not to prevent votes. If you do not believe in having a vigorous debate on the floor of the Senate, why run for the office in the first place?

As Harry Truman once said: If you can't stand the heat, you better not go into the kitchen. That is what this resolution is really all about.

Next, this resolution, unfortunately, represents a real lack of consistency on the part of the majority. It is a flip-flop, more worthy of a gymnastics contest than a debate on the floor of the Senate.

Just 4 short years ago, the majority voted to overturn the historic practice of not allowing legislation on appropriations. Now they propose to change it back. I could not blame Americans listening to our comments today if they thought what was really holding sway on the floor of the Senate had more to do with expediency in politics than consistency of principle.

Unfortunately, Mr. President, it represents something that Americans have come to view as too often is the case in Washington today, and that is the pursuit of power above all else—certainly, the pursuit of power above principle, all too frequently. And that is not how it should be.

I remind my colleagues, the majority, that the test of character is not how you behave when you are weak; the real test of character is when we see how you behave when you are strong. That is what we see today. I am afraid we are not passing this test if we go forward and gag and muzzle the minority from offering our ideas to the American people.

Let me offer this observation in conclusion.

I represent a State of 6 million souls. I believe I was elected to represent them on the floor of the Senate, to offer the ideas that will best serve to increase the opportunity that they will have in their lives. That is why I was sent to the Senate. It is not right to muzzle their elected Representative from offering the ideas that I believe will serve them best, or the Senator of Nevada believes will serve his constituents best, or the Senator from Minnesota or the other Senators in this body.

I have hanging in my office a print entitled ''The United States Senate,'' circa 1850. It is a wonderful print that I believe embodies the history and the legacy of this institution at its finest.

In the center of this print is Henry Clay, speaking on the floor of the Senate in the historic Old Senate Chamber. And listening intently to him on the floor of the Senate were some of the giants in the Senate: Daniel Webster, John Calhoun, Thomas Hart Benton. Future Presidents of the United States were in attendance listening to the debate.

They were not debating an arcane subject that would be of no interest to the people of this country. They were debating the very union that is the foundation upon which our Nation is built. What would our forefathers think of the changes that have taken place in this Senate if they felt that the issues of union and disunion, States rights and Federal rights, the very liberties we hold dear, were no longer allowed to be debated on the floor of the Senate?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. BAYH. Mr. President, I believe they would be distressed, as I am today, and as people would be today if they understood what was at stake here. I urge my colleagues to vote against this resolution and to uphold the traditions of our Senate.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I yield 5 minutes to the Senator from Minnesota.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Thank you, Mr. President. I might not even need to take that much time.

First of all, I thank the Senator from Indiana for his comments. I was thinking about what he said. When I was a college teacher, I used to talk a bit about Birch Bayh, some of the Senators who took strong, principled stands. The Senator mentioned other great Senators, but I think the Senator represents a really wonderful tradition.

I think what Senator BAYH said at the very end of his remarks is what is most important to me. I was thinking about when I ran for the Senate from Minnesota. It would be an honor to be a Member of the House of Representatives; the Presiding Officer was a Member of the House of Representatives. As a Senator, you could do a much better job of being an advocate for the people in your State, because the rules of the Senate were such that you could come to the floor, even if it was you alone—maybe others would not agree with you, but hopefully you could get a majority—if you thought the Senate was in a disconnect with the people, to the concerns and circumstances of people you represented, to express your concerns.

I just mention a gathering I was at the Dahl farm in northwest Minnesota. It is a huge problem in Arkansas, too. Farmers showed up, coming from a long distance away. It was a desperate situation. In the Senate you can come to the floor and say: I have to come to the floor and fight for family farmers. I have to come to the floor to talk about comprehensive health care. I have to come to the floor and figure out a vehicle whereby I can talk about ending this discrimination when it comes to people who are struggling with mental illness. I have to come to the floor to talk about poor children in America. I have to come to the floor to talk about veterans health care and the gap in veterans health care in Minnesota and around the country.

The great thing about being a Senator is you can come to the floor with an amendment and you can fight for it.

Mr. REID. Would the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. WELLSTONE. I would be pleased to yield.

Mr. REID. You are a former professor of government. It is true, is it not, that the Constitution was drawn to protect the minority, not the majority?

Mr. WELLSTONE. That is true.

Mr. REID. Isn't it true that there is nobody better to protect the Constitution and the minority than the Senate?

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, that is part of the genius of the Senate and the way Senators have conducted themselves over the years.

Mr. REID. Do I understand the Senator to say, unless we have more of an opportunity to speak out on issues, that those minorities, in effect, are not represented here?

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, the reason I am going to vote against this resolution is, to be very direct—I am not full of hatred about this; I am just making a political point, and we do make political points on the floor of the Senate—when I look at the context of what has been going on here, I am in profound opposition to what the majority leader and the majority party have been doing, which is to sort of what we call fill up the tree, basically denying Senators the right to come to the floor with amendments, to try to make sure we don't have to debate tough and controversial questions, to try to make sure we can't move forward agendas that we, as Senators, think are important to the people of our States.

I am absolutely opposed to what I think is being done here. Therefore, I think this resolution fits into that pattern of trying to stifle dissent, trying to stifle a minority opinion, trying to stifle individual Senators from coming to the floor and doing their absolute best to be the strongest possible advocates for the people of their States. That is why I am voting against this resolution.

It is sort of two issues. One is the question that the Senator from Nevada spoke on, which is, what is the role of the Senate in relation to the House of Representatives, in relation to making sure that we have respect for minority rights, so on and forth, what is the role of the Senate as a deliberative body, as a debate body. The other issue, which is even more important to me, is whether or not I can, as a Senator, do the best possible job for the people of my State. That is why I am going to oppose this resolution.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 7 minutes as in morning business.

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

VETERANS BUDGET REPORT

Mr. WELLSTONE. This is an area in which the Presiding Officer has done a lot of work. I thank the Senator from Arkansas for his good work on veterans issues.

Mr. President, on June 15th I sent letters to each of the twenty-two VISN

Directors of the VA health care system to ask for data on how their network would be affected by the President's flat-lined budget. I conducted this survey because the stories coming from rank and file VA staff and veterans who I had talked with were horrible:

Veterans with PTSD waiting months to get treatment;

Veterans living in fear that facilities would be closed and access to care would be cut off;

VA nurses working mandatory overtime, frequent back to back shifts because of staffing shortages.

But I wasn't getting complete answers in Washington. So to find the truth I went to the VISN Directors themselves. By the middle of July, all 22 VISN Directors had responded. I am pleased to say that overall their responses were very candid. They took my letters in the spirit that I intended: to understand the stakes involved in the VA health care budget debate here in Washington. Many of these directors showed real courage in responding as frankly as they did.

My staff summarized the responses in a report. I think the findings should be of great concern to every one of my colleagues.

I can best describe the results in two points:

1. The legacy of the Clinton administration's budget will be fewer VA staff, offering fewer services, and treating fewer Veterans.

2. The House and Senate cannot buy off the nations veterans by adding a few hundred million dollars to the President's budget. Only full funding will restore the VA to a capacity America's veterans deserve.

Let me be specific: The report finds that:

20 VISNs would have funding shortfalls under the Clinton Budget:

As many as 10,000 employees would be cut under the Clinton budget: 19 of the 22 VISNs indicated that staff reductions would be necessary under the Clinton administration fiscal year 2000 budget. One VISN indicated that under the President's budget it would need to reduce employment by 1,454 FTEEs, a cut of 15.4 percent of that VISN's workforce.

10 VISNs would reduce patient workload under the Clinton budget: Only one VISN said it could treat more veterans this year than last year under this budget.

71,129 fewer veterans would be served under the Clinton budget: One VISN reported that it may need to eliminate services to as many as 17,000 veterans. And this number is only the total from the 6 VISNs who gave us an estimated number. Again. Four other VISNs said they would treat fewer veterans.

But even an increase of $500 million above the President's budget would not reverse this trend. On the contrary, this report shows that an increase of such a small amount would still require hard choices and in some cases reductions in services, staff, and veterans served.

At least 12 VISNs would have short falls under Clinton budget plus $500 million: the largest deficit for an individual VISN was $100 million.

At least 13 VISNs would reduce staffing under the Clinton budget plus $500 million—in one VISN by over 1,100 employees.

At least 38,155 fewer veterans would be served under the Clinton budget plus $500 million: Again, only one VISN said it could positively increase services to veterans under this scenario. One VISN said it would still turn away 9,600 veterans.

Veterans health care is at a crossroads. While the nation's twenty-two VISNs have struggled valiantly to do more with a shrinking budget, the results of this survey suggest that urgent action is required to reverse what has become a funding crisis in VA health care—even as America's veterans population becomes older and more reliant on VA services. Spending decisions made by Congress in the next few months will determine whether predictions made by the 22 VISNs become reality or a disaster narrowly averted.

This funding crisis will affect the World War II veteran, who has to drive 6 hours to get care because funding problems prevented the VA from opening a community based out-patient clinic in his area.

This funding crisis will affect the VA nurse who has to work 16 hour shifts because hiring enough nurses is too expensive.

It is outrageous that with federal budget surpluses 20 VISNs will run a deficit. It is outrageous that staff will be cut, or furloughed while being asked to work harder and longer hours. It is outrageous that over 71,000 fewer sick and disabled veterans would be treated by the VA next year even as they get older. These veterans need more health care not less.

But this story doesn't begin with my report. It is really a continuation of a battle begun 13 years ago with the release of the first Independent Budget by the major veterans groups. It is the continuation of a battle fought by Senator JOHNSON in the Budget Committee—to provide full funding for veterans. And of a battle TIM and I fought on the floor on the Senate to provide full funding for veterans in the Senate budget resolution—a fight that we won with a unanimous vote to increase VA funding to the level recommended by the independent budget.

But let me be clear, this is also a fight we must carry on to Appropriations.

What this report suggests is that we are through cutting the fat out of the VA budget. There is nothing left to pare but bone and muscle. The VA has reached its fighting weight and has plunged dangerously below.

We've squeezed just about as much money out of the system as we possibly can. People on the front lines of veterans health care—whether care providers or recipients—know that the VA health care system is desperately short of resources. I worry that my friend Lyle Pearson, of North Mankato, decorated for his service in WWII, disabled vet, who receives care at VA facilities in Minnesota, will not get the care he needs if the flat-line budget is not improved. I worry that veterans across the nation will be caught between increasing need and flat-lined funds. Veterans in Bangor, Maine are concerned because a VA inspector general report noted that their outpatient clinic had a 10 month backlog of new patients. Things were so bad last Fall that the clinic couldn't see walk-in patients or urgent-care patients, and there was a four month wait to see the clinic's part-time psychiatrist. Veterans in Iowa are facing the possible closure of one of their three major veterans hospitals because of budget shortfalls.

The last chance for veterans this year is VA/HUD appropriations. But we still don't know what the funding level will be the VA/HUD appropriations bills. In two and a half months, fiscal 1999 will end and we still don't even have a start on funding FY 2000. The bills have not been marked up by the committee. This is unacceptable. If veterans funding is allocated in the dark of night in a last minute omnibus spending bill, I fear the veteran will be short changed. Bring the VA/HUD bill to the floor. If there isn't enough money in it for veterans, we'll amend it to add more.

A story in the July 18th edition of the Richmond Times Dispatch quotes in chairman of the VA/HUD appropriations Subcommittee as saying that the budget situation that we face this year is very tough. That same article says that VA health care might be facing a $1 billion cut.

I've heard that rumor. I've heard the rumor that veterans will get an increase. Well let me start a rumor this morning that veterans can take to the bank: I give notice now to my colleagues that I will be on the floor of the Senate offering an amendment to VA/HUD appropriations the first opportunity I get if the funding is not enough.

The veteran has borne the pain of budget cuts for too long. Tax cuts should come after relief for veterans. Defense buildups should come after relief for veterans. Let's make the veteran the priority again.

This is a fight to make VA health care the gold standard for health care again. It is a fight to keep a promise to the veteran: If you served your country your nation will stand up for you. If you were injured you will be healed. If you are disabled, the country will raise you up—not cast you aside.

I call on my colleagues to join me and the veterans in this fight. It will take every U.S. Senator and every Member of the House. It will take the VFW, the DAV, the PVA, the AMVETS, and the Vietnam Vets and all the other groups besides.

Most importantly, America's veterans must demand it. Veterans need to hear the call one more time.

Together we can restore the funds and keep our covenant with the veteran.

Mr. President, today the Vice President announced that the White House is going to be asking for another $1 billion. Veterans organizations last week—I thank them—came together with us and presented this data. We said there are huge problems in the country; a lot of veterans aren't going to get the care they need and the care that they deserve.

The Vice President stated the White House is going to ask for an additional $1 billion. I thank the Vice President for his announcement. That helps. However, we are going to have to do a lot better. That still leaves us with a $2 billion shortfall. To my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and to the White House and to the Vice President, I say that the veterans community is organizing. It is good grassroots politics. They are going to hold us all accountable. We will have to do a lot better.

STOP WORSENING REPRESSION IN BURMA

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I want to speak today on the distressing human rights situation in Burma. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN, held their Annual Ministerial Meeting in Singapore this weekend. And this week Secretary Albright will be in Singapore for the ASEAN regional forum and the Post-Ministerial Conference. It is essential that during all of these meetings serious attention is focused on the worsening human rights situation in Burma.

We haven't heard much about Burma in the media recently. There have been no major news events in Burma recently to grab the attention of the world: No Tiananmen Square scale massacres, no Kosovo scale dislocations, no bloody street clashes like we've seen in East Timor or Iran. But in Burma today something equally chilling is proceeding, out of the world's view: A slow, systematic strangling of the democratic opposition. Since last fall, the ruling military regime has detained, threatened and tortured opposition party members in increasing numbers. At least 150 senior members of the opposition National League for Democracy are being held in government detention centers. 3,000 political prisoners are held in Rangoon's notorious Insein prison. The regime has forced or coerced nearly 40,000 others to resign from the opposition party in recent months. In a videotape smuggled out of Burma in April and delivered to the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva, the leader of the National League for Democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi, said government repression had worsened greatly in the past year on a scale ''the world has not yet grasped.'' She said on the tape: ''What we have suffered over the last year is far more than we have suffered over the last six or seven years.'' According to one Western official, the regime intends to do nothing less than eradicate the opposition ''once and for all.''

Mr. President, most of this repression takes place quietly, through intimidation, arrests at night and other activities out of the public eye. The Burmese regime carefully controls access to the country for journalists. So we have no video footage of the repression and only scant reporting from a few brave journalists and human rights workers. But just because we cannot see what is going on in Burma does not mean we can ignore it. It is all the more important for us to speak about the situation there and show our support for the forces of democracy and human rights.

In July 1997, when Burma became a full ASEAN member, ASEAN countries claimed that such a move would encourage the regime—the so-called State Peace and Development Council, or SPDC, to improve its human rights record. In fact the opposite has been true. As the Washington Post put it in a recent editorial: ''ASEAN's logic was familiar: Engagement with the outside world would persuade Burma's dictators to relax their repressive rule. The verdict on this test case of the engagment theory thus far is clear: The behavior of the thugs who run Burma has worsened, and so has life for most Burmese.''

Not only has the SPDC stepped up its repression of the opposition party, the National League for Democracy, it has intensified its campaign of oppression against the country's ethnic minoriites. The regime has increased forcible relocation programs in the Karen, Karenni, and Shan States. The use of forced labor in all seven ethnic minority states continues at a high level, and forced portering occurs wherever there are counter-insurgency activities.

Amnesty International has just issued three new reports which describe in compelling detail the harsh, relentless mistreatment of farmers and other civilians of ethnic minority groups in rural areas. Let me read a few brief passages from these excellent, detailed reports:

In February 1999, Amnesty International interviewed recently arrived Shan refugees in Thailand in order to obtain an update on the human rights situation in the central Shan State. The pattern of violations has remained the same, including forced labor and portering, extrajudicial killings, and ill-treatment of villagers. Troops also routinely stole villagers' rice supplies, cattle, and gold, using them to sell or to feed themselves. According to reports, Army officers do not provide their troops with adequate supplies so troops in effect live off the villagers. One 33 year-old farmer from Murngnai township described the relationship between the Shan people and the army:

> Before, I learned that the armed forces are supposed to protect people, but they are repressing people. If you can't give them everything they want, they consider you as their enemy . . . it is illogical, the army is forcing the people to protect them, instead of vice-versa.

Amnesty International also reports similar abuses in Karen state:

Karen refugees interviewed in Thailand cited several reasons for leaving their homes: Some had previously been forced out of their villages by the Burmese army and had been hiding in the forest. They feared being shot on sight by the military because they occupied ''black areas'' where the insurgents were allegedly active. Many others fled directly from their home villages in the face of village burnings, constant demands for forced labor, looting of food and supplies, and extrajudicial killings at the hands of the military.

These human rights violations took place in the context of widespread counter-insurgency activities against the Karen National Union (KNU) one of the last remaining armed ethnic minority opposition groups still fighting the military government. Guerilla fighting between the two groups continues, but the primary victims are Karen civilians. Civilians are at risk of torture and extrajudicial executions by the military, who appear to automatically assume that they supported or were even members of the KNU. Civilians also became sitting targets for constant demands by the army for forced labor or portering duties. As one Karen refugee explained to Amnesty International, ''Even though we are civilians, the military treats us like their enemy.''

A similar situation exists in Karenni State. Three-quarters of the dozens of Karenni refugees interviewed by Amnesty International in February 1999 were forced by the military to work as unpaid laborers. They were in effect an unwilling pool of laborers which the military drew from to work in military bases, build roads, and clear land. When asked why they decided to flee to Thailand, many refugees said that forced labor duties made it impossible for them to survive and do work to support themselves. Several of them also mentioned that forced labor demands had increased during 1998.

Unpaid forced labor is in contravention of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Convention No. 29, which the government of Burma signed in 1955. The ILO has repeatedly raised the issue with the government and in June 1996 took the rare step of appointing a Commission of Inquiry. In August 1998 the Commission published a comprehensive report, which found the government of Burma ''. . . guilty of an international crime that is also, if committed in a widespread or systematic manner, a crime against humanity.''

Mr. President, I am under no illusion that the military regime in Burma will reform overnight and end its human rights abuses. But I think it is critically important that we keep the