

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. SPECTER. I fully appreciate the objection. And I thank my colleague. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas is recognized.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 1996—CONFERENCE REPORT

The Senate continued with the consideration of the conference report.

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I see my colleague from Florida is seeking recognition. The Senator from Arkansas has just about a 3-minute statement, if he will permit me to go forward. I will just take a few moments of the Senate's time this evening.

I rise tonight to voice my very, very strong opposition to the Department of Defense authorization conference report that is now before the U.S. Senate.

This conference report takes the unthinkable step of actually repealing a bipartisan piece of legislation which was written in 1983, by Senators ROTH, KASSEBAUM, GRASSLEY, myself and many others in this body. We set up a process for an office to test new weapons, in an independent, unbiased, untainted, and a very, very, realistic environment.

If enacted, this conference report that we are now discussing would be a gigantic step backwards in the war against \$600 hammers, thousand-dollar toilet seats, guns that do not shoot, bombs that do not explode, and planes that do not fly.

I truly believe, Mr. President, that if this conference report is enacted in its present form, the lives of our men and women who serve this country in the Armed Forces will be put needlessly at risk.

I hope my colleagues in the Senate are aware that this conference report contains a provision that would virtually eliminate the Pentagon's Office of the Director of Operational Testing and Evaluation by absolutely revoking its charter. Mr. President, no one has yet explained any reason whatsoever to take away the office and the department in that area of our Department of Defense that tests weapons before we go into mass production. It simply does not make sense.

Over the past 12 years, this testing office has been an unparalleled success. It has saved time, money, and, most importantly, it has saved the lives of our fighting forces by making weapons better and by keeping flawed systems out of the hands of our soldiers.

Support for the testing office has always been bipartisan, Mr. President. Former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney said that an independent weapons testing office "saved more lives" during Operation Desert Storm than perhaps any other single initiative. The current Secretary of Defense, William Perry, recently described this office as "the conscience of the acquisition process."

Mr. President, I was shocked to learn that this conference report revokes the charter for independent testing of our weapons. I could not believe it.

Because of this provision, I cannot and I will not vote for this conference report. I urge my colleagues to defeat this legislation.

Mr. President, I want to make it very clear that I do not fault my very good friend from South Carolina, the distinguished chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator THURMOND, for this language that undermines independent testing. From all reports that I have, he tried to keep the office of independent testing alive. I have always known that this flawed initiative originated not in the Senate but in the House of Representatives. In fact, the Senator from South Carolina, the distinguished chairman of the Armed Services Committee, supported the sense-of-the-Senate resolution approved by this Chamber as recently as August that voiced the Senate's strong opposition to revoking the charter for independent weapons testing.

Unfortunately, Mr. President, the Senate's position did not prevail in the conference committee. The wishes of the U.S. Senate to uphold and to support and to continue this office of independent testing were not granted.

I want to thank the chairman at this time for doing what he could in conference to stop, or at least to delay, the elimination of the office of independent testing. I only wish that he had been more successful in keeping the conference committee from endorsing an absolutely terrible idea.

As we begin sending American troops into Bosnia, it is wrong, it is dangerously shortsighted, for this Congress to propose eliminating that very office that has been so helpful, so successful in making sure that our weapons work properly in combat.

Mr. President, I will be voting against this conference report.

I urge my colleagues to do the same. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I would like to point out an inadvertent omission in the conference agreement statement of managers with respect to Air Force Program Element 602601F, Advanced Weapons. The conference agreement increased the authorization of the requested amount of \$124.4 million by \$11.0 million. Of that increase, \$5.0 million was intended by the conferees to authorize the continuation of the High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program. As pointed out in the statement of managers accompanying the conference report, the conferees intend the remaining \$6 million of the increase to authorize the rocket propulsion technology program described in the House Report 104-131.

Mr. DOLE addressed the Chair. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

BUDGET NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, if I could just take a minute here, let me indi-

cate that I still do not know for certain what the program will be today, tomorrow, and Sunday. I had hoped we would have some serious budget negotiations.

I have just listened to the President of the United States. I must say I do not know who gives him advice, but I do not think he is telling the American people the truth. If he thinks he is engaged in serious budget discussions, then he ought to take a look at the budget.

I must say that this administration is for a one-way street. It is all right to cooperate with them, but they are not going to cooperate with anyone else. And I have made an effort to do that as recently as 48 hours ago on this floor.

I am a little frustrated that we have been 26 days now waiting for the administration to give us a legitimate offer to balance the budget in 7 years, using Congressional Budget Office estimates. It was my understanding, in talking with the President yesterday, that there would be a serious offer given to Republicans today. Anyone with any knowledge of the budget process could look at the offer made and tell you very quickly that it was not a serious offer. But here the President of the United States is getting on television saying that Republicans are recommending devastating cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, the environment and student loans after we put money back into those programs in our legitimate offer earlier today.

So I am almost convinced that there is no real desire on the part of this administration to do anything except to play politics with the budget—and play politics with senior citizens and play politics with every other interest group in America. We have made an effort time after time to meet the President halfway.

I believe the American people want a balanced budget in 7 years. They have indicated that. The President agreed to it, but we cannot do it with the same old smoke and mirrors.

In fact, \$54 billion of the savings today was "baseline adjustments," which is one example, and there are other examples in the President's bill. Tax cuts—he has tax cuts in his bill, too, I think—in what, the 5th year. If everything was not in balance, you would trigger over those tax cuts. That is another way of how they save \$23 billion. That is something that even Darman had not thought of when he was here. So they thought of a lot of good things down there.

But I would hope the President of the United States would contact this Senator and the Speaker of the House of Representatives—the three of us sit down and get serious. This is serious business. If we do not have some agreement, if we do not pass the continuing resolution by Sunday evening, the Government will shut down again.

One way to avoid that is to let us bring up the Labor-HHS bill, which the Democrats twice have objected to. We are going to ask consent—I guess we