

tax relief. That is not true. That is not the case. To be sure, Washington has been guilty of mishandling the Social Security system.

Since 1983, Washington has raided more than \$700 billion from the trust funds for non-Social Security programs, and Congress voted for the spending. In the next 5 years, the Federal Government will raid another \$600 billion from the Social Security trust funds, as well.

Now I hear some who come to the floor and say they won't vote to use Social Security trust funds to give tax relief. I ask, why their change of heart today? They voted for most, if not all, of the spending bills in the last 15 years which have used Social Security to make up the difference of revenues versus outlays. In other words, they are willing to take Social Security surpluses and put it into higher Federal spending, but they are not willing to take excess income revenues and put it into tax relief for average Americans.

I just note that no one raised the issue of saving Social Security when those spending initiatives were on the table. No one juxtaposed spending with Social Security. That was because Washington was spending other people's money. But once the tables are turned and the Senate is asked to pass tax relief for America's hard-working taxpayers—meaning that Washington gets a little less—suddenly, we face gridlock and are in a quandary.

Again, Washington says it just can't afford to let Americans have some of their money back; Washington needs it to satisfy its spending appetite. I always ask Americans, "Did Washington ever call you and ask how are you going to get by with less money if we raise your taxes? How are you going to continue to provide for your families?" And they say, "No, they never call and ask that." They just pass it and take it. So American families have to then learn how to do more with less, or get by without.

Mr. President, despite the rhetoric of saving Social Security, few have come up with a concrete plan to actually save it. The problem is that, by law, the Social Security surplus has to be put into Treasury securities. That means Washington can legally use the money to fund its non-Social Security pet programs. They take the money out of the trust fund, put it into the General Treasury, and then spend it. Ask anybody how are they going to take any money out of the Social Security trust funds? How are they going to redeem any of those notes or Treasury bills in the trust fund? They are going to have to go to the American people and ask for more money in taxes in order to retire the debts.

In other words, the money Americans have already saved for their retirement future has been spent by the Government, and the Government is now going to come back to you and say you have to pay again in order to satisfy the needs. So these assets are essen-

tially nothing more than Treasury IOUs, redeemable only by cutting spending, raising taxes, or borrowing from the public. Unless we change the law, Washington will continue to use Social Security until it goes broke.

Mr. President, I am going to introduce legislation next week that will help shift retirement decisions back to those who know retirees' needs the best, and that is the retirees themselves.

On the last day of the fiscal year, we can be proud of the Balanced Budget Act that Congress enacted and upheld over the course of the past year. But we must also be prepared for the upcoming year, as well. A Government shutdown is looming again—a testament to politics in an election year more than sound debate over budget policy. I truly hope that this political chicanery does not make tax relief, and ultimately the hard-working American taxpayers, the losers in this inside-the-beltway game of politics.

I yield the floor.

Mr. CRAIG addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho is recognized.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I thank my colleague, Senator GRAMS, for dealing with an issue that this Senate has to deal with, and in a very short time. Somehow there is this belief here in Washington that you can save Social Security, but you can't give tax relief. Well, I, like Senator GRAMS, believe we must and can do both, not only to keep the economy moving and growing, but also to recognize the importance that we have a surplus, thanks to our diligence over the last decade, and now we can use it to strengthen and reform Social Security, and we probably have the opportunity of a generation to do that. I hope that the Congress can and will do both.

Mr. GRAMS. I thank the Senator.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for no more than 10 minutes.

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

(The remarks of Mr. CRAIG pertaining to the introduction of S. 2533 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. CRAIG. With those considerations and the bill introduced, I yield the floor.

Mr. THURMOND addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 3616

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, on behalf of the leader, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 3616, the Department of Defense authorization bill. I further ask unanimous consent that

following any debate today in relation to the conference report, the conference report be temporarily set aside.

I further ask that at 9 a.m. on Thursday, the Senate resume consideration of the conference report and there be an additional 3 hours for debate divided as follows: 1 hour equally divided between the majority and minority managers, 1½ hours under the control of Senator FORD, 30 minutes under the control of Senator THOMPSON.

I further ask unanimous consent that at 12 noon on Thursday the Senate proceed to a vote on adoption of the conference report with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

STROM THURMOND NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 1999—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee on conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 3616) have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses this report, signed by a majority of the conferees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will proceed to the consideration of the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of September 22, 1998.)

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, as the Senate takes up the conference report on the national defense authorization bill, it brings to an end a process that began in February with the introduction of the President's defense budget by Secretary Cohen. During the intervening months, the committee conducted more than 50 hearings which identified the declining readiness status of our military. In response, the committee formulated a bill that addressed these issues and garnered the support of both the civilian and military leadership of the Department of Defense.

The committee completed the markup of the defense bill in mid-May. However, due to the intervening debate on the tobacco bill, the Senate took more than four weeks to complete action on the bill. Although the floor debate was protracted, I want to thank my colleagues for their overwhelming 88 to 4 vote in favor of the bill, and for their contributions during the floor debate.

The Senate's strong support of the bill was a key factor during the difficult conference with the House. When we began the conference to resolve the differences between the House and Senate bills, we faced a veto threat on four provisions. I am pleased to report that we were able to mitigate each of these objections. At this point, I am not aware of any remaining veto issues, and expect that the President will sign this bill.