

When faced with honest choices, the American people will not accept the Federal Government paying for programs that are primarily the responsibility of the States at the expense of sacrificing our commitment to Social Security and Medicare, as well as to numerous other commitments the Federal Government has made under law and under the Constitution of the United States of America. That is absolutely unacceptable, and the American people have a right to be upset. We need to be doing better.

As the appropriations legislation is finalized in negotiations, I hope that we in the Senate can inject some common sense into the dialog, taking into account our priorities as a Federal legislative body, and weighing the extent to which we should or should not maintain our involvement in various programs that are more properly the responsibility of State and local government. Even now, however, I fear we are primarily driven to compete with the President for political oneupsmanship in the area of education which, while ranked first as a national priority according to polling data, is not the primary responsibility of State and local government.

Medicare, Social Security, and national security—these are the primary challenges before us. As fiscal stewards of our Nation's economy, we cannot afford to continue maintaining our involvement in so many other areas, spending at such a pace as we have and it has been enormous. We must define our responsibilities. We must prioritize. We must exercise fiscal discipline and restraint and insist that we work harder and smarter and do more with less.

The current budgetary path that we are on is both dangerous and irresponsible and downright misleading.

I am sad to say that many of the fiscal year 2000 appropriations bills with which we have invested so much of our time, despite our best intentions, are flawed by the use of budgetary gimmicks that I cannot help but say overshadow the labors of so many of my colleagues who are shouldered with the difficult task of constructing a budget that both meets all of the perceived demands placed on this body and keeps us out of the red. That is why we must prioritize.

In the meantime, I cannot condone the sleight of hand that allows us to postpone making the kind of tough choices that are required to balance our books, and because of that I have voted against a number of these spending bills—bills that, to be sure, would benefit Ohio in a number of ways.

We have committed over \$17 billion in emergency spending in these bills, and that does not even count the billions of dollars of other spending that's being hidden. We are plastering—and I mean plastering—this spending over with something called directed scoring. Instead of using CBO numbers—that is, the Congressional Budget Office num-

bers—we have been selectively using numbers from the Office of Management and Budget, the agency for which the President is responsible, whenever they allow us to spend more.

Incidentally, does anyone remember the last time we did not have an emergency for which we had to account? Let's end the charade and admit we use emergency spending to avoid the balanced budget spending caps and, while we are at it, admit we are spending every dime of the projected on-budget surplus in fiscal year 2000.

When I go back to Ohio, people say to me: What about the tax reduction? You guys are having a tough time just balancing the budget.

I want to say this: If we do not have substantially more revenues in fiscal year 2000 than what is currently projected, CBO will announce in January that we are using Social Security to balance the 2000 budget. We have to pray the dollars come in a lot more, but if the dollars do not come in more, then CBO is going to announce in January this budget uses Social Security.

It is time to bite the bullet and make the hard choices. Nobody else but us can exercise the fiscal responsibility that is needed. If we cannot do it now, with the lowest unemployment we have had and a booming economy, the question I have is, When will we ever be able to do it? If we fail to make the tough choices now, we will soon be facing a train wreck that will make it impossible for us to respond to the needs specifically delegated in the Constitution to the Federal Government and fail to keep the sacred Social Security and Medicare covenant we have with the American people. Let's get back on track so when we return to Washington at the start of the new millennium, which is just around the corner, we can say with confidence we have, indeed, been the stewards of a government the American people deserve.

I yield the floor.

NOTICE OF OBJECTION

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, today I have informed the Minority Leader in writing that I will object to any motion to proceed or to seek unanimous consent to take up and pass H.R. 2260, the Pain Relief Promotion Act of 1999, when it is received from the House.

BRING ON THE WRITE STUFF

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, according to recent results from the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only about a quarter of fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders write well enough to meet the "proficient" achievement grading level, and a measly one percent of students attained the "advanced" grading level. Approximately six out of ten pupils reached just the "basic" level—defined as "partial mastery" of writing skills by the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam.

What startling results, Mr. President! How do we expect our nation to forge ahead in a global economy with a "partial mastery" of writing skills? From the typical thank-you note to a cover letter for a job opening to a simple exchange with friends over the Internet, writing is a skill essential to everyday existence, no matter what path in life one may choose to pursue. The power of words and the blending of thoughts in a succinct, clear, and grammatically correct manner is often a daunting endeavor, and one that is too easily dismissed with a poor letter grade or a critical evaluation by a mentor or coworker.

The path to becoming a solid writer is a long and arduous road. I continue to improve my writing skills each day through reading and through practice. As the old saying goes, "practice makes perfect." Well, Mr. President, this dictum does not just apply to perfecting your baseball swing or your tennis serve. It is an edict we all ought to follow with a little greater will and fortitude in all of life's quests.

What makes someone a better writer? Lots of things, I say, but perhaps a strong foundation is the most critical, and often the most neglected, step along the way. Today's children are ripe with great ideas and creativity, but without proper instruction and strong reading skills, bright promise fades into fractured thoughts and misspelled words on paper. Based upon the results of the 1998 NAEP test, students who did well tended to be those who planned out their compositions and had teachers who required practice drafts. Moreover, youngsters from homes filled with books, newspapers, magazines, and encyclopedias had higher average scores.

So often, we hear students gripe about burdensome summer reading lists, and even more shockingly, we witness parents encouraging their children to buy the "Cliff Notes" of the book to provide them with the basic character and plot summaries while avoiding the hefty task of reading the novel from cover to cover. What nonsense! Perhaps, the greatest benefit of a child's summer agenda is reading. Skimming and reading shortened versions or the so-called "Cliff Notes" rob children of wonderful learning experiences.

Reading is an essential ingredient to enhancing one's writing skills. From enjoying the morning newspaper over a cup of coffee to reading an educational magazine or a novel, one can benefit greatly from this endeavor. Given the expansive English vocabulary, there is much to learn from different styles of writing. How often does a person come across an unfamiliar word or phrase in reading? Quite often, I suspect. But how often does the person actually interrupt their reading to consult the dictionary for the word's definition or origin? Not very often, I venture to guess. An appreciation of the soaring majesty of the English language is the