

this, but I think we all agree that our free market works best when we all know and we all follow the rules of the road and all have confidence in that system.

That is what the focus of those hearings will be. If there are people abusing the free enterprise system to advantage themselves or their businesses at the expense of everyday Americans, they need to be exposed and they should be ashamed.

Next week's hearings will help shed light on this very important matter.

Meanwhile, the Senate is also working to strengthen and secure America's energy supply. Indeed, we are doing it, in part, in the bill that we will be voting on over the course of today.

Last summer, the Senate passed a comprehensive energy plan that looked, in terms of framework, at production, at consumption, at conservation, at alternative uses of fuel, at nuclear, at hydrogen, at the investment of science and technology to make fuel use more efficient, and that was a good first step. But we have a lot more to do.

When you go home and you are talking to constituents and you say: What if I told you that most of the oil that you are pumping into your gas tank comes from overseas, from foreign sources, from countries that are very specifically hostile to the United States, and what if I told you that the United States has barely 45 days' worth of oil on hand in our own Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the answer is obvious. You would want to diversify your energy sources, you would want to move toward energy independence, and that is exactly what we need to do.

Now, if I told you that in the United States we have untapped oil reserves comparable to all of the oil in Arizona, California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, North Dakota, and South Dakota combined, you would want to find it since it is here and get it to the American people.

Well, we do have that resource. It is in Alaska under the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve, ANWR. We all know ANWR is the Nation's single greatest prospect for future oil. The Government estimates that ANWR contains approximately 10.4 billion barrels of technically recoverable oil. At peak production at this one site could be produced more oil than any other U.S. State, any other State in this country, Texas or Louisiana, from this one site.

In 1968, the Federal Government estimated that Prudhoe Bay held 9 billion barrels of oil. To date, Prudhoe Bay has produced 13 billion barrels and it is still producing. Now, more than ever, we need to recognize the need to strengthen America's oil supply and now we have the opportunity to do that. America can't afford \$3 a gallon, and we can't afford to depend on sources many of which are hostile to the United States.

Some critics complain that drilling in ANWR will hurt the environment. It

is simply not true. It was stated again and again in the Chamber yesterday and explained, the prospective drilling site is an area equivalent to the size, if you took a tennis court, of a single postage stamp.

State-of-the-art drilling technology has made remarkable advancements to preserve and protect the environment. It is now possible to extract oil using that horizontal drilling technique from a site that could reach way out from a site that is very tiny, as you look at it on the horizon or area. These are called extended reach wells. We talked yesterday about how far out you can go. You can go out horizontally twice as far as you can vertically, therefore reducing the number of drilling sites.

Developing the Reserve will create hundreds of thousands of jobs for hard-working Americans. It will contribute billions to the economy and strengthen America's energy independence. The oil in ANWR is critical to our economic and national security. I look forward to the vote today on developing this tremendous resource. Responsible, environmentally sensitive exploration will help ease the bottom line for every American family. We are working hard to deliver real solutions for the real problems facing the American people by taking strong, decisive action. Indeed, by today's floor action, we are moving America forward.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

AMENDMENT NO. 2347 WITHDRAWN

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask for the regular order with respect to amendment No. 2347 and I ask that the amendment be withdrawn. I further ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to votes in relation to the pending amendments in the order offered; provided further that there be 2 minutes equally divided for debate prior to the votes in relation to any of the pending amendments, in addition to any second degrees offered.

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, has the majority leader completed his statement?

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. I thank the Chair.

THE BUDGET

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I strongly oppose the Republican budget and the package of reconciliation bills we will be debating and have debated this past week. The Republican budget and the reconciliation bills are fiscally irresponsible and simply will increase the deficit, which is already staggering—\$8 trillion.

The budget and these reconciliation bills are based on the wrong values.

They harm vulnerable Americans. And these cuts simply provide tax breaks for special interests. With so many other serious problems facing middle-class families and our Nation, the decision to focus on this reconciliation legislation reflects seriously misplaced priorities. Certainly, together we can do better than this.

The budget of the United States ought to be a mirror of our Nation's values. The budget should reflect what we think is important, what we care about and what we don't. It says a lot about who we are and what we value as a people and a nation, this thing we call the budget.

In essence, a budget is a moral document. Unfortunately, the Republican budget is an immoral document. That is not my term, Mr. President. That is the conclusion of some of our Nation's leading religious leaders who, citing scripture and the Bible, have urged all of us to oppose this budget reconciliation process. As Bishop Mark Hanson, the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, put it, "This is not the time to cut . . . important programs while using the cuts to pay for tax breaks for those who don't need them."

My Republican friends will portray their budget as a way to reduce the deficit. In truth, their budget and these reconciliation bills actually make the deficit worse. In fact, debt under their budget would go up by about \$3 trillion in just 5 years. That is fiscally responsible? No. It is irresponsible at any time but especially when we should be saving to prepare for the baby boomers' retirement.

Let's review a little bit of the history. When this administration came to power, our Nation had finally put our fiscal house in order. After many years of deficits and raids on Social Security to pay for other programs, Democrats, without the help of a single Republican vote, stopped that practice.

As a result of our efforts, this Nation ran a surplus from 1998 through 2001, and it was projected we would enjoy surpluses as far as the eye could see. At the time, our future looked so bright that many economists, including Alan Greenspan, seriously worried about what would happen to financial markets if we eliminated our debt altogether. Unfortunately, in these 5 short years, with Washington Republicans in control of the House, the Senate, and the White House, we have moved from a period of record surpluses to a time of record deficits. Once again, we are raiding Social Security, and the deficits in each of the last 3 years have been higher than at any time before President Bush took office.

This year, Social Security has had taken from it—I don't know the exact amount—about \$175 billion to mask the deficit. The latest Republican budget before us will make matters even worse. While the majority has divided its budget in a way that obscures its overall effect, nobody should be fooled.

Viewed as a whole, budget reconciliation would increase the deficit by more than \$30 billion. After 5 years under their budget, our national debt would exceed \$11 trillion.

But the problems with their budget go well beyond its fiscal irresponsibility. This budget reflects the wrong values. It puts more burdens on those already struggling. And if that isn't bad enough, it takes the sacrifices it demands of the less fortunate to partially pay for another round of large tax breaks for the elite of this country.

Let's look at what is in the bill before us.

The budget increases burdens on America's seniors by increasing Medicare premiums, and we have not seen what the House is going to give us.

It cuts health care, both Medicare and Medicaid, by a total of \$27 billion.

It cuts support for our farmers by \$3 billion.

It cuts housing.

It allows drilling in an Alaskan wildlife refuge, at the behest of the oil and gas industry, even though this year they are going to make a \$100 billion profit.

If we take a look at what is happening in the House of Representatives, we can see what is likely coming down the pike from them:

Student loan cuts, food stamp cuts, cuts in child support enforcement, deeper and more painful cuts in health care.

Why? Why are we using expedited procedures for cuts that will harm millions of seniors and working Americans? Is it to reduce the deficit or to pay for Katrina? No; no on both counts. Is it to prepare for the avian flu? No. It is to provide congressional Republicans fiscal cover today so they can turn around tomorrow to provide tax breaks to special interests and multimillionaires.

Let me be more specific. The capital gains and dividend tax breaks in the Republican budget would provide 53 percent of its benefits to those with incomes greater than \$1 million. Those lucky few would get an average tax break of about \$35,000.

What about those with incomes between, say, \$50,000 and \$200,000? Well, they will get an average cut of \$112. How about those with incomes of less than \$50,000? Six dollars—\$35,000 for those with incomes of more than \$1 million, \$6 for those earning less than \$50,000. And to partially pay for these tax breaks, many Republicans now want to cut Medicare, cut Medicaid, cut agriculture, cut housing, cut student loans, cut child support enforcement, cut services on which Katrina survivors should be relying, cut benefits needed by our Nation's most vulnerable Americans.

Now you know why some of our Nation's most respected religious leaders call this budget immoral. These choices do not reflect the best of American values. That is not what Americans would want. America can do better.

Finally, beyond the fiscal irresponsibility of this budget and the disturbing choices it makes, there are other more important priorities the Senate should be addressing. Take, for example, skyrocketing prices of fuel. Families are struggling to fuel their vehicles and heat their homes. Farmers and businesses are feeling the pinch. Democrats have a plan to respond, to address price gouging, and ultimately make our Nation energy independent. That is more important than harming the vulnerable to provide tax breaks to special interests while increasing the deficit.

Hurricane survivors are still struggling. Thousands lack health care coverage. More than 200,000 still live in motel and hotel rooms. Devastated communities have been forced into massive layoffs and are unable to provide even basic services, such as a place for kids to go to school. And many survivors who have lost everything are facing the threats of foreclosure and bankruptcy in homes that do not even exist. Democrats have a plan to address these urgent needs. That is more important than harming the vulnerable to provide tax breaks to special interests and multimillionaires while increasing the deficit.

The Iraq war is not going well, as we all know. We were promised by this administration that it would. Mr. President, 2,036 American soldiers have been killed in Iraq. Tens of thousands have been wounded, badly injured; 150,000 more are still in harm's way in Iraq, while the administration still has no plan to end the conflict and bring them home. Instead of being greeted as liberators, the violence continues nearly 3 years after the start of this conflict. Our Nation badly needs a strategy for success, and that, too, is more important than harming the vulnerable to provide tax breaks to special interests and multimillionaires while increasing the deficit.

I urge my colleagues to defeat this budget piece by piece. It is fiscally irresponsible. It is based on the wrong values and reflects the wrong priorities. I would hope together we could do better. Let's reject this budget, and let's focus on the real needs of the middle class and our Nation.

APPROPRIATIONS FOR AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2006—CONFERENCE REPORT—Resumed

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, while I recognize there are good things in this bill, today I will be voting against the Agriculture appropriations conference report for two primary reasons. One, it delays the implementation of the country-of-origin labeling for beef and other foods. U.S. consumers deserve to know where their food is grown and

processed, and domestic producers deserve the opportunity to differentiate their products from foreign imports. While mandatory country-of-origin food labeling passed as part of the 2002 farm law, its implementation continues to be delayed and this bill would delay it an additional 2 years.

My other primary concern is that the bill cuts funding for many important conservation programs, such as the Conservation Security Program. Since the farm bill was enacted in 2002, the USDA conservation programs have taken hits year after year. They have been used repeatedly as a source of off-sets to fund other needs. Including this conference report, the annual appropriations measures from fiscal year 2003 through fiscal year 2006 have cut \$1.13 billion in mandatory funds that we dedicated to conservation in the farm bill.

I appreciate the hard work of the chairman and the ranking member, but what came back from the House is not good for our Nation's farmers, it is not good for consumers, and it is not good for conservation. I will, therefore, be voting against it.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, today the Senate will vote on the conference report to H.R. 2744, the Agriculture Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2006. Unfortunately, I cannot support final passage of this bill.

The conference agreement to H.R. 2744 appropriates about \$100.9 billion in spending, an amount that is approximately \$848 million over the administration's request, \$258 million more than the Senate-approved bill and \$660 million more than the House-passed bill. As is the case with many of the appropriations bills that come to the floor, this bill and its accompanying report contain earmarks and pork projects which have not been authorized or requested.

I believe that some Federal involvement is necessary to assist low-income families under the Food Stamp Program and that we ensure that our farmers stay out of the red. And to this end, many of the programs under the Agriculture Department are worthwhile and I support their funding. I know that many of my colleagues have spoken before the Senate about the economic struggles of America's farmers, but as Congress looks ahead towards legislating a new farm bill in the near future, we once again conform to the practice of diverting taxpayer dollars into an array of special interest pork projects.

Let's take a look at some of the earmarks that are in this bill: \$350,000 for a report on the economic development of the sheep industry in the United States; \$1,250,000 for the National Sheep Industry Improvement Center; \$210,000 to the Little Red River Irrigation project, Arkansas; \$1,800,000 for the Muskingam River Watershed, Mochican River, Jerome and Muddy Fork obstruction removal projects, Ohio; \$1,000,000 for a flood prevention project