consent request, that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the conference report on H.J. Res. 2 and that it be considered under the following limitation: 20 minutes of debate equally between myself and the distinguished Senator from West Virginia, the ranking member of the Appropriations Committee; 10 minutes under the control of Senator DODD; 15 under the control of Senator BOXER; further, that following the use or yielding back of the time, the Senate proceed to a vote on adoption of the conference report, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. Reserving the right to object.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, reserving right to object, I would like 3 minutes before final passage of this bill.

Mr. STEVENS. I am pleased to add that addition to my request. I am pleased to modify the request so the Senator's request is complied with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I was talking to someone here. The Senator wants 3 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota has 3 minutes. Is there objection?

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I withdraw my unanimous consent request for the time being, and I ask unanimous consent that my right to be recognized to call up the report remain the same.

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

The Senator from North Dakota.

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, it has been very interesting to me to review the budget document that is now before us that has the omnibus appropriations for 2003, which provides funding for all the discretionary programs and activities outside the Department of Defense.

For months last year, our Republican colleagues prevented completion of the remaining 2003 appropriations bills, arguing that that level for appropriations was too high and the President would not accept appropriations bills that exceeded $750.5 billion in total.

The President's veto threat persisted even with the Senate Appropriations Committee having voted out all 13 appropriations bills on unanimous 29-to-0 votes.

After delaying the 2003 appropriations process for 5 months, and forcing most of the Federal Government to operate under a series of continuing resolutions, our Republican colleagues have produced a bill that, when combined with the already enacted defense and military construction bills, exceeds the President's level by more than $12 billion.

Republicans provide total discretionary budget authority for 2003 of $762.7 billion, and highway obligational authority of $31.8 billion, for a total of $794.5 billion.

Last year, they railed against the Senate Budget Committee reported spending level of $797 billion.

My friends, that is a difference of three-tenths of 1 percent, a $2.5 billion difference. Five months of delay over a difference of three-tenths of 1 percent. Levels they said were fiscally irresponsible they have now adopted.

Most interesting—most interesting—when the bill was here on the floor, some of our colleagues on the other side ran up a debt meter on amendments offered by some Democrats that had a total cost over 10 years of $37 billion.

We are poised to vote now on their proposal which is $62 billion above what was offered on the floor at the time. So if they still have their debt meter chart, they had better get it out. And they ought to put another $25 billion on their tote board because they are running up the debt—and it is their spending. They are in charge, and all their talk about Democratic spending, and that that is the problem with fiscal responsibility, is shown for what it was. It was all talk.

The reason we are in the deficit ditch is the tax cuts that were unaffordable that they have put in place and the additional tax cuts this President is seeking that are going to drive us deep into deficit and debt.

Mr. President, the numbers do not lie. I have been waiting for this moment for 5 months, to see if the rhetoric matched the reality. And now we see. In just a few moments we are going to have a chance to vote, and then we are going to see who stands with their words, and who stands with their rhetoric, and who votes to spend the money.

This has been a very interesting year, but this is just the beginning. Because we are going to see, in the coming months, who is serious about fiscal responsibility, who is serious about having budgets that add up, who is serious about paying down debt, who is serious about exploding deficits and debt—right on the eve of the retirement of the baby boom generation. I hope very much that the rhetoric matches the reality because we have not seen that in the last 5 months.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut is recognized.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise to address the issue of our fiscal year 2003 omnibus appropriations conference report.

Let me begin by, first of all, commending Senator STEVENS and Senator BYRD. Conferencing these bills is no easy task. Each of us has pieces of these bills that we care about deeply. And the Chair and Ranking Member have the awesome responsibility of trying to pull all of this together.

Although I am disappointed by many parts of the conference report, I also want to begin by paying tribute to the chairman and the ranking member and their staffs for the tremendous effort they put into this bill and to try to accommodate the many requests they received and the tremendous demands made of them.

Certainly, in many respects this bill is an improvement over the budget that was submitted to us by the President. Unfortunately, that is not a very high standard, by this Senator's calculation.

The standard that we must meet in each year's appropriations is to address the needs of the American people. Unfortunately, this bill neither reflects the priorities of the American people, nor does it do nearly enough to address our national needs.

I will begin by discussing education. There are many other parts to this bill, but education is a particular priority and source of debate and contention for the American public. Regardless of where you live, any constituency will tell you that one of their major concerns is the quality of our public education at the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels. It is critically important when you consider how significant this is to the American public that this bill should reflect to the greatest extent possible the interests of the American people in improving the quality of education.

I thank the committee for something they did in the bill on education, instead of just sounding like a critic on everything. We exempted under this bill, thanks to the leadership of Senator STEVENS and others, Head Start from the across-the-board cuts. I am grateful to them for that. That is going to make a difference to a lot of kids in the country who count on Head Start. I thank him and his staff for doing that for these young people. That would have lost somewhere around 12- to 22,000 kids, had we applied the across-the-board cut to the existing funds on Head Start. We serve thousands more than that, about 800,000, but 22,000 kids being dropped off the rolls of Head Start would have been a great tragedy. I thank them for that.

Again, I thank my colleague from Alaska on special education. He managed to work out a way with me, at least coming out of this Chamber, to put an additional $1.5 billion into special education, which would have been a major step forward. It would not have gotten us to the 40 percent that ultimately we will have to reach, but it would have taken us a substantial part of the way down that road.

The Senator from Alaska can't win every battle, but I would be remiss if I

did not report to my colleagues that in this conference report, instead of coming back with that $1.5 billion, we are coming back with $400 million. We lost $1.1 billion when the House and the conferees from this body met to work out the differences.

This is such a priority. I don't care where you go in the country. For every county, every community, this is a major issue. It is a major fiscal responsibility. Local governments don't get to do the things we do at the national level or the State level. They have to meet these responsibilities. We have mandated it; we have required it. So whether you live in the great State of Colorado, as the Presiding Officer does, or the State of Connecticut, I will guarantee you, if you were to ask local people what are some of the priorities you have, this is one that would always come up.

I am very disappointed, despite the efforts of Senator STEVENS and others, that apparently the House leadership did not see the wisdom of maintaining the $1.5 billion. They cut it by $1.1 billion so we get a $400 million increase over the President's budget. You could argue that is certainly an improvement but still far short of what I had hoped we would be able to do.

I wish to address the issue of title I. That was a source of lengthy debate in this Chamber during consideration of the legislation. Senator KENNEDY of Massachusetts offered an amendment to try to make up the shortfall between what the President's budget submitted on title I funding and what would have been needed in order to meet the promise the President and the Congress made last year when the President signed the No Child Left Behind Act. How many times have you heard people talk about this bill, the importance of title I, getting resources to these children and their families, those who are in the poorest conditions in both rural and urban communities?

We all signed on to the bill, which, by the way, if you are troubled by special education because of a mandate from the Federal Government, brace yourselves because the No Child Left Behind Act has significant mandates in it. We require localities to do many things under title I. It is going to be costly to do them, including mandatory testing. But instead of providing the resources in the first year of this new Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the President actually came back and sought to reduce the funding dedicated to meet those commitments.

The difference in the conference report between the promise and the reality is $4.25 billion rather than $4.65 billion. So coming back from conference the disparity is not quite as bad as it was, but the fact is, $4.3 billion was still missing for title I. I am terribly saddened by that.

I know how hard the conferees have to work, but you can't mandate things on local governments and not be willing to come up with the resources. If you are going to vote as we did overwhelmingly for the No Child Left Behind Act and then within the same calendar year refuse to provide funding for it, well, you get some sense of why there is so much outrage at the local level. You are seeing it in special education. Now you will see it in title I. That is regrettable. But, again, I thank the Members for their efforts and what they have done in this area.

Lastly, on higher education, when the bill left the Senate, it had increased Pell grants by $100 a student. Since the purchasing power of Pell grants has been cut in half since 1975 and in most cases the average student loan indebtedness has tripled since 1987, I didn't think that was nearly enough. Our Republican colleagues defeated an amendment to increase the grant by $400, but we sent over at least $100. Now it is coming back with an increase of $50. I don't need to tell you wherever you go, whether it is special education, title I, or college education, the idea that a $50 increase in a Pell grant is going to make much of a difference for these low-to-moderate income families who are trying to meet the cost of higher education, just doesn't make sense.

Again, I understand that conferees must establish priorities. But I am deeply saddened that we couldn't do better and hold at least to the $100 that we had in the Senate bill and try to at least relieve a small amount of that additional burden that these families are going to face.

Just to put this all in perspective, I know there is divided opinion on these issues, but these are about priorities. The President has placed a very high priority obviously on the $674 billion tax cut; $320 billion of which will go to the wealthiest 5 percent of Americans. Think of that. Here you have a tax cut for the top 5 percent that is going to be some 75 times larger than the cost of meeting the promise to low-income schools, and apparently the President values that tax cut about 230 times more than increasing Pell grants for low-income students by $400.

Those are choices. I understand people make them. But the American public has a right to know that when the choice came to doing something about Pell grants for struggling families, working families, doing something about special education needs for our local communities, or doing something about title I funds which are critically important to improve the quality of education at the elementary school level, we made the choice to provide tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans.

I represent the most affluent State in te country. I probably have a larger percentage of constituents who would benefit from this tax cut proposal than most other States. Yet I can tell you, there are very few who believe these kinds of priorities are their priorities. Most of them, in fact, based on what I have heard from them, believe we should be making these critical investments in the quality of education in our country—special education, title I funding, and Pell grants.

I am glad the conference report retained the language from my amendment approved on the Senate floor to exempt Head Start from any across the board cut contained in the bill. Head Start reaches only 60 percent of eligible 3- and 4-year-olds and only 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers. The conference report provides a modest increase for Head Start that will barely cover inflation. While it is good that Head Start was not subject to an across the board cut and was allowed a modest increase, we should be fully funding the program. If we truly want to leave no child behind, then we need to ensure that every child starts school ready to learn. This would have been a good opportunity to expand Head Start, but instead, we are just holding it harmless. That's not good enough.

And, while the omnibus legislation continues to provide funding for a range of programs critical to the public health of our Nation, it falls far short of meeting the true healthcare needs of American citizens. When this bill was before the Senate, I was pleased to support amendments offered by Senator MURRAY and MIKULSKI that were adopted and will support care for the uninsured and nurse training. I am pleased that the conference agreement supports lifesaving research conducted by the National Institutes of Health and removes a scheduled reimbursement reduction for physicians that treat elderly Medicare beneficiaries. However, I am disappointed that this agreement fails to sufficiently broaden further many of the health provisions contained within the original bill. Amendments regrettably rejected by the Senate during consideration of this measure include an amendment offered by Senator KENNEDY that would have provided more than $500 million to public health programs that serve minority communities and an amendment offered by Senator CLINTON that would have bolstered funding to Medicare providers service elderly Americans by more than $4 billion.

Because more than 130 million Americans continue to breathe unhealthy air, I believe the President's proposal to eliminate protections that control pollution from powerplants and other industries is unwise. I supported Senator EDWARDS' amendment during Senate debate called for an independent, scientific analysis of the regulations before they go into effect. Unfortunately, this amendment was defeated. Language was added in conference to allow more logging for commercial purposes and prevent legal challenges to the 1997 Tongass forest management plan.

Further, at a time when energy markets are so volatile, when heating oil inventories in the Northeast are 35 percent below the 10-year average, when crude oil is at $35 per barrel, and when

the Northeast is experiencing an unusually cold winter, this bill cuts funding for the Northeast Heating Oil Reserve from $8 million to $6 million.

Under the cuts imposed by the administration and the majority here in Congress, the Department of Housing and Urban Development will provide housing services to fewer families and communities will suffer. These cuts come on top of HUD's recently announced plans to cut its operating support for public housing authorities by as much as 30 percent. In letters to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, I have urged the administration to work with Congress to meet the Nation's housing priorities. Unfortunately, this appropriations bill is simply not adequate.

I am also disappointed that this legislation cuts funding for the Federal FIRE grant initiative from $900 million in the previously approved Senate bill to $750 million in this final bill. FIRE grants provide local firefighters with absolutely essential equipment and training. I firmly believe the FIRE grant program should have been fully funded. Now more than ever, the Federal Government should be striving to be an effective partner with cities and towns across the country.

Unfortunately, this final bill reduced funding not only for the FIRE grants, but for a myriad of other homeland security activities. In total, this final omnibus bill cuts nearly $4.5 billion in homeland security spending from the fiscal year 2003 bills written by the Senate Appropriations Committee last year. Homeland security spending was cut in order to stay within the President's spending limits—limits that were imposed not because domestic spending is out of control, but because we have cut tax revenue irresponsibly. At a time when the Federal Government is running record deficits, we are being asked to economize on the safety of local law enforcement, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and the public.

This bill also fails to provide adequate funding to help state and local governments improve their election and balloting systems. The conference report provides $1.5 billion for election and balloting modernization. This is a significant first step, but it is substantially below the amount authorized in the Help America Vote Act. I am concerned that state and local governments will not have the resources they need to prepare for the upcoming election and ensure that we do not have a repeat of the 2000 Presidential election fiasco. I am hopeful that we will find the additional resources necessary to make sure that every vote is accurately counted. I hope we will find the additional resources at the earliest opportunity.

In the end, I believe this bill reflects a very troubling attitude that seems to be taking hold here in Washington, which is to talk about helping working families, improving healthcare and education, keeping our homeland safe, and other priorities, but not to do enough follow-through. The American people deserve better than that.

Again, I thank my colleague from Alaska. He fought hard on some of these issues. Unfortunately, we were not able to prevail as successfully as I hoped we could. But, I thank him publicly for his efforts, and I regret deeply we could not have held onto the Senate provisions during the conference negotiations.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Connecticut for his nice comments. I can only say I regret deeply that I will not have the privilege he will have tonight, to go home to that beautiful young child. We know he protects children because of his great interest in children at this time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed, according to the previous order, to the consideration of conference report to accompany H.J. Res. 2, that it be considered under the following limitation: 15 minutes under the control of Senator BOXER, 20 minutes between the chairman and ranking member of the Appropriations Committee; further, I ask that following the yielding back or use of the time, the Senate proceed to a vote on the adoption of the conference report with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I withdraw the request.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, will the Senator from Alaska yield for a question?

Mr. STEVENS. Yes.

Mr. REID. Would the Senator allow the Senator from California to proceed with her part of the evening's debate?

Mr. STEVENS. Certainly.

Mrs. BOXER. I will be ready in a moment.

Mr. STEVENS. Is there some limitation?

Mr. REID. She is going to speak as I have indicated to the Senator.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to reiterate the request of the Senator from Alaska, absent the last paragraph, and Senator BOXER be recognized for up to 15 minutes.

Mr. STEVENS. That is all?

Mr. REID. Yes.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I am not ready to lay down the bill. I have no objection to the Senator having 15 minutes, as the rest of us have, in terms of morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair understands the Senator from California is to be recognized for 15 minutes and that is the only request.

Mr. STEVENS. That's correct.

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

The Senator from California is recognized.

NATIONAL FORESTS

Mrs. BOXER. I thank the Senator from Alaska. I also thank my friend from Nevada for the time.

Mr. President, normally I have fancy charts. I have not had time to develop those because we just saw some of the riders of the bill.

I take the floor to make the point that I have many problems with this bill in the area of homeland security—as we are told to take duct tape and plastic and get ready for a chemical or biological attack. God forbid. We have shorted homeland security in this bill. We have shorted port security as it relates to inspecting containers at the ports. We have shorted border security, firefighter grants, community policing grants; and in education, we are leaving many children behind. That breaks a promise to them.

To me, this bill is wanting in many ways. In the area of the environment, which I will talk about, brownfield cleanups have been reduced, and the meaning of organic meat has been turned on its head.

It breaks my heart to tell the Senate tonight that I think America's forests are under major attack. It is unbelievable to me that without any debate or discussion, a pilot program has been expanded massively and, in my opinion, it is going to lead to the ruination of our national forests—our forests that belong to the American people. The program I am talking about is called the Forest Stewardship Program, which started 3 years ago. The idea was to allow limited logging on national forest land for the purpose of maintaining healthy forests in accordance with the forest management plan. Now, as I said, this program has been massively extended.