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So the conference report was agreed to.

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. WARNER. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, let me yield to the distinguished chairman of the Armed Services Committee, who did an outstanding job, and I congratulate him and members of our staff and our colleagues on this side for passing this most important conference report. I yield to the Senator from South Carolina.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. THURMOND. I would like to express my deep appreciation to all of the Members who worked hard to prepare this bill and who supported it. I also would like to express my deep appreciation to all the staff members who worked so hard to prepare this bill. This is a good bill. It serves the military well. It serves the country well. And I am sure all who support it will be proud that they did support it because it is going to help the soldiers and their families in every way possible.

Thank you very much.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I wish to join other members of the Armed Services Committee in stating our profound appreciation to the distinguished chairman, Senator THURMOND, for his work on this bill. I am trying to recall a quote by the Duke of Wellington in the close of the Battle of Waterloo when he said:

... a damned nice thing—the nearest-run thing you ever saw in your life.

The vote on this conference report was also very close, and I doubt if it would have been passed without the absolute determination and the total dedication of the distinguished chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Mr. THURMOND of South Carolina, and we all render this fine gentleman a hand salute.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST—
HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 132

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, let me advise there will be no more votes today because the weather is lousy out there and the roads are going to be difficult if you live in the suburbs. But I would propound a unanimous-consent request. I assume there will be an objection, and there might be someone, a couple on this side who would like to speak briefly.

Yesterday, the House passed by an overwhelming vote House Joint Resolution 132, which relates to balancing the budget, and so forth, over 7 years. So I would ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of House Joint Resolution 132, a resolution affirming that budget negotiations be based on the most recent technical and economic assumptions of the Congressional Budget Office, and shall achieve a balanced budget by fiscal 2002 based on those assumptions.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I would inquire of the majority leader whether the resolution includes all of the priorities that we listed in the continuing resolution which passed about 3 weeks ago?

Mr. President, it is my understanding that the priorities that were listed in the continuing resolution are not included in this specific draft, and because they are not we would be compelled to object at this time. I hope that perhaps we could work out some language that would include those priorities, and then there would be no objection on this side.

Mr. DOLE. I thank the Democratic leader.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. DOLE. I think we can work it out because we have already passed those priorities once, talking about veterans, Medicare, agriculture. There are I think six or seven. So let us see what we can do, or if the minority would like to propose an amendment, we could modify it. I think there are some who would like to speak even though there has been objection, if that is satisfactory.

Mr. DASCHLE. Sure.

Mr. DOLE. Let me indicate to my colleagues who are in the Chamber and those who may be in their offices that we have had, as I have said earlier, a very constructive discussion with the President and Vice President and Chief of Staff with reference to achieving a balanced budget over the next 7 years. There will be a meeting going on tonight with Mr. Panetta, Senator DOMENICI, Congressman KASICH, and others, and then, depending on what happens in that agreement, there may be another agreement of the principals either tomorrow morning or early afternoon, depending on everyone's schedule.

I think it is fair to say that at least I am optimistic about getting something done here that will satisfy a great majority of Americans and probably most people on both sides of the aisle—not everyone but most of my colleagues on each side of the aisle. There are certainly areas of difference, and we will not go into those at this time, but I think there was an agreement that there are at least five or six or seven categories where the leaders are going to have to be directly involved and the President is going to be directly involved, and he has agreed to be directly involved.

We hope to give you more detailed information as soon as it is available and as soon as we have something that we can really say this is it; we are serious; we are going to go to work; we are going to stay here today, tomorrow, whatever. It is our hope—and we have not worked out the schedule because I know some have some difficulties with it, but hopefully if we have, if we put it together tomorrow morning, then there will be a CR passed that would extend at least until December 27 or December 28 and perhaps an adjournment resolution to extend from this Friday until December 27.

We have not worked out those details. But in any event, I think the important point I should make is that I really believe we are going to start the process.

Now, will we finish the process and when will we finish the process? We would like to say we could put together the framework this year, by the end of the year, and then take some days for drafting, come back a couple days in January and finish the product. Some would like to do it all before New Year's Eve. I am not certain that is possible. But in any event, I think there is reason for optimism, bipartisan optimism and I hope it continues.

Mr. DASCHLE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. DASCHLE. I share the views expressed by the majority leader. I think there is reason for optimism tonight. I think the meetings held at the White House have been very productive. The President has committed to become personally involved in these negotiations. With a good-faith effort on both sides, there is renewed hope that we can reach an agreement. As the majority leader said, I do not know that there is any timeframe within which we can realistically reach that agreement tonight. We certainly know that these are difficult issues.

We agreed to reach an agreement in three areas. First, on the continuing resolution; second, on the schedule; and third, on the framework within which these negotiations would take place.

Leon Panetta will be talking with our Budget Committee people on both sides to discuss all three of those and hopefully reach an agreement sometime tomorrow, which then would allow us to go to our caucuses to discuss in detail what that agreement may entail. But there is no agreement tonight. There is simply an agreement to work out in three areas what that agreement might look like. If we can reach that tomorrow morning, I hope our caucuses could be informed and we will begin to go to work. But I again share the optimism expressed by the majority leader, and hopefully it will lead to even more optimistic developments in the days ahead. With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. HARKIN addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

PAYMENT OF FEDERAL
EMPLOYEES

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, here we are now in the fourth day of another Government shutdown.

I do not know how many more days it is going to go on. I hope there is some reason for optimism. But I want to point out, once again, as I have with the Senator from California, that over 200,000 Federal employees are not at work and, as a matter of fact, no Federal employees are getting paid for these 4 days. Right before the holiday season, right before Christmas, Federal workers all over this country are unsure of just how much money they are going to be paid or when they are going to be paid.

This is grossly unfair, Mr. President, grossly unfair that Congress would act so cavalierly toward decent, hard-working people. I know it is fun to point fingers at bureaucrats and that type of thing, but just keep in mind, many of those Federal workers who are now not being paid are the same Federal workers, or the same type of Federal workers, who were killed in the Oklahoma City bomb blast—our hearts went out to them—people doing their job, working for their country, doing the best they can to make sure our Government operates fairly and justly and in the best interest of our people. And yet now, right before Christmas, they are told, "We don't know if we can pay you." Some are told to go home, not come to work. But what is so grossly unfair about this, Mr. President, is that Members of Congress who caused this whole thing are getting paid. Senators continue to get paid. Members of the House continue to get paid.

Earlier this year, one of the first bills that we passed was the Congressional Accountability Act. As a matter of fact, here is the so-called Contract With America that Members of the House of Representatives put out. The first item in that Contract With America says: "It requires all laws that apply to the rest of the country also apply equally to Congress."

That was the first bill we picked up this year, and we passed it. I happen to have supported it. I thought it was long past time when Members of Congress should be covered by the same laws that apply to the people around the country. But the country found out during last month's partial Government shutdown that when it comes to paychecks, Congress gets special treatment. Congress is not covered by the same laws as other Federal workers. They do not get their pay, but Congress continues to get its pay during periods of shutdown.

We have passed three times this year a no-budget/no-pay bill or amendments that say if Congress shuts down, Members of Congress do not get paid or that we get treated exactly like the most adversely affected Federal worker.

It has been passed three times, but what happened? It just sort of got lost

when it went to conference. In fact, I am told that the no-budget/no-pay amendment which was attached to the ICC bill was dropped in conference—just dropped in conference. It is still a part of the D.C. appropriations bill that is now languishing in the House. Let us see if the House has the courage to live up to its own Contract With America to make the laws that apply to Federal workers also apply to Congress, so that in periods of shutdown, Members of Congress will be hit in the pocketbook just as well as other Federal workers.

I have heard from my constituents. I know that people around the country have now been alerted to this, and they know we are getting treated differently. What difference does it make to the Speaker of the House if the Government shuts down? He gets his paycheck. What difference does it make to anyone in this body or the House? It does not make any difference. If the Government shuts down, Congressmen and Senators still get their pay.

So for those of us in the Congress, we do not have to worry about making the house payment or the car payment or buying presents for the kids, because we know that paycheck is going to be there. But for over 200,000 Federal workers, many of whom live in Virginia and Maryland, many of whom live in my State of Iowa and across this land, they do not know.

I saw an interview on television last night with some of these Federal workers. One after the other was saying, "We just don't know what kind of Christmas it is going to be. We don't know whether to buy presents or not because we don't know when and if we are going to get paid, we don't know when and if we are going to go back to work."

What a terrible thing to do to people. It is unconscionable that we would allow this to happen. I, for one, think we should have gone on a continuing resolution until January or February, keep these people on the job and let us work out this budget arrangement. Let the people go to work, but at least have enough decency and kindness and compassion that Federal workers can at least enjoy their Christmas. That is, unless you just absolutely do not care about them. Maybe there are some who do not care. But I care about them. I care very much about them, because they are doing a good job for our country in carrying out the mandates of Congress and this Government, and it is not right that we treat them differently than we treat ourselves.

So we should have no exemptions for Congress, no special deals. We should say that we are like the most adversely affected Federal worker. If we have a Government shutdown, Members of Congress and the Senate should not get their paycheck.

So, Mr. President, I will speak about it again tomorrow and every day that the Government remains shut down, pointing out the unfairness of it. I just

hope that the House of Representatives will finish their work on the District of Columbia appropriations bill. We will see if they have the guts to leave on the no-budget/no-pay amendment that was adopted in the Senate. Send it to conference and let us get it acted on once and for all. I daresay, if Members of the House and the Senate were treated like the most adversely affected Federal worker, I just wonder how many days we would shut down the Government. I bet the number would approach zero.

So, Mr. President, I think it is time Members of the House and Senate be treated just like other Federal workers. With that, I yield the floor.

Mrs. HUTCHISON addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

VETERANS' BENEFITS

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Virginia for putting together a letter to the President asking the President to do what we believe he has the right to do, and that is pay veterans' benefits.

Obviously, all of us are going to continue to negotiate and work with our leaders and are negotiating to stop the shutdown of Government. But, Mr. President, we do not have a whole lot of time before veterans' benefits are going to be late or will not be there at all, and that is not right. These are earned benefits.

We believe and we have gotten legal opinions that say that the President has the right to declare that veterans' benefits are essential. Who could question that veterans' benefits are an essential part of Government?

But, in fact, the Veterans Affairs bill that was passed by both bodies and sent to the President was vetoed in recent days. Now, once again, we are faced with veterans' benefits not being paid. The President and his administration said during the last Government shutdown that veterans' benefits are not on the list, not on the essential list. We believe that is an erroneous assumption; that is an erroneous look at the regulation and the laws that are in place right now. If anything is essential in this Government, it should be veterans' benefits. In fact, the President has declared that the people who process the veterans' benefits are essential, but the benefits are not. I would leave you to get the logic of that.

Mr. President, we have sent a letter to the President—Senators WARNER, SIMPSON, DOLE, and myself, along with 34 other cosigners of the letter—asking the President merely to do what we believe he has the right to do, and let veterans know just before the holiday season that their benefits will not be late.

But, in fact, if the President does not do this, we are prepared to pass a bill through the Senate that would require