

## LINE-ITEM VETO

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, we hope later today to be bringing to the floor the line-item veto. Senator McCAIN and I are leading that effort. We are in final stages of negotiation as to the final form of the legislation. It is something that has been discussed at length over the past several years. Senator McCAIN and I have offered it alternately and jointly several times. We have not been able to secure the necessary 60 votes to break a filibuster on the line-item veto or to secure a budget waiver.

This is the year we believe that it is time for the Senate and time for the Congress to fulfill its commitment to the American people on an item that an overwhelming majority of the American people support. Poll after poll show the support for line-item veto in the 70 to 80 percent range; 43 Governors enjoy the line-item veto and have for many, many years and have effectively demonstrated that it works in their State.

Line-item veto is simply a measure by which the President can provide a check and balance against the gaming that Congress has engaged in on appropriations bills, in particular, and also on tax bills, I would say, in terms of attaching an item that has not been exposed to the light of debate on that item and a separate vote on that item, but has been attached to an otherwise necessary appropriations bill or tax bill that is being sent to the President.

Under the current law, the President has only one of two options: Either accept the entire bill as it is written—sometimes it covers thousands of items—either accept that or reject the entire bill. So the President, in a sense, is being held in a position that some will describe as blackmail but others will say is at least extraordinarily difficult because it allows Members of Congress, when they see a popular bill moving through the Congress, to attach an item that could at best be described as pork barrel, an item that does not benefit the national interest, but an item that goes to the benefit of a very selected parochial interest.

We are annually embarrassed by the disclosure in the popular news media of some of the items that have been attached to these bills. Constituents say, "How in the world could you pass that? How in the world could you allow a grant that studies the well-being of America's lawyers? How could you pass something that would allow the study of the bathing habits of South American bullfrogs? How in the world could it be made a priority the expenditure of money to refurbish the Lawrence Welk Museum," and on and on and on it goes, schools in France, special bridges, special buildings—items that go toward, I suppose, pleasing a selected constituency in someone's congressional district or someone's State, but certainly would not fall within the list of priorities and receive, I believe, a majority vote if that specific item was

debated on the floor of the Senate and voted on.

But Members know, if a bill is rolling through here that provides necessary funds for the Department of Defense, as this supplemental appropriations bill we have been dealing with this week does, or a measure provides earthquake relief or hurricane relief for either California or Florida or other parts of our country, or if a measure goes to fund something popular or needed or necessary health care measures, veterans' benefits, whatever, they know that the President is going to find it very, very hard to veto that entire bill to get rid of the extra pork that is attached to that bill.

And so the President's only choice is to veto the whole thing and sometimes, as a consequence of that, shut down the entire Government or accept the bill, and more likely than not, he has to accept the bill.

Line-item veto gives the President the opportunity to say, "I'll take that bill, but I won't take this special interest provision that is on line 16 of page 273, and I'm going to line-item veto that particular item."

This is a check and balance on what I would say are the egregious habits of Congress to accomplish in the dark of night without the light of debate, without the risk of a yea-or-nay vote on a particular item, to accomplish something that could never be accomplished in full debate and with a vote. It is designed to check that practice.

Congress, if it thinks that the President has not followed its wishes, can bring that item up, because under the Constitution, if the President vetoes an item, we can override that item. Yes, it takes a two-thirds vote. It ought to be harder to spend the taxpayers' dollars, particularly on those items that the executive branch does not think are appropriate and have not had the normal process of authorization and debate and vote so that their constituents, our constituents, know where we stand on these particular items. That is the whole concept and purpose behind line-item veto.

The President of the United States has supported line-item veto. Some people have said, "Why would Republicans want to give a Democratic President the line-item veto?" We think the Presidency deserves that authority to check the excessive and unnecessary, unwarranted spending habits of Congress that do not follow the normal procedures in devising these spending items.

So we will be debating that. I expect the debate to be fairly fierce. We probably will get a filibuster on our efforts. This is the year, though, that if we are going to fulfill our commitment to the American people to make substantive changes in the way we do business, this is the year to do it.

We will hear all kinds of excuses about delegation of power and will this really work and how much will this save. I guarantee you, it will save more than if we do nothing. This is a debate

between the status quo, let us keep doing things the way we are doing them; oh, we will promise to change, we will promise to do it differently, we will summon the will, we will do what is necessary—no, we will not, because we have not. Year after year, decade after decade, promises—just rhetoric—no reality, no fulfillment of the promise.

This is the time. I am deeply and bitterly disappointed that we could not pass a constitutional amendment to balance the budget. That would have provided the mechanisms by which we can eliminate this debt which would force us to own up to our responsibilities, which we have not done over the past several decades. But at the very least let us enact line-item veto so that we can get at some of this problem and so that we can restore credibility with the American people that we are responsible in handling their money and we can eliminate this practice of providing pork-barrel spending that never gets the debate it deserves and is never subjected to a vote.

Mr. President, we will be talking a lot about that later. I think my 5 minutes has about expired. Given the fact no one was available to speak, I thought it might be more interesting than a quorum call.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from North Dakota [Mr. DORGAN] is recognized to speak for up to 10 minutes.

## TAX CUT PROPOSALS

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I was intending to come to the floor today to speak briefly about the work that is going on in the other body in which the majority party is proposing a tax cut of nearly \$200 billion over the coming 5 years. So I listened with some interest to the discussion on the floor of the Senate about the formation of something called a 500 Club, apparently a group of Senators who feel that the Senate also should move quickly on a tax cut.

I was especially interested in a couple of things. I was interested in the fact that at least a couple of the speakers this morning were the same speakers who were on North Dakota radio programs in recent weeks talking about the need for a constitutional amendment to balance the budget. They talked about their desire to balance the Federal budget, the fact that they were the willing warriors, willing to stand up and fight and do the right things and have the courage to cut spending to balance the Federal budget.

All this is very curious to me. There must be some arithmetic book somewhere in America that tells us that if you are in a very big financial hole, what you ought to do is just keep digging. It seems to me, if you are in a very big hole, you stop digging and