The President. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FREEZING APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I have a reservation that I would like to make, first on a letter and announcement that all the Republican members of the Senate Appropriations Committee have sent to the chairman of the committee today.

Because Federal spending and debt are at crisis levels, Republican Senators on the Senate Appropriations Committee are asking our Democratic colleagues to join us in supporting the Sessions-McCaskill freeze on discretionary Federal spending. Every Republican—every one of us—and 17 Democratic Senators already have voted for the Sessions-McCaskill amendment several times.

The amendment would basically freeze discretionary Federal spending—both military and non-military—which constitute about 38 percent of the Federal budget. This action by the Senate members of the Appropriations Committee is especially important this year because the Democratic Congress has refused to produce a budget for next year.

Here we are, at a time when almost every American is deeply worried about the level of Federal debt and the level of Federal spending, and the first thing we would expect the Congress to do this year as it sets the budget for next year is to produce a budget that would be able to restrain this spending—both the discretionary portion of it, the kind we appropriate year after year—and begin to deal with the entitlements—the mandatory spending that is on automatic pilot. The Democratic Congress has not produced that budget for next year, and it indicates it will not. So it, therefore, is the first job of the members of the Appropriations Committee to decide how much we can spend.

Year in and year out we decide where and how we spend the money. That is the constitutional responsibility of Congress under article I, and that is the job we do. Perhaps we haven’t paid as much attention to the first responsibility as we should. Perhaps we have relied too much on the Budget Committee, well, not this year. What we are saying is, if we are going to be members of the Senate Appropriations Committee to decide how much we can spend.

At a time when Federal spending and debt is at crisis levels, when the President’s 10-year budget, up through the year 2018, would double the debt and triple the debt, it is our responsibility to get this under control.

So our recommendation—and it is a serious recommendation, and one we hope and believe our colleagues who are Democratic on the Appropriations Committee will be able to accept because it is a bipartisan proposal that has already, as I mentioned, received between 16 and 18 Democratic votes on the floor of the Senate, and every single one of the 41 Republican Senators—is that we essentially freeze spending in the discretionary accounts, both military and nonmilitary, between this year and next year.

The Federal debt is a crisis that is imposing a burden on our children and our grandchildren that they will not be able to pay. It is our responsibility to deal with it and to work with it now. A Sessions-McCaskill freeze on Federal discretionary spending for next year is an important first step. The next step would then be getting entitlement spending under control, which we should move on as rapidly as possible.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record a copy of the letter from Republican members of the Appropriations Committee which I referred to earlier in my remarks.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:


Dear Mr. Chairman: As Republican members of the Appropriations Committee, we are writing to express our views regarding the Fiscal Year 2011 appropriations process. The Committee is operating in a particularly difficult environment during this Congress. The enormity of the Federal debt poses a direct threat to our national security and demands restraint of Federal spending. Developing a consensus approach to funding the operations of the Federal government in such an environment is a significant challenge.

Despite the clear need for a long term plan that will bring our nation’s debt under control, it is apparent that Congress will be faced with the difficult challenge of the Federal budget this year. Our Committee will instead be compelled to choose a discretionary top-line number outside the context of a comprehensive budget resolution. Over the last two years discretionary spending has increased by 17%, not including stimulus spending. With stimulus spending included the increase soars to 84%. We note that a bipartisan majority of the Senate has voted several times in recent months on the Sessions-McCaskill proposal to impose a discretionary top-line for Fiscal Year 2011 that essentially freezes non-defense spending, and which would result in significant reductions in spending from the President’s budget proposal. This is a clear indication of the broad concern that exists about levels of Federal spending. We are confident that, working together, our Committee can produce bills that responsibly address fundamental government needs in a fiscally responsible manner. We will not, however, be able to support appropriations bills that do not conform to this top-line number.

Sincerely,

Mitch McConnell, Thad Cochran, Judd Gregg, Lamar Alexander, Susan Collins, Bob Bennett, Kit Bond, Richard Shelby, Kay Bailey Hutchison, Sam Brownback, George V. Voinovich, Lisa Murkowski.

NUCLEAR POWER

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, 40 years ago, at the time of the first...
Earth Day, Americans became deeply worried about air and water pollution and a population explosion that threatened to overrun the planet’s resources. Nuclear power was seen as a savior to these environmental dilemmas. It could supply enormous amounts of energy at low cost, reliable clean energy. Unlike oil, nuclear power did not need to be hauled in leaking tankers from countries that did not like us. Unlike coal, it did not spew tons of pollution out of smokestacks.

Then Three Mile Island and Chernobyl happened. The world pulled back, fearful of nuclear technology—even though no one was hurt at Three Mile Island. In fact, no one has ever died as a result of a nuclear accident at an American commercial nuclear reactor or on a U.S. navy ship powered by reactors. Chernobyl was the tragic result of a flawed technology never used in the United States. Still, the United States has not licensed a new reactor since.

Now the rest of the world is returning to nuclear energy. France is 80 percent nuclear and has among the lowest per capita carbon emissions and cheapest electricity costs in Western Europe. Italy, Spain, and Eastern Europe are all exploring new reactors. Russian, India, China and Japan are moving ahead. South Korea is selling reactors to the United Arab Emirates.

These countries realize that exploiting the population density and large amounts of cheap, reliable electricity to help create jobs and lift people out of poverty. And nuclear power provides just that. The National Academy of Sciences in a 2009 report said that the cost of nuclear power is equal to or lower than natural gas, wind, solar, or coal with carbon capture. Reactors can operate for 80 years while wind and solar last about 25 years. And nuclear reactors operate 90 percent of the time while wind and solar are only available about a third of the time. Remember: wind and solar power can’t be stored today in significant amounts. Most people do not want their lights and computers working only when the wind blows.

Nuclear plants occupy a fraction of the land required for wind or solar. For example, 20 percent of U.S. electricity comes from 104 nuclear reactors on about 100 square miles. Producing the same amount of power from wind or solar would require covering an area the size of West Virginia with 183,000 50-story turbines as well as building 19,000 miles of new transmission lines through scenic areas and suburban backyards. Nuclear fuel is available in the U.S. and is virtually unlimited. We do not have to drill for it. We do not have to mine it nearly as much as we do for coal. And thanks to technology, we can safely recycle nuclear waste and turn most of that waste into more fuel. After Recycling Fuel is able to capture all of their final waste from producing 80 percent of their electricity for 30 years in one room in La Hague.

A more recently realized benefit of nuclear power is its ability to combat climate change. Nuclear power emits zero greenhouse gases. Today it produces 20 percent of our Nation’s electricity but 70 percent of our carbon-free electricity. Wind and solar provide less than 1 percent of our electricity and 6 percent of our carbon-free electricity today.

The United States uses 25 percent of the energy in the world. At a time when we need to produce large amounts of clean power at home at a cost that will not chase jobs overseas looking for cheap energy, Americans can’t afford to ignore nuclear power.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDENT. OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum be dispensed with.

THE PRESIDENT. OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE BUDGET

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I rise to continue the discussion which was raised by the Senator from Tennessee relative to the letter which has been signed by all the Republican members of the Appropriations Committee. This is a unique event, in my experience. I have had the great honor and privilege of serving on this committee now for 14 years, and I have never participated in this type of an undertaking, which is essentially the Appropriations Committee Republicans, at least, stepping up and doing the responsible thing in the area of trying to control the fiscal policy of this country when the Budget Committee has left the field.

The Budget Committee didn’t leave the field arbitrarily; it is just that the other side of the aisle decided they did not want to do a budget for some reason. Actually, I know the reason. The reason we are not doing a budget of the country as we are supposed to do is that the budget shows we are in dire straits. We are going to have a $1.4 to $1.6 trillion deficit this year. It looks as if next year we are going to have a deficit in the range of $1.4 trillion. And for the next 10 years, every year under the other side of the aisle, the spending plans of the Democratic leadership of this Congress, we are talking an average of $1 trillion a year of deficits. That adds up to a doubling of the debt in 5 years and a tripling of the debt in 10 years. The American people understand that we cannot do this, we cannot continue that type of profligate spending, that type of out-of-control spending.

But, unfortunately, the other party, which now controls with significant majorities both in the House and the Senate, is unwilling to step up and produce a budget which brings those numbers down, which makes us more responsible in the area of spending and reduces the debt burden on our children. So the Republican members of the Appropriations Committee have said: Enough. We want to stop this out-of-control spending. We want to have a spending proposal that the President approves. We picked a number that is very reasonable. It is essentially a freeze at last year’s levels. It is a number which has been supported, interestingly enough, on this floor when it was proposed as the House or Sens. McCain or Sens. Hatfield amendment on four different occasions, by a majority of the Senate, with all of the Republican Members of the Senate voting for this type of essential freeze and with a number—I think between 16 and 18—of Democratic Senators voting for this. That is because there is a full understanding, at least on our side of the aisle and by some Members on the other side of the aisle who did vote for this, that we have to do something about controlling spending around here.

This letter essentially says that before we start marking up any bills in the Appropriations Committee, we have to have an understanding as to how much we are going to spend. Is that an unusual idea? Is it a terribly radical idea, that we should reach a number, an overall agreement on an overall number as to what we are going to do? It is not. We do not have to start producing spending bills? No, it is not. It is exactly what the budget is supposed to do. But we do not have a budget for the reason I mentioned earlier—people do not want to talk about how big the deficit is around here because they are afraid the American people have already figured this out and will just get more outraged about it.

What we are doing and what we are suggesting in this letter is that we as Republicans in the Appropriations Committee and those who are not on the Appropriations Committee expect there to be a budget for the Appropriations Committee even though there was not one passed here, with the top-line number being essentially the number in the Sessions-McCaskill, what amounts to a freeze proposal—freezing at 2010 levels, essentially—and that we will test every committee appropriations bill that comes forward on the basis of that number, and we hope our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, those on the Appropriations Committee and those who are not on the Appropriations Committee, will join us in this effort because it is a sincere effort and a reasonable effort since it was already voted on here with all of our side voting for it and a majority of the Senate voting for it. It is a reasonable number to set forward as the goal.

Yes, it does mean a significant reduction. We have to be forthright about this, and this is what we need to do. We want to honestly. It does provide a significant reduction from what the President requested. It means a significant reduction from what the Senate Budget