

A significant portion of the debt is held by foreign investors. It does not make sense to me to use American taxpayers' dollars to make early debt payments to foreign investors like the central banks of China, Japan, and Germany. I believe there are several priorities facing this Congress beyond reducing the federal debt, including reforming the Social Security system and improving our onerous tax code, and I do not support amendments that would tie Congress' hands with regard to these important reforms.

Two other amendments that require comment were the Kennedy and Murray amendments to increase funding in Function 500, the education and training function, while making across-the-board cuts to all other domestic discretionary accounts. Mr. President, the underlying budget resolution accomplishes two priorities with regard to education. First, it lives up to the budget agreement signed by both congressional leadership and the President just last year. That agreement targeted sufficient resources at federal education programs to fully fund the priorities of both the President and Congress. Second, this resolution adds to those agreed-to levels by increasing funding for important programs like IDEA and the Innovative Strategies State Grant program—programs that work by block-granting federal resources back to the states and local governments.

Mr. President, if we have learned anything regarding effective education policy, it is that building an ever larger federal presence in historically local- and state-controlled public schools simply doesn't work. The Senate budget recognizes this fact, while the Kennedy and Murray amendments ignore it. This budget increases federal education funding by \$2.6 billion over the next five years at the same time that many budget areas are being cut. I believe this is a clear indication of the priority the Senate places on education issues.

Several other amendments were offered, including the Lautenberg, Wellstone, Dorgan, and Feingold amendments, which would have established so-called reserve funds for the creation of new mandatory spending programs. Mr. President, by definition, these amendments call for creating new, uncontrolled federal entitlement programs. Exactly what these programs would do, and how they would be funded, is left unclear. On the other hand, my position regarding new mandatory spending is extremely clear—until Congress takes the necessary steps to ensure the future solvency of our existing entitlements, including Social Security and Medicare, we should have the discipline to refrain from creating new programs which will endanger the solvency of existing programs and the federal government. For that reason, I opposed these reserve fund amendments.

The Kempthorne amendment regarding the Endangered Species Act also re-

quires comment. Under the budget resolution, funds raised from selling surplus BLM lands were to be targeted at programs designed to protect endangered species. In my mind, Mr. President, this funding mechanism represents a win-win situation for everyone involved in protecting this nation's wildlife. First, by selling surplus lands, the federal government rids itself of the cost of managing lands for which it has no purpose. Second, the proceeds from these lands would go towards continued protection of endangered wildlife. During debate, Senator REID raised concerns that tying ESA funding solely to the sale of federal lands was not good policy. For this reason, I supported the Kempthorne amendment which addressed some of Senator REID's concerns by expanding the possible funding sources for Endangered Species Act enforcement.

Another important vote was the Bumpers amendment to increase the royalty on the net return on the profits from mining gold, silver and platinum and channeling those funds into IDEA. Mr. President, the underlying budget resolution takes a dramatic step towards increasing the funding for IDEA. This is a program that I fully support and look forward to continued increases in federal participation.

Nevertheless, I opposed this amendment because I do not believe the imposition of new taxes on the mining industry is the proper means of reforming our mining law. Hard rock mining is a capital intensive industry that has struggled in recent years despite the booming U.S. economy. The reason is simple—the costs of extracting these metals from U.S. soil is only slightly less than the market value of these metals. I believe there are better approaches for reforming our mining laws than simply raising taxes, and I look forward to working with Senator BUMPERS and other Senators to seeing those reforms take place.

Finally, Mr. President, I wanted to discuss the Domenici amendment regarding the recent ruling by the Veterans' Administration General Counsel to include some smoking-related illnesses in the qualified list of "service connected" diseases. Mr. President, I want to help veterans and their families, but it is my firm belief that such an increase in the federal government's liability should result only from an act of Congress, not a judge's ruling, and that Congress should only act with all the pertinent facts before it. For these reasons, I supported the Domenici amendment to require a year-long study of the merits of such claims. This study will enable Congress to avoid the current vacuum of knowledge that surrounds this issue and devise the best policy for our veterans. If the study supports these claims, then I will support expanding the current program to accommodate them.●

#### TRIBUTE TO UNIVERSITY OF UTAH ROTC CLASS OF 1944

● Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the University of Utah ROTC Class of 1944 which responded to the call for active military duty during World War II. On May 2, 1998, at the University of Utah members of the ROTC Class of 1944 will hold a reunion commemorating the 55th anniversary of their activation into our national armed services. I believe it is fitting that we honor them today in the United States Senate.

The University of Utah Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) was a unique organization. It was one of the few military units which were called into service during World War II from a specific community and which can return to that home area for a reunion. Most military units include individuals whose residences are scattered throughout the country. Through an Act of Congress in 1916, ROTC programs were established in higher education institutions across the country. Since that time, they have been an important part of this nation's civil defense—in times of war and peace—training generations of students for service to their country.

In the early 1940s, this class trained at the University of Utah with horse-drawn artillery working with an old French 77 millimeter cannon and with a 105 millimeter howitzer, new at the time. As a unit, this ROTC class was first assigned to Camp Roberts in California, for basic training in truck drawn artillery. Later they were assigned to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for further training and ultimately received further schooling at the Infantry Officers School at Fort Benning, Georgia. After graduation from Fort Benning, these young men, whose average age at the time was slightly over 20, served as officers in various combat units in Italy, France and the South Pacific.

These were brave and honorable men, each one of them. Of the 99 who were called to active duty in 1943, two were killed in action while serving in the 10th Mountain Division in Italy. One was later killed in the Korean Conflict. Of the group's original 99 members, 71 are still alive. Today, I speak for all Utahns and all Americans when I say, we honor these brave men and pay tribute to them for their service and sacrifice for this great country. The Class of 1944's great tradition of discipline and leadership continues today as many of its members are respected professionals in the public and private sector as well as their own communities.

Finally, Mr. President, before I close, I want to thank Chris S. Metos of Salt Lake City, Utah, for the outstanding job he has done to help organize this upcoming reunion and for the many years of service he has provided to this country and to the people of the state of Utah.●