

walks the talk in terms of what we can do to achieve this goal of energy independence.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be allowed to speak for 10 minutes in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Will the Chair please let me know when I have a minute remaining?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chair will do so.

STATE OF THE UNION AND WASTEFUL SPENDING

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I wish to talk about two things this morning: No. 1, the President's State of the Union Address last night, and No. 2, Senator GREGG's proposal to reduce wasteful spending.

I appreciate the comments of the Senator from Colorado, who has been a leader on renewable energy and energy independence. I want to point this out. The President last night did his job. It was a truly Presidential speech, in my opinion. I used to work in the White House, and a wise man there told me: Lamar, our job here on the White House staff is to consider everything that comes to the White House as important. We need to push those things out and reserve for the President those things which are truly Presidential.

The President talked about truly Presidential issues last night, and he did what Presidents are supposed to do. He did not give us a laundry list. He talked about Iraq, terrorism, energy independence, and health care costs. He said: Pick up immigration and deal with it. He said reduce the budget in 5 years. He gave us a strategy in each case, he tried to persuade us that he is right, and then he handed the ball to us.

We are independent of the President. We have a Democratic Congress, closely divided, and a Republican President, so I don't think we can criticize the President. I think we should applaud the President and say: Mr. President, you did your job. You identified the issues, you gave us a strategy, and you handed the ball to us.

The biggest news last night, it seemed to me, was on energy independence and health care costs. Starting with energy independence, the President said let's set a goal to reduce our use of gasoline 20 percent in 10 years. That is a big, serious proposal. This country uses 25 percent of all the energy in the world. If we reduce our use of gasoline by 20 percent in 10 years, it will help clean the air, it will help reduce dependence on foreign oil, it will create a big market for agricultural products in this country to help create biodiesel alternative fuels, and it will

force innovation in such things as electric batteries.

The President's proposals will require a change in the so-called fuel efficiency CAFE standards. It will require these new technologies. It is a big step, and it is the kind of thing that Democrats as well as Republicans can take, improve, and pass. We don't need to be saying to the President: Mr. President, you walk the talk. He talked. Now it is up to us to act.

The same with health care. His proposal on health care is a big, serious proposal. There is probably no subject Tennesseans talk to me about more in their daily lives than: How do I pay for my health care costs? The President had an answer last night. He said: For 80 percent of working Americans, I will give you an average of \$3,600 in savings from your taxes which you can spend to buy yourself health care insurance. That means if you are a family of four, making \$60,000 a year, you might have \$4,000 or \$5,000 in tax savings to use to pay for health care costs.

Now, 20 percent of us would pay a little more for health care. Mine would go up. But 80 percent of all of us who work would get significant savings to pay for health care insurance. This would help us afford it. This would help more people who do not have it pay for it. This would help hospitals whose emergency rooms fill up with people who cannot pay for health care. It is a big, serious proposal.

The President has done his job. It is up to us now to have a hearing, improve it, and enact it.

I salute the President for doing his job last night with what I felt was a truly Presidential speech. Much of it was about Iraq. Iraq is being talked about today in many different bodies, but much of it is about what is happening at home. If we take up immigration and don't stop until we are finished, if we balance the budget in 5 years, if we reduce the amount of oil we are using by 20 percent in 10 years, if we give 80 percent of working Americans several thousand dollars to help pay for health care insurance, that will be a great big step forward. So it is up to us, now, to pick up the ball and run with it. He has handed it to us. Let's go. Let's talk about it. Let's do it. If we have a better idea, fine; if not, let's just pass his proposal.

Second, I wish to speak for just a moment about the proposal of Senator GREGG that would give the President a new tool for cutting wasteful spending. I believe it should have been enacted with our reforms last week on lobby reform because it would help rein in wasteful spending and earmark abuse. But I commend Senator MCCONNELL and Senator GREGG, and I thank Senator REID for working it out so we can have a vote on this important amendment.

We need to get our fiscal house in order. Yesterday, 25 of us attended a breakfast. The Chair and I were there. It wasn't a breakfast where we talked

about how Democrats could beat Republicans and vice versa; we talked about how we can put our fiscal house in order. The Presiding Officer had some very good ideas to express, but the whole 40 minutes was about the unsustainable growth of Federal spending here, especially in the entitlement area. There are several things we need to do about it, but this amendment by Senator GREGG is one. It is not the same thing as a line-item veto, but it goes in that direction.

I would support amending the Constitution to give the President a line-item veto. I don't think that is in derogation of our authority to appropriate. The Supreme Court thinks it does that, so we have to respect that. But this is a little different way to let the President have a way of letting us take a second look at appropriations we passed which may not have been wise.

Under current law, the President has the power, for example, to propose cuts in spending after appropriations bills have been passed by Congress. Then we can pass those cuts in the same form and send them back or we can ignore them. So the idea would be, under the Gregg amendment, that the President could submit four packages of rescission proposals each year. We couldn't ignore the proposals. We would have to vote on them in a short period of time, if any Member wanted us to. If the majority of the Senate and the House agreed with the President's recommendations for cutting spending, then the spending or targeted tax breaks would get cut and the money would be used to reduce the deficit. But if a simple majority of either House disagreed, then the cuts would not go into effect.

It is pretty much the same amendment Senator Daschle and Senator BYRD offered in 1995, which was supported by 21 of my Democratic colleagues who are still serving in the Senate. It is not the same thing as the traditional line-item veto, but it is an opportunity to put the spotlight on wasteful spending.

Senator GREGG went one step further to make his amendment more closely reflect the Daschle-Byrd proposal. Senator GREGG's amendment allows us in the Congress, if the President makes a rescission proposal, to strike out an individual part of his proposal. There are plenty of forces here in this city for increasing spending. There are not enough forces that push to reduce spending. The Gregg proposal would be one tool the President and the Congress can use to reduce spending.

I know when I was Governor I had this authority and 43 Governors currently have the line-item veto. In Tennessee, it is not much of a line-item veto because the Governor's veto can be overridden by a majority of the legislature. But just because I had the veto and the fact that I might have used it, and occasionally did use it, helped me put the spotlight on wasteful spending and gave the legislature a

chance to reconsider or think twice about what they might do.

As a new member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I can assure my colleagues, I don't take lightly proposals to alter the Congress's power of the purse. For Congress to appropriate is as natural as for Johnny Cash to sing or for the President to nominate Supreme Court Justices. But I don't think this interferes with that because both the Senate and House must vote to adopt the President's proposed cuts; second, we can strike portions of his proposed cuts; and third, the power to do all this would sunset after 4 years, giving us in the Congress a chance to evaluate how well it is working.

There are some other things I think we can do. A biennial budget would help. Passing a 2-year budget, so we can focus all of the first year on the budget and all the next year on oversight over programs to help them work better, avoid duplication, and get rid of some programs—all of that would help control spending. We also ought to have a commission on accountability and review of Federal agencies, which would help reorganize duplicative and unnecessary programs.

I am honored to sponsor the Gregg second look at waste amendment because it gives the President and the Congress one tool to reduce wasteful spending at a time when we urgently need to do that and the country knows that.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I understand we are in morning business at this time?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

SECOND LOOK AT WASTE

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I rise to thank the Senator from Tennessee for his support at this second look at waste amendment which I have offered. The Senator's arguments, as always, are extraordinarily cogent and logical. He makes the point—which I think is very valid, as a former Governor who had the line-item veto, which is a much stronger authority than what we have in this amendment—that this is important, managing the fiscal house, to making sure that items which get into legislation as a result of being put in arbitrarily by some individual Member of Congress but which are not subject to the light of day in the traditional way—by being brought across the floor as individual items but, rather, are put into major pieces of legislation, sometimes representing hundreds of billions of dollars in spending—that those items can be reviewed again and get a vote as to their credibility and as to their appropriateness and whether they represent something on which American tax dollars should be spent.

This proposal, this fast-track rescission, which is what it really is, is not

a partisan proposal. In fact, as proposed in my amendment, second look at waste, it would actually be primarily under the control of the next President. It has a 4-year window of activity and then it is sunsetted. By the time it would get into law, should it pass the Senate and then pass the House, it is likely that this President will only have, probably, a year and a half to use this authority, and then the next President, whoever that President may be—maybe a Republican, maybe a Democrat—will have the authority to use this rescission ability for 2½ years. So it is not partisan.

Second, it was drafted, as the Senator from Tennessee noted, basically to mirror a proposal that was put forward by Senator Daschle. In fact, I have called this amendment daughter of Daschle. It is essentially the Daschle amendment as offered back in 1995, which was cosponsored by Senator BYRD. There are only two major changes—well, three major changes, and I have already said to those who have asked me that I am willing to adjust those changes to bring it even more in line with Daschle.

One of the changes in this bill from the Daschle bill was that the President would have 300 days to send up his rescission notice. Some people have expressed concern that that gives the President the ability to use that rescission notice as a club over people's heads. The reason we gave the President 300 days in this amendment was we had reduced the number of rescission notices in the Daschle amendment. There were potentially 13 rescission actions available to the President, and in this amendment, there are only 4 available to the President. Therefore, in the Daschle amendment, it was required that the rescission notice be sent up soon after the bill was signed. But, of course, with 13 different opportunities, it could go on all year long. We felt that since we were reducing it to four, we should give the President more leeway as to when he sent up those rescission notices.

But I can understand the argument. In fact, I accept the argument that maybe that is too much authority in the sense it gives the President too much leverage over the Congress. So when, I hope—I am using the term "when"—when this amendment comes forward in an amendable form, I will offer an amendment to reduce the 300 days back to 30 days. So the President would have to send up his rescission notices within 30 days of it being signed, or at least asking us to take a second look at it, and that should adjust that problem and bring it directly in line, pretty much in line with what the Daschle amendment was originally.

The other area which was different from the Daschle amendment is the issue that deals with mandatory spending. Some people have said new mandatory spending—not existing programs, not existing veterans programs or farm programs or Medicare or Medicaid, but

if there is a new mandatory program, that can also be subjected to the President asking for a second look at it. It has been argued by some on the other side that this would undermine the ability to reach a comprehensive settlement on entitlement reform. That is really a straw argument. That argument has no legs.

The practical matter is, if a President reaches an agreement with the Congress on something as extraordinarily important as major entitlement reform, part of that agreement is going to be that the President signed off on it. So this argument of, well, but the President might come back and change it later on with a rescission notice really has no legs. It is just being made for the purpose of giving comfort to folks who believe they want to vote against this amendment. If people want to vote against it, that is their right. But don't use that as an excuse.

What this amendment essentially does is it allows the Congress to fulfill its obligation to make sure that money which is sent by our taxpayers is spent effectively, honestly, appropriately, and without waste. And, it gives the executive branch a role in asking the question of Congress: Did you really mean to spend this money?

I have to say, I have been here for a while—14 years in the Senate—and I have seen a lot of bills come across this floor which were fairly large, and when I took a look at them after I maybe had voted for it, I realized there were some things in them that I wished weren't in them. I didn't happen to vote for the highway bill which had the bridge to nowhere—the famous highway bill. But had I voted for it, I think I would have wanted to take a second look at some of the projects in that bill.

The same is true of a lot of our appropriations bills when we get to the end of the year and we haven't gotten our appropriations process completed effectively, so we lump 3 or 4 different appropriations bills, sometimes 5 or 6, occasionally 10, appropriations bills into 1 and we call it an Omnibus appropriations bill. Those bills tend to get items in them which have received no scrutiny, which are simply the result of an earmark for the purpose of accomplishing something which some Member of the Senate or the House feels is appropriate but which one suspects, if the entire House or the Senate were to take a look at, we would say: Well, better to put that money toward reducing the deficit than toward spending the money in this specific area.

So this bill is, as I have said and as the Senator from Tennessee so eloquently said, a second look at waste. The purpose is to give us, the Congress, another tool to manage waste.

Now, I wish it had come up last week because, quite honestly, I thought it was much more appropriate to last week's debate when we were debating earmarks and when about 50 percent of the debate time was spent on earmarks