

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS
FOR NATURAL DISASTERS AND
OVERSEAS PEACEKEEPING EF-
FORTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 1998

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

Mr. STEVENS. Madam President, I might state for the RECORD, it sort of proves my point. I yielded time on the appropriations bill for 5 minutes, and here we are 2 hours later. I do hope that Members will understand if we are not very cooperative any further on this bill. Further, however, I might say to the Senator from Georgia, who was yielded specific time so he could have time comparable to that used by the Senators from Massachusetts and Connecticut—and I understand he only had 5 minutes of that 25, 26 minutes—he is not included in the prohibition against having some time on this bill when I manage it, as far as I am concerned.

Madam President, I have a series of amendments. I would like to proceed with them.

I do have one of them that is cleared already. It is an amendment to the pending supplemental appropriations bill.

AMENDMENT NO. 2067

(Purpose: To prohibit the Department of the Army from moving forward with civilian personnel reductions and the offer of Voluntary Separations Incentive Pay (VSIP) and Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) benefits at all Army Test Ranges until such time as the Congress has the opportunity to consider the merits of such actions during the Fiscal Year 1999 Appropriations process; and to require that the VERA and VSIP benefits being currently offered will continue to be available if necessary)

Mr. STEVENS. I send the amendment to the desk on behalf of the two Senators from New Mexico, Senators DOMENICI and BINGAMAN, and ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Alaska [Mr. STEVENS], for Mr. DOMENICI, for himself, and Mr. BINGAMAN, proposes an amendment numbered 2067.

Mr. STEVENS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

On page 15, after line 21, insert:

SEC. . Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Department of the Army is hereby prohibited from moving forward with civilian personnel reductions at all Army Test Ranges resulting from proposed reductions in their fiscal year 1999 budget, until such time as the Congress has the opportunity to consider the merits of such action during the fiscal year 1999 defense appropriations process. Where civilian personnel are concerned, the Army is required to offer such Voluntary Separation Incentive Pay (VSIP) and Voluntary Early Retirement Authority benefits as are currently being offered, should such benefits be necessary at a future date.

Mr. DOMENICI. Madam President, my amendment does not increase the

cost of the emergency supplemental in any way.

What it does is it freezes in place the current posture of civilian personnel authorizations at all Army Test Ranges, including White Sands Missile Range until such time as the Congress, and this Committee, has an opportunity to consider the merits of the President's fiscal year 1999 budget as it relates to this installation.

It is a very simple, straight forward amendment, and it is necessary for me to proceed in this way at this time because the Department of the Army has chosen to circumvent the congressional oversight process. Let me tell you how:

Because of budgetary constraints, the Department of the Army made a distributional decision that would reduce White Sands Missile Range's WSMR's, overall RDT&E budget by approximately \$17 million in fiscal year 1999. As a result, WSMR was asked to plan for a reduction of as many as 550 full-time civilian positions.

Subsequently, in late December 1997, the Army agreed to provide approximately \$11 million to WSMR for the purpose of offering Voluntary Early Retirement Authority, VERA, and Voluntary Separation Incentive Pay, VSIP, benefits. This ameliorated some of the civilian personnel reductions that are scheduled to take place in fiscal year 1999. With the VERA and VSIP benefits, the Army's plan for WSMR is to reduce approximately 350 civilian personnel.

I do not believe it is prudent for the Army to be reducing civilian personnel authorizations at WSMR until such time as the Congress has an opportunity to consider the merits of such actions during the fiscal year 1999 defense appropriations process. Unfortunately, the Army has directed WSMR to open the window of opportunity for retirement benefits from now until March 31, 1998.

This action effectively precludes the Congress from exercising any oversight responsibility of the Department of Defense decisions in this regard. Once civilian personnel at WSMR elect to take the benefits, those civilian personnel positions are essentially eliminated.

In addition, if the Army does not find enough personnel who are willing to take the benefits, a Reduction In Force, RIF, will have to occur and its timing will be such that the Congress will have little or no ability to address these issues.

Finally, what should cause great concern to every member who is interested in Congressional oversight, the Army is using fiscal year 1998 funds to implement reductions that are planned to occur in fiscal year 1999. This circumvents the Congressional oversight process.

Again, my amendment prohibits the Department of the Army from continuing to move forward with any civilian personnel reductions at WSMR until such time as the Congress has the opportunity to consider the merits of

such action during the fiscal year 1999 Defense Appropriations process. In addition, the bill language requires the Department of the Army to offer such VERA and VSIP benefits as are currently being offered should such benefits be necessary at a future date.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no objection, the amendment is agreed to.

The amendment (No. 2067) was agreed to.

Mr. STEVENS. I move to reconsider the vote by which the amendment was agreed to, and I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. STEVENS. Madam President, the Senator from Georgia is still here, and we are waiting for the beginning of the time on the McCain amendment. I yield him 5 minutes at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

Mr. COVERDELL. Madam President, I thank the Senator from Alaska.

EDUCATION SAVINGS ACT FOR
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Mr. COVERDELL. Madam President, earlier this afternoon, the Senator from Massachusetts and the Senator from Connecticut were debating their opposition to the education savings account that we have been struggling with since last July. The essence of their argument is that it does not amount to much, that there would only be \$37 of interest saved on a family that had a child in private school and only \$7 if the family had a child in public school.

You cannot have it both ways. If it is so insignificant, why have we spent the better part of a year filibustering it? Why would the President say, "I will veto the entire tax relief package if that provision is in there"? Something about that argument does not fit.

The other thing I will say about those arguments is that they talk about the tax—that figure is a tax that wouldn't have been paid by that family—but they forget to mention the amount of principal that is in the account earning interest which is forgiven. In the case of \$37, that means that family has saved over \$1,000 in order to earn the \$37 tax relief. What it says to me is how little incentive it takes to make Americans go out and save.

Madam President, \$1,000 is 50 percent greater than the average savings of American families. The average American family today saves \$1,900. That is their savings. And by this modest forgiveness, we take it up to \$3,000. So we are using a very modest amount of tax relief to cause Americans to save billions of dollars. This tax relief proposal would generate in the first 5 years \$5 billion worth of savings and over a 10-year period over \$10 billion worth of savings to aid and support students in public and private education.