

When I campaigned in 1992 for election, I said that the deficit will come down regardless of what happens, and every politician in Washington will take credit for it coming down. One of the major reasons it will come down, having nothing whatever to do with any politician in Washington, is that we will finish paying for the savings and loan bailout. That is moving through the system like a pig in a python, and once it finally is digested and taken care of, you will go back down to the same level of deficit you had before we had the bailout of the savings and loan. A lot of us will look at each other and say, "Aren't we heroes? Look. It has come down." When in fact all that really happened is that we are paying off a one-time obligation, and that was completed.

The other reason it comes down is because the cold war is over and we have had substantial downsizing in the Defense Department. The President talks about 270,000-and-some civilian employees no longer on the payroll. Yes, and over 200,000 of those are in the Defense Department having to do with base closures and other downsizing activities in the Defense Department.

The structural deficit is as persistent and pernicious as it ever was, and the size of the civilian work force unrelated to the cold war is as big and as obtrusive as it ever was, and we are kidding ourselves with these short-term numbers to think that something serious and long term is taking place.

THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I want to talk about the two issues that are on the floor; first the minimum wage, and then the TEAM Act. I am willing to vote on the minimum wage at any time. I intend to vote against an increase in the minimum wage, and I do so for the following reasons.

If we increase the minimum wage, we eliminate jobs, and we eliminate jobs primarily among middle-class white suburban teenagers. You may say, "Well, that is fine. We do not owe these middle-class white suburban teenagers anything. So let us eliminate their jobs." I was a white suburban teenager in a middle-class family, and I started work at 14 when the minimum wage was 40 cents an hour. That dates me, I recognize, around here. I got a nice raise when the minimum wage went to 75 cents an hour. I did not need the money. The money was not the issue. The issue was that I learned that I had to be at work on time. I learned that I had to put in a good time at work. Looking back on it, the work I did, frankly, was not significant to the corporation. They could have done without it. But as long as they were paying me that low wage, it did not hurt them that much to have me around, and I liked to think I at least made things a little more comfortable if not more profitable.

It was the most significant learning experience of my young life. It was

more significant than many, if not most, of the classes I took in high school. It was more significant in setting the pattern of my life and work habits in my life than the extracurricular clubs that I went to and the other things I was involved in. It was a tremendously worthwhile experience, as I am sure it is for the other middle-class teenagers who are experiencing their first work opportunity, a work opportunity that will be outlawed if we raise the minimum wage to the point where the employer says, "Well, I cannot afford it anymore, and I will cut it off."

Virtually every employer who has contacted me on this issue has said, "If the minimum wage goes up, I will eliminate jobs." I say to those who get so excited about how low the money is, why is it more moral for a person to be unemployed at \$5.25 an hour than it is for that person to be working at \$4.25 an hour? Somehow, I do not see the social benefit in having somebody unemployed at a high rate whereas they could be working at a lower rate in an entry-level job.

THE TEAM ACT

Mr. BENNETT. Finally, on the TEAM Act, as it is called, I want to make these observations.

Going back to a headline that appeared in a local U.S. paper—I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to continue for another 3 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BENNETT. The headline coming from another circumstance but driving to the heart of this issue said this: "Why are the liberals afraid of democracy?"

This had to do with another circumstance where liberals were complaining about people voting on an issue and saying that the Government should dictate it. Why, said the speaker at this particular symposium, himself a liberal, "are the liberals afraid of democracy? Are they afraid they would lose? Why are the unions afraid of the TEAM Act? Are they afraid that workers, speaking for themselves, exercising democratic rights, will in fact end up in a circumstance that might be good for those workers? Do they not trust the workers?"

Here are the kinds of things that are illegal now, without the passage of the TEAM Act, in terms of discussions between workers and businesses. They cannot discuss an extension of employees' lunch breaks by 15 minutes. That is illegal. They have to have the union discuss that in their behalf. They cannot discuss the issue of decreasing rest breaks from 15 minutes to 10 minutes. You would think they could get together, exercise their democratic rights, rights of free speech, to talk about that? Oh, no. Under the present law that is illegal. The union has to be the one to do that.

How about sitting down with management and the workers to discuss

tornado warning procedures? Oh, no, we cannot trust the workers to have that kind of discussion. They may give away the store. We have to have the union there to protect their rights. The union must decide, not the workers who are directly involved.

How about rules about fighting? Oh, no, we cannot have that discussion with the workers. We have to have that discussion with the union.

Sharpness of the edges of safety knives? No, we cannot have the people who actually handle the safety knives discuss that with management. We have to have the union there. The list goes on and on.

I am willing to vote on minimum wage. I am willing to vote on TEAM Act. I am willing to vote on the gas increase. I am not willing to have some people in this body say to us, "You can vote on the ones that we think are important, but we will not let you vote on the ones that you think are important."

I say, in closing, to those who are so concerned about the minimum wage, why, if it is such a vital social benefit for so many people, was it never mentioned by the then-majority party for the 2 years that they held both the Presidency and the Congress? Never once did it come up when they had the opportunity to control the agenda, control the veto, and control the passage through here. They did not even mention it, let alone raise it. Now, all of a sudden, it is an amendment that must be offered to every single bill.

I think the coincidence is that \$35 million has been pledged in support of the President's campaign by the labor unions, and the decision has been, suddenly, well, it is important. So now we will bring it up, even though we never did when we were in charge.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

THE THREE PROPOSALS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, to lay a framework here, we have three proposals that are before the Senate offered by the majority leader, Senator DOLE of Kansas. We have an opportunity to repeal a 4½-cent gas tax that was imposed by President Clinton in August 1993. This is the gas tax that the President, while campaigning, said should not be imposed because it is especially harsh on the poor families in our country. But when he became President, he changed his mind and imposed a 4.3-cent gas tax that, as I said, is very, very difficult for the poorer sectors of our society to deal with, the rural sectors, rural communities that have to utilize gas extensively in their travels and in their work. This has added a deficit in a family checking account between \$100 and \$200 per family.

It is interesting we are discussing that on this day, because May 8 is the first day that wage earners get to keep