

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, February 28, 1995

Contact: Clarkson Hine
(202) 224-5358

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

END OF DEBATE STATEMENT OF SENATE MAJORITY LEADER BOB DOLE

We stand at a crossroads in American history. The vote we cast in a few moments is one of the most important in decades. In fact, it may well be the single most important vote we cast in our careers.

Those of us who support the Balanced Budget Amendment, do not take amending the Constitution lightly, nor should we. But if there was ever a time when Washington needed the discipline only the Constitution can impose, now is the time.

Statutory Changes Won't Work

1969 was the last year that Congress passed balanced the federal budget. Since that time, Congress has passed seven different laws containing balanced budget requirements.

Despite all the votes, the speeches and the good intentions over the past quarter of a century, the federal debt has grown each and every year.

National Debt Threatens Every Federal Program

Why is it important to balance the budget?

In 1969, American taxpayers paid \$12.7 billion for interest on the national debt. This year, interest on the national debt will devour a staggering \$234 billion in tax dollars, more than all the money the federal government will spend on agriculture, crime-fighting, veterans, space and technology, infrastructure, natural resources, the environment, education and training combined.

Opponents of the Balanced Budget Amendment have tried to scare America's seniors by arguing that balancing the budget could threaten key programs like Social Security and Medicare. What they fail to mention is that the national debt already threatens every government program. Each year, interest payments on the debt consume a larger share of each federal dollar. According to President Clinton's most recent budget, next year, interest payments will consume 16 percent of every federal dollar.

Anyone who is still not convinced need look no further than President Clinton's recent budget, which essentially gave up on ever balancing the nation's books. In 1992, candidate Clinton seized on a \$292 billion deficit, the highest in history, to campaign against the deficit and on a promise to cut it in half. Now, two years into his administration, his own budget abandons that pledge, predicting a deficit of \$196.7 billion next year and roughly \$200 billion a year through the year 2000. In each of the next five years, the amount the federal government collects in taxes is projected to rise -- but spending will go up much more. The picture only gets worse in the next century, when the deficit is projected to rise to \$421 billion by 2005. The Clinton policy has sadly gone from halving the deficit to doubling it.

If the President gets his way and we fail to take action this year to put the deficit on a path to balance, by the year 2000 we will be spending \$42 billion a year more on interest payments than on our national defense, \$49 billion a year more on interest than on all domestic discretionary programs combined. If we stay on the current path, the federal debt will approach \$7 trillion by the year 2000.

The time has come to act.

An Amendment Whose Time Has Come

Last November, the American people sent a message to Washington. They asked for a smaller, less expensive, less intrusive federal government. Adoption of this Constitutional amendment is a critical step in the fight to rein in big

(more)

government. The record of the past 25 years is clear: we cannot rely on statutory changes to get the job done.

For too long, the big spenders and the special interests have controlled the purse strings here in Washington. The American people want us to stand up to the special interests and take action to protect the American dream for our children and out grandchildren.

Many of those who now oppose the Amendment claim that it is the easy way out. It is not. The fact is that adoption of this Amendment will fundamentally change the way Washington works.

Thomas Jefferson was so concerned about the ability of a democratic government to control spending that in 1789 he wrote - - and I quote -- "The question whether one generation has the right to bind another by the deficit it imposes is a question of such consequence as to place it among the fundamental principles of government. We should consider ourselves unauthorized to saddle posterity with our debts, morally bound to pay them ourselves." Think about that for a moment, just one year after the new Constitution went into effect, Jefferson himself was pondering whether a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget was needed.

The time for a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution has come.

Review of Precedents

Since the Constitution first went into effect in June of 1788, a total of twenty-seven constitutional amendments have been adopted. The first 10 amendments -- commonly referred to as the Bill of Rights -- made the United States a model for the world by limiting the powers of government and securing rights for individuals and the states. The Bill of Rights was proposed to the legislatures of the several states by the first Congress on September 25, 1789 and ratified by December 15, 1791.

There is a common thread that runs through most of the constitutional amendments that have been adopted. Most have either limited the power of government or provided constitutional protection to groups of Americans. The Balanced Budget Amendment would do both. By limiting the federal government's ability to borrow, it will help provide constitutional protection to future generations of Americans -- those who are not adequately represented in our current system, those who cannot yet vote.

We simply cannot continue to mortgage America's future. If we continue current tax and spending policies, future generations will be saddled with effective lifetime tax rates of more than 80 percent. Failure to stem the flow of red ink from Washington amounts to taxation without representation for our children and our grandchildren.

A Constitutional Duty

Those of us fortunate enough to be elected to the United States Senate take a simple oath before assuming our duties. We take a solemn oath to -- and I quote -- "Support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

That simple oath illustrates why a Balanced Budget Amendment is important.

Past efforts to control federal spending have not been successful in part because balancing the federal budget never became a national priority. Adoption of a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget by 2002 will require a national debate, one that makes it clear to everyone who serves in this body that balancing the budget is not only a national priority but also a constitutional duty, one that every senator will be sworn to uphold and defend.

We have had a healthy debate on this issue that is worthy of this great institution.

I want to commend those who have led the fight on the Balanced Budget Amendment on both sides of the aisle and on both sides of the issue. The distinguished Chairman of the Judiciary Committee -- Senator Hatch, the senior Senator from Idaho -- Senator Craig, the senior senator from Illinois -- Senator Simon, and the distinguished senior Senator from West Virginia -- Senator Byrd, all deserve special recognition for their contributions to the debate.

Final Decision With American People

It is clear that the Founding Fathers wanted the Constitution to be a living document that reflected the will of the American people. That is why they included Article Five which outlines the process for proposing and ratifying constitutional amendments.

(more)

But, they did not make amending the Constitution easy. The action that we take today is not the last word. The final decision about whether or not the Balanced Budget Amendment will go into effect rests with those outside Washington. The Founding Fathers decided to give the ultimate authority over constitutional amendments to those who are closest to the people -- the men and women who serve in state houses around the country.

Those who are still in doubt about whether or not to support this Amendment should remember that the founding fathers ultimately put their faith in the wisdom of those who are closest to the people. We should do the same.

As the time to vote draws near, I want to remind my colleagues of a few facts.

Fact: 80 percent of the American people favor the Balanced Budget Amendment.

Fact: Earlier this year, the House voted for the first time in history to approve a Balanced Budget Amendment. Altogether 300 members of the other body -- 72 Democrats and 228 Republicans -- joined together to give us this historic opportunity.

Vote for Fundamental Change

Finally, I want to state what every member of this body already knows. Adoption of this Amendment is only the first step to regaining control of this nation's financial future. Difficult choices lie ahead.

Regardless of the outcome of this historic vote, Republicans will begin work on a detailed 5-year plan to put the budget on a path to balance by 2002. Our plan will not raise taxes. Our plan will not touch Social Security. Everything else, everything from Agriculture to Zebra Mussel Research will be on the table.

As George Washington reminded us in his Farewell Address -- and I quote -- "The basis of our political system is the right of the people to make and alter their constitutions of government." The time has come for us to exercise that right.

Let us put our faith in the American people. Let us vote for a fundamental change from business-as-usual in Washington. Let us vote to adopt a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution and send it to the States for ratification.

###