

News from Senator

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1985

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SENATOR DOLE URGES ACTION ON BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

LANSING, MICHIGAN -- Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) today urged Michigan legislators to press the United States Congress to approve a Constitutional amendment requiring a balanced Federal budget. The following is the text of Senator Dole's statement:

The balanced budget amendment is an appropriate long-term response to our fiscal problem: our inability to eliminate deficit spending. Even with strong public pressure to balance the budget, Congress hasn't been able to do so. We need an institutional restraint--in the Constitution--to help us keep the public interest ahead of special interest pressures.

32 states have already petitioned Congress for a Constitutional Convention to draft a balanced budget amendment, and there is a good chance that more will follow (including Michigan). Congress has an obligation to respond to the consensus in favor of a balanced budget amendment and take the initiative itself.

The fundamental problem of deficit spending demands a fundamental solution. The balanced budget tax limitation amendment approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee in July does not embody any particular economic theory, but just requires that Congress be specifically accountable for its decisions on fiscal policy. Actually, the Judiciary Committee voted out two versions of the amendment--one which President Reagan and I support, incorporated a tax limitation--and one that simply requires a balanced budget.

HOW IT WOULD WORK

The amendment I support would just require a 3/5 vote to adopt a deficit budget, and an actual majority (51 Senators, 218 Representatives) to raise the level of taxation as a percent of the national income. That is all there is to it: increased accountability, and an appropriate counter to the never-ending pressures on Congress to increase spending and deficits by responding to special interests.

This is not a partisan issue and it is certainly not a quick-fix: We have to do everything we can right now to reduce spending and deficits. But we also need to reform the basic way we deal with the budget in Congress. The balanced budget amendment would limit our options in a way that is good for us and good for the country.

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CONVENTION CALLS

I have spoken to a number of state legislators around the country who are concerned about the implication of calling for a Constitutional Convention. Many of them support a balanced budget amendment but fear that a Constitutional Convention might get into more sensitive issues, or even rewrite the entire document--and most of us are pretty happy with our system the way it is.

Let me say that while I appreciate this concern, I don't share it--and I hope that Members who are confronting this issue in their states will decide on the merits of the balanced budget amendment, and not on the basis of their fears about a Constitutional Convention. I know there is a dispute among legal scholars as to whether a Convention could take on a life of its own. But as a former Member of the Judiciary Committee, I am convinced that Congress can limit any Convention to the subject at hand--in this case the balanced budget amendment. In fact, both last year and again this year our Judiciary Committee has approved legislation providing regular procedures for the Convention method of proposing amendments. Furthermore, in 1973 the American Bar Association concluded in their study of this issue that Congress had power to limit a Convention to the subject matter of state petitions. We shouldn't fear the States exercising their proper roles under the Constitution.

NEED YOUR HELP

We need help in Washington--we need your support both for immediate steps to reduce the deficit, and for long-term restraints like the balanced budget amendment. The drive for a Constitutional Convention on this subject is vital to success, and I congratulate those legislators around the country who have forced Washington to focus on the balanced budget amendment. I hope we will act on it this year in Congress, and it is one of my top priorities for this session of the Senate.

There is no doubt in my mind that when Michigan votes to petition the Congress on this issue, the Congress will respond. By and large the States have done a good job in matching expenses to revenues--those of us who work in Washington could learn a lot from the States on that score. The same is true of the balanced budget amendment--Congress can benefit from your leadership here in Michigan. And everyone will benefit from long-term restraint on deficit spending, in terms of lower inflation, sustained economic growth, and safeguarding the economic security of generations to come.

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