executive branch agencies to plan for longer in the future. And I think it is difficult for an agency to have to plan one year at a time when they are doing longer term projects. They can be useful for them as well. They could help Government do it with Federal grantees to do it.

The author of the bill, Senator DOMENICI, has introduced bipartisan legislation with the bipartisan support of 35 of our colleagues. It passed the Budget Committee and the Governmental Affairs Committee, and is pending on the Senate calendar.

Bipartisan support has been expressed by Senator LOTT, Senator DASCHLE, leaders of both sides of the Senate, and Vice President GORE and the OMB Director have all expressed support for biannual budgets. A limited time has elapsed. I suspect it is unlikely that it will pass, which is part of what I am talking about. Now we are jammed in here for 4 weeks. The leader spoke this morning about how difficult it will be to do all of the things that have to be done. As I recall, the budget is supposed to have been pretty well done by now. It is supposed to move along on a schedule. We, of course, seldom, if ever, live by that schedule. So we are in our annual sprint to avoid a Government shutdown.

I urge my colleagues to consider some reform of legislation that would change what we do. I think there is great merit in doing it. It is not a new idea. Certainly it is not a cure-all of all Federal Government ills. But it is a process that perhaps would be helpful.

Processes are hard to change in this institution. And I respect that. There should be a reason to change things. I am a little discouraged when you talk about making things work a little better when the response often is, ''Well, we have always done it that way.'' That is not a very good response.

I think we could save time. I think we could save money. I think we could manage better. I think we could allow ourselves to do the things that we need to do.

I suspect, frankly, that one of the reasons there is opposition is that those people and the appropriators have a little more power to exert each year rather than every other year by being on this committee and helping to decide where money is spent. That is one of the realisms of it. On the other hand, there are a lot more people who are not on the appropriations committee than there are on the committee. So that should not keep us from doing it.

This, as I said, would not be a panacea but certainly would be a step in the right direction of what we seem to constantly talk about, and I hope constantly seek; that is, a more efficient operation, a more effective operation by spending less taxpayers' money. It seems to me that this is one of the ways to do that.

I hope we consider it. If we don't get it done this time, we ought to bring it up early in the next session. We ought to bring it before both the House and the Senate and streamline the way we appropriate the funds for the programs in Congress.

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

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

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, Thank you.

U.S. POLICY TOWARD IRAQ

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, I thought I might take just a moment to speak to the issue of the policy of the United States of America toward Iraq and Saddam Hussein.

In the month or so that the Senate has been out of session, there has been a significant series of developments which cause me considerable concern about the direction of the administration's policy—or not policies, as the