

of Representatives, compromises with the administration.

But now, today, at 3 o'clock, is the time to move ahead and complete action on this legislation and thereby start that critical funding. I am sure as we discuss this over the next several hours it will become apparent that every single Senator in this body has a stake in passage of this legislation.

I did write to each of the Senators last week that no Senator should be under any illusion as to what will happen if we were to fail to pass this legislation. It is a clear, it is a stark alternative to a continuing resolution of the seven outstanding appropriations bills. Failure to pass this Omnibus appropriations bill, to approve this legislation, would really shortchange—it would curtail our efforts in fighting terrorism. It would weaken our food security system. It would create hardships for millions of veterans. It would put at risk millions of lives of those who suffer HIV and AIDS overseas. It would shortchange the needs of our schools and of our States and needy Americans.

I do also want to add, in addition to stating the importance of passing this Omnibus bill, that the legislation itself adheres to the agreement, the general agreement between Congress and the executive branch in terms of spending limits. I have set aside the emergency spending for the Iraq war supplemental. As I mentioned, some would wish there was more spending and some would wish that there was less spending. Whatever the arguments that people put forth, what it is important for people to understand, I believe, is that the spending under these appropriations bills is consistent with the budget blueprint that we adopted last April for this fiscal year.

It is a fact that, excluding the expenditures of the major supplementals for the operations in Iraq—one last April and most recently in October—appropriations funding authority between 2003 and 2004 is held to slightly less than a 3-percent increase.

Second, while remaining within this agreed-to spending restraint, the legislation funds important bipartisan priorities. A number of examples will be talked about on the floor, but let me cite just a few.

Education funding for title I programs would be funded at \$12.4 billion, and special education—or IDEA—would be funded at \$10.1 billion. These two programs combined would increase funding by \$2 billion for education over last year. Both increases are necessary to truly see that we leave no child behind. If we had to resort to a full year of a continuing resolution, these education programs would lose \$2 billion.

In education, we have a wonderful program—the Pell Grant Program—for needy college students. Under this bill, they would receive \$12.1 billion. If we had to take that stark alternative of a continuing resolution, funding would be reduced for these Pell grant recipi-

ents by \$700 million. That is clearly unacceptable.

Head Start spending in this bill would increase to \$6.8 billion—a \$150 million increase that would be forgone if we resorted to that stark alternative of a continuing resolution.

In the field of health, if you look at the area of research, NIH would receive \$28 billion—an increase in this bill, once it is passed, of over \$1 billion. Under a full year of a continuing resolution, this increase would be zero. Veterans' medical care spending would reach \$28.6 billion—an increase of over \$3 billion over last year—if, and only if, we pass this bill.

The list continues in terms of highway funding, the Millennium Challenge Account, and election reform. Global HIV/AIDS funding—with a strong bipartisan policy in this body—would reach \$2.4 billion. But failure to pass this legislation would clearly jeopardize that 5-year commitment of \$15 billion in funding to which Congress and the President have agreed.

The Small Business Administration, through the Guaranteed Loan Program, would receive \$9.5 billion. These are critical loans to small businesses that create jobs out of this increasingly strong economy.

FBI funding would increase by \$423 million once we pass this bill. If we don't pass the bill, the new FBI agents, who we know are needed, would not be funded; AmeriCorps, USDA's Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service—the list goes on.

I address only a few of the critical funding items. People will talk about the others.

There are other provisions in the bill such as providing a 4.1-percent Federal pay increase that is important to all of our Federal workers listening to me now.

There is over \$200 million in assistance to Southern California for last winter's disastrous forest fires that will not occur without this bill.

I am sure the chairman of the committee can list many other important funding items in this legislation needed for the basic functioning of government.

But the time has come to pass this legislation and to move forward into next year's budget—the fiscal year 2005 budget, which I remind all of my colleagues will arrive in less than 2 weeks. It is time for us to move ahead in 2004 rather than remain stuck in 2003.

I ask my colleagues to weigh their votes on this legislation very carefully this afternoon.

Again, I thank Chairman STEVENS and Senator BYRD for their tremendous work this past year, and particularly their staff for their dedication and long hours expended.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

Mr. DASCHLE. Thank you, Mr. President.

I join in welcoming back our colleagues and staff, and I wish our majority leader a happy new year. I hope his holidays were as enjoyable as ours.

I express my good wishes to the Presiding Officer and to the distinguished assistant Democratic leader and others with whom I have already had the opportunity to talk personally.

I hope this will be a productive session because there is so much that ought to be done. I believe much can be done if we work in a constructive and bipartisan way for legislation that will create opportunities for all Americans.

AN OPPORTUNITY SOCIETY

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, Senate Democrats have set as our goal the passage of legislation that we call an "Opportunity Society" for all Americans—not just the privileged few. It includes proposals for more jobs—especially in manufacturing where we have lost nearly 2.5 million jobs just in the past 3 years—8,000 in my State of South Dakota. Nothing could create those jobs faster than early passage of a highway bill. We have already lost 90,000 jobs by the failure to take up the bill last year when the last bill expired. We can create over 800,000 jobs this year if we act expeditiously.

Not only do we believe in the need to create jobs but we want those jobs to pay a decent wage. Nothing can be more critical in that regard than to increase the minimum wage for the first time in 7 years.

Democrats also believe this Senate should address the cost and availability of health care which is fast becoming the preeminent issue in our country. I have vivid recollections of my hundreds of conversations with South Dakotans throughout my State last year, conversations which revealed the anxiety and the physical and financial pain now experienced by so many with and without health insurance. We believe one of the very first steps in reaching this goal should be the passage of legislation which authorizes the Government to negotiate lower prices for all seniors on prescription drugs as we already do for veterans and military retirees.

We will also advocate that this country devote far more attention to education, from preschool to higher education, with more resources and greater priority to fully funding childcare, title I, special education, and the No Child Left Behind Act.

We are determined to see that the Senate addresses retirement security for all Americans by protecting our seniors' pensions and providing them with the confidence that their retirement income will not be squandered or lost because of corporate mismanagement. It is imperative that Social Security be protected, and we will continue to fight this year to see that it is.

We also seek to provide opportunities here at home, and we ask that we not

forget we are a nation at war and are asking a great deal of the men and women in our Armed Forces as well as their families. Democrats want to ensure that all of our Nation's reservists have access to quality health care. Democrats will try to make certain that no veteran has to choose between his disability pay and his retirement pay. We will seek to provide additional resources to end the lengthy waits at VA hospitals that are a fact of life for too many of our veterans today.

It is also our hope that this session will allow us the opportunity early on to address a good energy bill. I have said on several occasions, should the MTBE liability immunity provisions be stricken from the provisions in the energy bill, there would be sufficient votes to pass it on the Senate floor. The decision is up to the majority.

It is also our goal this year to pass the Mental Health Parity Act, welfare reform reauthorization, and the legislation to outlaw hate crimes.

As I said, we hope we can do this and much more on a bipartisan basis.

It is with sadness that I note the way the last session ended. The majority didn't seek consensus or cooperation of the Democratic caucus on either the Medicare bill or the energy legislation. It was a process designed to find agreement among those who already agreed not to bridge the differences or broaden support. It was marked by procedural abuses.

Many Americans are still dismayed that the House kept the Medicare vote open for 3 hours while one Member actually admitted he was offered a bribe from another Member on the House floor to support the bill. That isn't how the American people expect us to do their work. We can do better. This year we must.

While I am on matters that cause Democrats very grave concern, I am compelled to note the onerous recess appointment of Judge Charles Pickering. The President could not have started off this session of Congress in a worse way. The Senate has repeatedly rejected this nomination. The timing, during the Martin Luther King, Jr., weekend, also could not have been worse. It was a deplorable decision and one that is deeply regrettable on several levels.

As we begin this session, our first order of business will be the consideration of the Omnibus appropriations bill. The Omnibus appropriations bill was once a good bill. In the Senate we were able to work out compromises. We accomplished many things and the process worked. But the administration intervened at the eleventh hour and demanded changes, laid down an ultimatum, and even forced the conference to take positions in direct conflict with earlier positions taken on rollcall votes in both the House and the Senate.

Its insistence on provisions affecting the mad cow decision, overtime regulations, and media concentration made

the bill unsupportable to many Senators. We should take the time to fix the bill's problems because they affect millions of American families. We owe it to them to take the time to do it right.

I take a moment for some additional comments on matters unrelated to our legislative agenda. First, I know I speak for all Senators in expressing praise for our troops in Iraq for their inspiring demonstration of bravery and patriotism. Nearly 500 soldiers have died and 3,000 have been wounded since the war began. Our country owes them our debt of gratitude. I am particularly mindful of the sacrifices made by thousands of South Dakotans, including 800 who departed for Iraq during the recent holiday season.

Recently, I attended a funeral for Chris Soelzer, a young man from Sturgis who lost his life in Iraq on Christmas Eve. He was a remarkable role model, a leader, and soldier. The agony felt by his family, friends, and his community is another poignant reminder of the horrific sacrifice that war demands.

We honor those who are there and express our heartfelt gratitude for the job they continue to do under the most difficult of circumstances. While we praise them for finding Saddam Hussein and for continuing the effort to ensure democracy for the 23 million people of Iraq, we remain concerned that our troops face violent attacks daily and our troops and our taxpayers are bearing a disproportionate share of the burden.

Second, I note the decision made by our colleague, Senator JOHN BREAU, to retire at the end of this session. I have had the good fortune to work with Senator BREAU now for 25 years, 17 in the Senate. I am proud to call him a close friend.

He will leave the Senate with many accomplishments, many admirers, and many good friends. He has earned our respect and affection by his manner, his work, and his never-ending desire to seek consensus and bipartisan achievement. For that reason, he will also leave a hole in this institution, one that will be very hard to fill. We thank JOHN BREAU for his service to his country, his remarkable leadership, and his friendship. I wish Lois and JOHN well in the months and years ahead.

In the spirit of JOHN BREAU, let me close by reiterating our desire to work in a constructive, bipartisan way for legislation that will truly create an "opportunity society" for all Americans. I look forward to the coming months and the challenges that we will confront as they unfold.

I yield the floor.

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2673, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A conference report to accompany H.R. 2673 to make appropriations for agriculture, rural development, Food and Drug Administration, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes.

RECESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, with the two leaders having spoken, I ask unanimous consent we recess now for our luncheons.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Under the previous order, the Senate will now stand in recess until the hour of 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:24 p.m., recessed until 2:16 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. VOINOVICH).

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004—CONFERENCE REPORT—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time between 2:15 p.m. and 2:50 p.m. shall be equally divided for debate only.

Who yields time?

The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, the time is equally divided between now and 2:50; is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, if the Senator would yield, why 2:50? I have missed something. That is fine. That means we have about 15 minutes.

Mr. STEVENS. Seventeen minutes apiece.

Mr. REID. On this side, if it is OK, I will yield 5 minutes to Senator KENNEDY, 5 minutes to Senator JACK REED, and 5 minutes to Senator JOHNSON.

Mr. STEVENS. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I apologize for my voice. I hope I can keep it long enough to make this statement.

Republicans and Democrats worked together to adopt this omnibus conference report that is before the Senate today. It contains seven appropriations bills. It was my hope that the Senate would pass this bill last December, and it was a great disappointment to me that we did not pass it then.