

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

END OF DEBATE STATEMENT OF SENATE MAJORITY LEADER BOB DOLE

My remarks will be brief. All that can be said about the Balanced Budget Amendment has surely been said sometime during this month-long debate.

But there are a few matters that have arisen since Tuesday, and a few points that bear repeating.

Relationship of Trust

I begin with a matter of critical importance to the Senate.

I have said many times over the years that the Senate could not operate in the absence of a relationship of trust between the Majority Leader and Minority Leader. I had such a relationship with Senator Byrd and Senator Mitchell. And I have such a relationship with Senator Daschle.

The distinguished Democrat Leader, however, has stated that in postponing the vote until today, I may have damaged that relationship.

I hope and believe that this is not the case.

As the Democrat Leader knows, Senator Hatch and Senator Simon spent much of Tuesday in discussions with members on the Democrat side of the aisle who had indicated their willingness to join the bi-partisan coalition supporting the Amendment.

Those discussions led to an addition which gained the support of Senator Nunn and Senator Breaux. And when the time for the vote had arrived, it was my judgment that there was still a possibility that concerns raised by other Democrat Senators might still be addressed.

This judgement has been verified by the fact that members from the Minority Leader's side of the aisle remained actively involved in the discussion process, and put forward new suggestions as recently as 5:00 P.M. yesterday.

It is now apparent that these discussions have concluded, and that all Senators have now reached a firm decision, and that the time to vote has arrived.

Setting Record Straight on Social Security

The issue that was the subject of much of the continued negotiations was Social Security.

It is no secret that several Senators on the other side of the aisle who will likely vote no today, voted on March 1, 1994--almost exactly one year ago--to support a virtually identical amendment.

Let me repeat: but for the addition of the Nunn amendment, which they all supported, and the implementation date, this is the same amendment they supported last year.

And if they believed that Social Security was protected then, they should believe it even more firmly now, given some recent votes in this Chamber.

On January 26th, the Senate voted 83-16 to adopt a Sense of the Senate amendment stating that we should not raise Social Security taxes or cut Social Security benefits in order to balance the budget.

And on February 9th, the Senate adopted a motion reaffirming that commitment by a vote of 87-10. The House has adopted similar language by a vote of 412-18.

Clearly, there is overwhelming bi-partisan support to protect Social Security.

It is also worth noting that each and every one of these new critics of the Balanced Budget Amendment, who are so concerned about Social Security beneficiaries, voted two years ago for a \$24.6 billion tax increase on Social Security recipients.

Not a single Republican in either house of Congress joined President Clinton and the overwhelming majority of Democrats in Congress in supporting that increase on Social Security recipients.

And let me state again, for the record, that later this year, Republicans will put forward a detailed 5-year plan to put the budget
(more)

on a path to balance by 2002. Our plan will not raise taxes. Our plan will not touch Social Security. But make no mistake about it, everything else--every other spending program-- will be on the table.

During last fall's campaign, President Clinton tried to convince the American public that a vote for Republicans was a vote to destroy Social Security. They did not buy that argument then, and I don't think they are buying it now.

Authorizing National Debate on Balanced Budget Amendment

When all is said and done, the debate over this Amendment comes down to one question: does the United States Senate trust the American people?

It's that simple.

As everyone here knows, by passing this Amendment, we are not changing the Constitution. The Founding Fathers did not give Congress that power. Instead, they reserved that power to the states and to the people.

By passing this Amendment, we are, in effect, authorizing a national debate on the merits of a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution.

Over the coming months and years, the pros and cons of the Balanced Budget Amendment will be debated in the legislatures of all 50 states. Citizens on both sides of the issue will be come involved, and will express their opinions to their local state legislators.

There's a word for that process. And that word is democracy.

Nobody can predict with certainty what the final result of that debate will be. Our state legislatures are almost evenly divided. Republicans control both chambers in 19 states. Democrats control both chambers in 18 states. And in 12 states, each party controls one chamber. (Nebraska, of course, has a non-partisan legislature.)

And given those divisions, it will be a tough uphill struggle to get 38 out of 50 states to approve this amendment. I'll do my best to convince the Kansas legislature and others to adopt the amendment. And I know President Clinton and others would do his best to sway opinion the other way.

Thomas Jefferson, himself, envisioned such a process when he wrote, "I know no safe depository of the ultimate power of society but people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."

If there's one man who knows as much about the Constitution as Thomas Jefferson did, it's Senator Robert Byrd. And on August 4, 1982, in announcing his support of the Balanced Budget Amendment, Senator Byrd said--and I quote--"Under our democratic system, to put a question of this magnitude directly to the people is a wise and proper action. Therefore I will vote for the amendment--and thus vote to put this question directly to the American people. I cannot doubt that their ultimate decision will be the right one."

Does U.S. Senate Trust American People?

I agree. I happen to think that the American people are enlightened enough to make this decision. I happen to believe what some still think is a revolutionary principle: trust the people.

I'm willing to trust the American people to make the right decision. Those who oppose this amendment are not. They are saying what the people have heard so many times before--Washington knows best.

It's that attitude that spurred last November's revolution, and it's that attitude that will only lead to a further mistrust of our government and this Congress.

I would ask my colleagues to listen to the words that Thomas Jefferson spoke in his first inaugural address:

"Sometimes it is said that man can not be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the forms of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question."

History will remember how we respond to that question today. As for me, the choice is clear. The answer is democracy. The answer is to trust the people. The answer is to pass the Balanced Budget Amendment, and to send it to the States.

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