

about how fairly we represent their concerns.

The supporters of reform intend to offer amendments related to various aspects of reform, and as I have stated previously, I intend to offer an amendment banning soft money, the unregulated ocean of money which is drowning the integrity of our political system and which occasioned so much scandal in the last election. I am looking forward to the great debate on the first amendment that supporters of soft money will offer in opposition to the ban.

I know that the Senator from Kentucky will enthusiastically engage in that debate, and I again commend him for having the courage of his convictions, for his clear willingness to have his opposition to reform recorded unambiguously for the people to judge. Will the other Senators join him? I don't know. I don't think support for unlimited soft money is quite so clear as his opposition to other reform proposals. I think we would win a vote banning soft money. I am not certain, but I am fairly confident, and I intend to find out.

We will keep trying until the Senate agrees to provide the people we serve with an honest, clear record of our support or opposition to campaign finance reform. They will then make a judgment as to whether they approve of our position or not.

Finally, again, Mr. President, I am hopeful that at some point, there will be sufficient requests by the American people, including a million signatories, 1 million Americans signing a petition asking us to address this issue of campaign finance reform. I hope that sooner or later that and the better angels of our nature will persuade us that it is time to sit down and work out a campaign finance reform which is fair to everyone and gives and restores the American people control of their Government.

I yield the floor.

Mr. KERRY addressed the Chair.

Mr. BOND. Without objecting, may I say, we are trying to arrange for the expeditious consideration of the VA-HUD report.

Mr. KERRY. I just ask for 3 minutes or so. I want to respond to Senator McCain.

Mr. BOND. I have no objection.

THE SENATE WILL ULTIMATELY BE HEARD

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I would like to thank the Senator from Arizona for his comments, for his steadfast efforts and leadership on this and, speaking for Senator Daschle who is not here at this moment and for the leadership on this side, we would like to make it very clear that what Senator McCain has said we are determined to try to help effect. We are determined that we will bring back campaign finance reform again and again and again until we have the ability to vote

up or down on either McCain-Feingold or on some measure of full reform. I think Senator McCain has appropriately suggested that ultimately the will of the Senate can't be held down on a matter like this. Senators will have to vote one way or the other in order to make their positions clear, and the will of the Senate ultimately will be heard.

We, on our side, are particularly grateful to Senator Feingold for his leadership, but, Mr. President, we regret enormously that the American people were not permitted to have one amendment properly voted on and debated. Not one. Not once in this important issue, where 88 percent of the American people believe we ought to have reform, was the U.S. Senate, known as the world's greatest deliberative body, able to truly deliberate. Some would argue deliberation comes in many forms and a filibuster is a form of that deliberation. But everyone knows that a majority of this Senate was prepared to vote for this bill as it is today. This bill will come back again and again until the Senate has a chance to work its will.

Mr. BOND addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREE- MENT—CONFERENCE REPORT AC- COMPANYING H.R. 2158

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now turn to the VA-HUD conference report; that the report be considered read; and that there be 20 minutes equally divided between the majority and the minority, plus 5 minutes for the Senator from Washington, Senator Gorton; that following the conclusion or yielding back of time, the conference report be agreed to and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, all without intervening action or debate.

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

DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AF- FAIRS, HOUSING AND URBAN DE- VELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1998—CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I submit a report of the committee of conference on the bill (H.R. 2158) making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1998, and for other purposes, and ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The report will be stated.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2158) having met, after full and free con-

ference, have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses this report, signed by a majority of the conferees.

The Senate proceeded to consider the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of October 6, 1997.)

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I yield myself such time as I may require.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I am pleased to present the Senate with the conference report accompanying H.R. 2158. The bill provides a total of \$90.7 billion in new budget authority, including \$21.5 billion in mandatory spending, which is \$855 million less than the President's request.

As with most legislative activity in this body, the bill is not perfect, but I do think it reflects a very balanced approach to a number of particularly difficult funding and policy decisions. In achieving that balance, I owe a special debt of gratitude and express my sincerest thanks to my hard-working ranking member, Senator Mikulski, whose cooperation, guidance, and wise counsel has helped to craft a consensus in reaching many of these difficult decisions.

We have done our best to ensure that both the spirit of the budget agreement and the highest priorities of the President have been met without jeopardizing key programs, such as veterans' medical care and the space program which were not protected in the budget agreement.

For the VA, the highest priority in the VA-HUD conference report is afforded to veterans' programs which total \$40.45 billion and veterans' medical care in particular. The conference report provides \$17,060,000,000 for VA medical care, which is \$100 million more than the President's request and more than \$300 million above the amount assumed for veterans' medical spending in the budget agreement. This level should ensure continued care to all eligible veterans and continued improvements to the VA medical system. Increases also are provided for the State Nursing Home Program construction and research.

For the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the conference report provides close to \$25 billion for fiscal year 1998, including full funding of \$8.2 million for section 8 contract renewals as provided through the budget resolution.

Other key programs include \$310 million for drug elimination grants; \$1.5 billion for HOME; \$4.7 billion for community development block grants; \$600 million for the Native American Block Grant Program; \$823 million for homeless assistance programs; \$35 million for Youth Build; \$25 million for Brownfields; and \$138 million for the economic development initiative.

Unfortunately, we were unable to fund the preservation program due to the high cost of the program, reported