

H.J. RES. 9, THE LINE ITEM VETO  
CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ENGLISH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ENGLISH. Madam Speaker, for many of us who came to Congress in 1994, elected on a platform of fiscal responsibility and reform, it is a source of wonder and considerable pride that America now has something that a generation of national leaders had only dreamt of, and that is a balanced Federal budget.

The current surplus is a major public benefit, opening long-term vistas of a debt-free America with a higher growth rate, lower interest rates and a cornucopia of economic opportunity. It was achieved through the disciplined efforts of a fiscally conservative Congress dedicated to reining in Washington's spending counterculture.

We now know we can balance the budget, but we can only realize the long-term benefits of a balanced Federal budget if we keep it balanced. This will require changes in the way that Congress appropriates tax dollars.

As Members of Congress, we need to look at real budgetary reform which will promote accountability in the appropriations process when we consider how to spend taxpayers' dollars. With this in mind, my friend, the gentleman from Maine (Mr. JOHN BALDACC), and I have introduced House Joint Resolution 9, a proposed constitutional amendment that would provide a line item veto to the President of the United States in his consideration of any appropriation. This is important, bipartisan, and fiscally responsible legislation that deserves the prompt attention of this House.

For too long presidents have had to adopt an all-or-nothing approach when considering action on bills containing appropriations. This presents a predicament for them when good policies and necessary investments are overloaded by unnecessary spending proposals.

This line item veto has had a long history in the U.S. Congress. The first proposal was introduced in 1876. President Grant endorsed the mechanism in response to the common practice of Congress attaching riders to appropriations bills. In 1938, the House approved a line item veto amendment to the independent offices appropriations bill by voice vote, but the amendment was rejected by the other body.

It did not come until 1996, in this reform Congress, that the line item veto act was finally signed into law by the President, and this law became effective in 1997. Unfortunately, after the President first invoked this new authority in August of 1997, the Supreme Court weighed the constitutionality of this law when it upheld a District Court ruling declaring the line item veto law unconstitutional.

Those of us who support the line item veto have come to recognize that in order to authorize a line item veto, a

constitutional amendment must be passed, and that is why I stand before my colleagues today. My legislation will correct an imbalance in our budgetary process long recognized, permitting a president committed to cutting unnecessary spending to do so surgically, using a scalpel instead of a broad sword.

Madam Speaker, the line item veto is a powerful weapon in the cause of fiscal responsibility. It flushes out special interests, pork barrel spending buried in the depths of large appropriations and forces them to be considered individually, on their own merits, in the light of day. It allows a determined chief executive to challenge specific expenditures no matter how powerful their champions of the legislative process.

Currently, constitutions in 43 States, including my own commonwealth of Pennsylvania, provide for a line item veto, usually confined to appropriations bills. These constitutions allow the governor the power to eliminate discrete spending provisions in legislation that comes to his desk for his signature. Governors have successfully utilized this power on the State level and it is now time to give this power to the President to cut unnecessary spending.

Already, Madam Speaker, this amendment has been endorsed by a number of prominent national organizations, including the National Taxpayers Union, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Citizens for a Sound Economy and Citizens Against Government Waste. More importantly, in my view, the line item veto enjoys broad support from millions of taxpayers who are frustrated by the ponderous size and unbridled waste of the Federal Government. Their call to action deserves to be heard.

Madam Speaker, I invite my colleagues to join me in supporting this reform legislation and supporting this important amendment in restoring accountability to the process.

VACATION OF SPECIAL ORDER

Mr. TALENT. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take the time of the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. WHITFIELD).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Missouri?

There was no objection.

SUPPLEMENTAL DEFENSE BILL  
NEEDED TO SUPPORT AMERICA'S  
MILITARY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. TALENT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TALENT. Madam Speaker, tomorrow we have a chance to be true or false to the interests of our country and the men and women in America's military service when we consider the supplemental defense bill to add \$7 billion to defense spending this year.

It is about time that we considered such a measure. For the last 10 years we have reduced military spending by 31 percent; by almost a third. At the same time, the number of engagements we have asked our men and women in America's military to be involved in has increased by a factor of three.

We deployed them 10 times during the Cold War around the world. We have deployed them 26 times in the last 8 years. Essentially, we have never reduced operational tempo, the business of the force, since Desert Storm. We have continued to ask them to do more and more with less and less, and they are at the breaking point.

First, they robbed the future to pay for the present in order to deal with that. They deferred maintenance. They reduced pay raises and retirement. They allowed health care to decline in the service. They postponed military construction and they slashed modernization.

When that was not enough, they robbed parts of the present to pay for other parts of the present. They sacrificed the important to the urgent. So now we have a shortage of spare parts. We have reduced training for our men and women in the military. We have a huge shortfall in ammunition, and we cannibalize the troops that are deployed here at home in order to support deployments abroad. We take people and spare parts and machines away from units that are here in the United States in order to support units abroad.

It has gotten so bad, Madam Speaker, that at the end of last year the Joint Chiefs of Staff came and testified before the Senate Committee on Armed Services that we are \$148 billion short over the next 6 years in what we need to maintain minimal standards of readiness. And tomorrow we have a chance to make a modest downpayment on what we need to do to protect America's greatness and to provide for our men and women in the military.

Nobody disputes these figures, Madam Speaker. The administration does not. Nobody here will stand up tomorrow and argue that we do not need to spend this money to maintain readiness. They will have a lot of excuses why we should not vote for the bill tomorrow, just as we have had excuses year after year after year.

We heard one of them a little while ago. We cannot pay for this extra military spending because that would pay for the war in Kosovo. No, it will not. That is going to pay for the money that otherwise will be sucked away from the military by the war in Kosovo.

If my colleagues want to stop the war in Kosovo, wait for the military appropriations bill and put a rider on it that says the money cannot be used in Kosovo. Do not starve the rest of the military in order to fund one of the deployments that has caused the military to go hollow in the first place.