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White House Office of Policy Information

ISSUE UPDATE

Washington, D.C. July 26, 1982

THE BALANCED BUDGET/TAX LIMITATION AMENDMENT

In his April 29, 1982, televised address to the nation, President Reagan urged the Congress to approve and forward to the States a constitutional amendment to balance the Federal budget.

In his address, the President said: "Once we've achieved a balanced budget...I want to ensure that we keep it for many long years after I've left office. And there's only one way to do that...a constitutional amendment to require balanced Federal budgets...We've tried the carrot, and it failed. With the stick of a balanced budget amendment, we can stop government's squandering, over-taxing ways, and save our economy."

Tax limitation is an essential part of this process of balancing the Federal budget, as President Reagan had explained a month earlier: "...a balanced budget amendment must also carry with it a limitation on taxes. It must contain a limit so that in the future you couldn't just always have a balanced budget by simply sending the bill to the taxpayers for whatever the deficit might be."

The President also reiterated his firm committment to the passage of the balanced budget/tax limitation amendment as recently as July 12, when he stated: "On behalf of the public and our administration, I express...my eagerness to do everything I can to ensure their [members of Congress sponsoring the amendment] success."

Spending is out of control

One of the major reasons the President announced his support for the balanced budget/tax limitation amendment is the persistent failure of Congress to bring the federal budget under control.

Federal spending has been growing at a seemingly unending rate for the past two decades; its growth has even accelerated in recent years. For instance, total spending passed the $100 billion mark in 1962. Only nine years later, spending had doubled. By 1980 -- just another nine years later -- it had more than doubled again, and was expected to double once more before another decade had passed. In fact, the Federal government is currently spending money at the rate of $83 million per hour.

This spending growth has significantly exceeded the growth in the overall economy. While Federal spending consumed 18.5% of GNP in 1960, it grew to claim 23% by 1981.

These spending pressures will continue in the years ahead. Under current law, the Office of Management and Budget estimates that non-defense entitlements will cost $354 billion in FY 1983, and $1.1 trillion over the next three years. Yet in the face of anticipated triple-digit deficits and the expectation of non-defense entitlement spending reaching 1/2 trillion dollars a year in fiscal 1987, the House Budget Committee in May proposed a three-year budget that would have reduced the growth in these expenditures by a microscopic 1.6%.

This spending growth has already necessitated -- and will continue to create pressures for -- enormous increases in Federal tax burdens. For instance, per capita tax receipts increased by 65% in the past five years alone. The number of individual taxpayers paying over 20% of their adjusted gross income in Federal taxes has almost tripled in the past 15 years. Throughout the economy, this rising tax burden has seriously eroded incentives to work, save, invest and produce.

Yet even this increase in taxes, as large as it is, has not been great enough to match the spending explosion, and the chronic and growing deficits of the past two decades have been the result. There has not been a single balanced budget in the last 12 years. As a consequence, the total national debt has grown from $367 billion in FY 1969 to more than one trillion dollars today -- or $4400 for every man, woman and child in America. If we were to reduce our present debt at the rate of $1 million per day, we would have it paid off in the year 4722. That's 2,740 straight years -- at $1 million a day from now on -- just to pay off what we've already borrowed.

The cost of financing this debt has grown along with the size of the debt itself, and now involves large annual expenditures. Net interest paid by the government was $69 billion in FY 1981 (more than 10% of total outlays) -- a sum greater than the entire Federal budget for 1955, and greater than the combined budgets in FY 1981 for Food Stamps, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, low-income housing and energy assistance, and all student aid to higher education.

Financing this enormous debt has at times contributed to both high inflation and high interest rates. In those years when the Federal Reserve monetized a large part of the debt (that is, printed more money) the inevitable result was high inflation.

Even when the Fed has been more restrained, much of the public -- understandably conditioned by the almost inevitable reinflation of past years -- have apparently expected the large deficits to eventually be financed through the printing of more money; these "inflationary expectations" have caused "inflation risk premiums" to be added to the going interest rates.

In addition, since federal debt is generally financed by government borrowing from the private capital markets, a "crowding out" process has taken place which made less capital available for private businesses and other governments.

As a result of the combination of high inflationary expectations and "crowding out," interest rates reached record highs (they were above 20% when President Reagan took office), leading to dramatic curtailment of business activity in major sectors of our economy and a loss of jobs for millions of Americans.

Popular support

Given this record of unrestrained spending, taxes, and deficits, it is little wonder that an overwhelming number of Americans are now demanding a balanced budget amendment.

Indeed, virtually every public opinion poll has shown wide support for such an amendment. In a September 1981 Gallup poll, for instance, 67% of those interviewed supported an amendment, with only 19% opposed.

A more recent poll, released on June 3, 1982, by Market Opinion Research, showed growing support for the amendment, with 79% of the people surveyed saying they would favor an amendment that would "require Congress to plan a balanced budget each year."

The survey also asked those polled if they would be more likely to vote for a Congressional candidate if he or she supported a balanced budget amendment. Seventy-three percent of the respondents said they would be either "much more likely" or "a little more likely" to vote for such a candidate.

Attempts at reform

Over the years Congress has tried to respond to these concerns, but with little success. The first significant attempt at reform -- the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 -- was intended to bring about "Congressional control" over the budget process. It established the Congressional Budget Office, two budget committees, and two budget resolution deadlines for each fiscal year (May 15 and September 15), with the second resolution as binding.

While these reforms have, in some ways, steamlined the budget process, they have had little impact on constraining Federal spending. Congress has consistently missed the deadlines it established for itself, and has been unable to live within its spending ceilings in recent years. Even in the first four years under this Act, Congress raised total spending from $364 billion to $491 billion, accumulating $201 billion in deficits in the process, including one of the largest deficits in history.

Congress made other attempts to legislatively require a balanced budget. Both houses, for instance, approved a statute in 1978 requiring a balanced budget beginning in 1981. The law had no apparent effect; Congress ended up approving a 1981 budget with $58 billion in red ink.

What has gone wrong?

Clearly, something is awry in the budget making process if the Congress, intent on disciplining itself, frequently fails to stay within the spending ceilings it establishes.

There are, of course, some congressmen and senators who have little genuine interest in limiting spending. But even for the majority of those in Congress who are sincere in trying to restrain Federal budget growth, the pressures to continue spending patterns of the past are intense. As President Reagan has noted, "It is extremely difficult for the Congress to withstand the pressures for more spending."

This was not always the case. For many years balancing the budget was considered part of the "unwritten constitution." Excessive public debt was considered improper. When deficits were incurred as a result of foreign conflicts or brief recessions, efforts were made to repay such debt expeditiously. The Civil War, during which the national government incurred enormous debts, was followed by 28 years of surpluses. Ten years of surplus budgets followed the deficit spending of World War I. The fiscal norm of peacetime was clearly a balanced budget.

The deficits of the Great Depression were followed by the deficits of World War II, and in subsequent years the notion that deficit spending could be used as a tool of economic policy first competed with and finally swamped the earlier commitment to the norm of balanced budgets. The budget has been in deficit in 26 of the 31 years since 1950.

In addition to using the Federal budget as a tool of economic policy, the government became increasingly involved in social welfare, and the Federal government funded programs in health, education, and a variety of other services that would have been considered fundamentally inappropriate in earlier years.

The extraordinary expansion in the scope of the activities subject to Federal intervention has increased tremendously the number of people who benefit from Federal dollars, in one of two ways: Either as direct recipients of aid, or as vendors who profit indirectly from the expenditure of Federal funds. There is thus an inherent and growing bias in the political process toward spending to satisfy this multiplicity of fiscal constituencies.

Neither are these special interest groups merely passive players in congressional spending decisions; they are, rather, highly active in their own behalf. There are now, for instance, more than 15,000 lobbyists in Washington -- nearly 30 for each congressman and senator -- as well as many more back in the legislator's home State or district. And as the number of interests proliferate, so do the various pressures for higher spending.

A related aspect of this bias involves the visibility of spending. A congressman can hardly take credit for new jobs created by the workings of the free market, or for meals served to the elderly by a volunteer organization. However, he can readily point to a vote in Congress for a public sector jobs bill or a federal senior citizens center program as evidence of his "compassion." This political advantage of spending programs act as a powerful, if subtle, spur to higher budgets.

The bias toward more spending can be especially great when the legislator's political interests coincide with the lobbyists' economic interests. A case in point is the recent housing bailout bill. Despite the stated concern for reducing spending growth and deficits, Congress approved the multi-billion dollar housing measure by a vote of 349 to 55 in the House and a 70 to 29 vote in the Senate. While many members of Congress genuinely thought the measure was good legislation, there is little doubt of the major role played by the combination of concerted pressure brought to bear by the housing industry and the political attractiveness of appearing to "do something" for housing.

In this particular case, the presidential veto was wielded forcefully enough to prevent this extra, unnecessary spending from taking place. The veto, however, is an exceptional tool, and the effective ability -- or, as the late 1970s demonstrated, the will -- to use it is not always present.

The other existing counterweight to these spending pressures -- taxpayer dissatisfaction -- is even less consistently potent. Such public protest is generally so diffuse that it can safely be ignored, for in contrast to the prodigious sums of money at stake to an interest group in a particular bill, the cost to an individual taxpayer may be only a few cents or dollars per year. For example:

- On an annual basis, dairy subsidies are $7,000 per dairy producer; but the individual taxpayer pays only about $18 a year for dairy subsidies.

- The Federal subsidy per Amtrak passenger exceeded the cost of an economy airline ticket on five routes in 1980, even though federal subsidies for Amtrak cost only $8 per taxpayer that year.

- The annual subsidy for families in newly constructed Section 8 subsidized housing is in some cases as high as $17,000 a year, but only costs $52 per taxpayer.

Thus, while it makes economic sense for the interest group to hire lobbyists, the same can hardly be said for the individual taxpayer. Nor can the taxpayer-voter be expected to turn against a member of Congress because of a single vote for higher spending, whereas an interest group could well premise its support entirely on that one vote.

Moreover, even the fiscally prudent congressman will find it difficult to reap any political benefit from his fiscal conscientiousness. Without sound economic policies, he would have few favorable economic results he could point to. Even if the economy improved due to fiscal restraint, the prudent congressman would find it far more difficult to identify his votes with that general result than, say, if he had voted to spend Federal funds to build a school in his district, which would be on display for all his constituents to see.

This institutional bias in favor of spending is analogous to one in which 535 people are all able to charge purchases on one credit card with the bill automatically going to someone else for payment -- in this case the American taxpayer. There is a built-in incentive to charge as much possible, since the benefit (to the member of Congress) from the expenditure is apt to be far greater than his direct (political) cost. And even if one congressman reduces his purchases, it will not prevent a huge accumulation of debt. Thus, he gets little benefit, but must share the blame.

The spending-bias is compounded by the fact that Congress has not been forced to ask for tax increases to pay for its promises. Tax increases have occurred automatically as a consequence of the progressive tax structure and inflation. The tax burden has increased from 18.1% of GNP in 1971 to 21% in 1981, but since 1960 Congress has voted individual income tax "reductions" seven times, while voting a tax increase, in the form of a temporary income tax surcharge to finance the Vietnam war, on only one occasion. Deficit spending and bracket creep have enabled Congress to avoid the politically difficult votes on either taxes or program cuts. It is as if the congressional "credit card company" automatically cancelled the credit card charges each month, whether the charges were paid or not.

An institutional restraint

The key, then, is not just to establish restraints, but to make them binding. Short of radical institutional reforms, the most effective way to do this is to place a "credit limit" on the congressional charge card. That is what a balanced budget amendment would accomplish, and thereby provide beleaguered members of Congress with some welcome relief from the incessant pressures to spend.

The amendment

The amendment being considered by the Senate (S.J. Res. 58) and endorsed by the President reads as follows:

Section 1 - Prior to each fiscal year, the Congress shall adopt a statement of receipts and outlays for that year in which total outlays are no greater than total receipts. The Congress may amend such statement provided revised outlays are no greater than revised receipts. Whenever three-fifths of the whole number of both Houses shall deem it necessary, Congress in such statement may provide for a specific excess of outlays over receipts by a vote directed solely to that subject. The Congress and the President shall ensure that actual outlays do not exceed the outlays set forth in the statement.

Section 2 - Total receipts for any fiscal year set forth in the statement adopted pursuant to this article shall not increase by a rate greater than the rate of increase in national income in the last calendar year ending before each fiscal year, unless a majority of the whole number of both houses of Congress shall have passed a bill directed solely to approving specific additional receipts and such bill has become law.

Section 3 - The Congress may waive the provisions of this article for any fiscal year in which a declaration of war is in effect.

Section 4 - Total receipts shall include all receipts of the United States except those derived from borrowing and total outlays shall include all outlays of the United States except those for repayment of debt principal.

Section 5 - This article shall take effect for the second fiscal year beginning after its ratification.

How the amendment would work

Section 1 of the amendment would require Congress to adopt a statement, or budget, for each year, in which planned Federal spending could not exceed receipts. Should Congress desire an unbalanced budget, it would have to approve a specific dollar amount of deficit spending by a three-fifths vote of the entire membership of each house of Congress -- that is, at least 60 of the 100 senators and 261 of the 435 representatives. In lieu of this exception, neither the President nor the Congress could spend more than what was provided for in the budget. Moreover, actual outlays could not exceed the amount of outlays adopted in the budget statement.

It is important to note that Section 1 would not require a balanced budget statement. Rather, as mentioned, it would permit Congress to adopt an unbalanced budget statement only if three-fifths of the entire membership of each house voted for it.

Thus, the flexibility of the budget process would be preserved. If, for reasons of great national concern, it were deemed necessary for Federal spending to exceed revenues, Congress could allow this to happen. In addition, as Section 3 makes clear, the amendment could be waived entirely in time of a declared war.

However, by requiring Congress to otherwise "adopt a statement of receipts and outlays for that year in which total outlays are no greater than total reciepts," the amendment would establish a balanced budget as the budgetary "norm." An institutional bias in favor of deficit spending would thereby be corrected.

Section 1 would also help members of Congress in their relations with special-interest lobbyists by enabling them to say "I would like to support your worthy cause but the Constitution limits how much we can spend. If you would like me to vote for your program you will need to point out what other areas of the budget we can afford to cut." In this way the congressional discussion would center not on the worth of a program in itself, but on its worth in relation to other programs. The constraint inherent in this form of decision making (based on the principle: "you can have some, but not all") would prevent the adoption of many ill-advised programs which benefit the few at the expense of the many.

Section 2 would limit the growth of federal revenues to the rate of growth of national income unless Congress, by a majority vote of the whole membership of each chamber, decided to raise taxes to a higher level. For example, if the current dollar GNP rose by ten percent in the previous calendar year, planned tax receipts could not rise by more than ten percent in the succeeding fiscal year unless a majority of all the members of Congress explicitly voted otherwise.

This procedure contrasts markedly with the operation of the taxing system in recent years, during which taxes have grown more rapidly than GNP -- even without a congressional vote. For whenever inflation reached a level of, say, 10%, the government collected 17% more from personal incomes due to "bracket creep".

Although indexation of tax rates (to take effect in 1985) already corrects the problem of bracket creep due to inflation in the personal income tax structure, Section 2 -- by requiring Congress to vote openly for any tax increases -- would effectively prevent a return to tax increases without tax votes were Congress to repeal or delay indexation. In addition, this section would extend the safeguard against unlegislated tax increases to other forms of taxation as well, and would prevent bracket creep due to real income gains. There is no justification for automatic increases in the government's share of GNP as GNP expands, whether the expansion is real or due to inflation. Just because the country is growing, there is no reason for government to grow faster than the country.

The amendment would further strengthen the principle of accountability by requiring Congress to vote on a specific bill to increase taxes instead of adding a tax increase as an amendment to another bill, as is often done now. In this way the President would be free to use his veto against tax increases without endangering other legislation.

The Founding Fathers intended that the people would never be taxed without their express consent, which is why they required that all revenue bills originate in the House -- at the time the only chamber directly elected by the people. The Founding Fathers did not anticipate that a progressive income tax, coupled with inflation, would negate this principle. This amendment would restore the clear intent of the creators of the Constitution.

Section 4 addresses the growing problem of so-called "off-budget expenditures" -- expenditures which are made by the Federal government and thereby add to the total public debt burden, but are not included in the unified budget.

In 1974, when this device was first adopted, off-budget agencies spent $1.4 billion; in 1982 this spending is estimated to reach more than $20 billion. Both for the sake of fairness and for accurate economic accounting, this amount of spending should be added to outlays as Section 4 would require. Federal government expenditures would no longer be divided into on and off-budget outlays. The term "outlays" would mean just that -- all government expenditures of taxpayer funds, with the single exception of repayment of debt principal.

The effect of a balanced budget amendment

The balanced budget/tax limitation amendment would be an important step toward achieving a balanced budget at more reasonable levels of taxation. For once the amendment takes effect, Congress will be required to abide by its provisions. In particular, it will either have to adopt a balanced budget statement, or have extraordinary reasons -- and support -- for not doing so.

Such a constraint would have a significant impact on the way Congress actually operates. No longer could sincere desires for a balanced budget be automatically set aside by the "reality" of the vast array of "uncontrollable spending needs." Congress, as an institution, would have to establish true spending priorities, and to make the difficult decisions to substantially reduce or eliminate funding in areas that are either ineffective expenditures of funds or outside the proper province of Federal assistance.

Moreover, the burden of proof would shift to those who desire an unbalanced budget, requiring them to justify specifically why levels of spending and taxing should be increased. The debate would thus focus on the fundamental question of how much of the citizen's income the government should be permitted to take. Once this issue were addressed directly, especially under a constitutional requirement that three-fifths majorities approve planned deficits, and absolute majorities of the entire membership approve tax increases, then real restraint on budget growth could take place.

In fact, one study conducted by the Center for the Study of Law Structures estimated that the existence of a balanced budget amendment over the 1978-84 period would have saved $530 billion, or an average of more than $75 billion per year.

If the private sector had been free to invest that money, the United States would, with far greater certainty, be facing lower interest rates and a booming economy in the mid-1980s. As in the 1950s and early 1960s, such economic growth would lift millions out of poverty and place the American economy on the road to long-term health and vitality.

Workability of the amendment

Critics of the balanced budget/tax limitation amendment object to it on two principal grounds: That the amendment would be such an "iron commandment" that it would force the United States into a depression, and that it would be so ineffective as to be constantly circumvented.

Clearly, the critics cannot have it both ways; the amendment cannot at once be too strong and too weak. More likely, it will be neither.

Those who argue that the amendment is a "formula for a depression" base their claim on the alleged need for Federal "countercyclical financing" -- that is, that the government should "spend" the economy out of a recession, and "tax" the economy out of an inflation.

If such a recipe sounds familar, it should; this economic formula has been employed continuously since the 1930s. Not only did it fail to end the Great Depression, but it did little to forestall -- and likely contributed to -- seven recessions since 1945, including four since 1970. If the balanced budget/tax limitation amendment were to make impossible the implementation of such countercyclical fiscal policy, there is little reason to believe the economy would be the worse for it.

But, in fact, the amendment would do no such thing. In the absence of any special action of Congress, the amendment would permit a substantial countercyclical pattern of spending because of the amendment's requirement that actual growth in outlays in a given fiscal year be linked to the growth in national income in the calendar year prior to the fiscal year. The average length of the business cycle in peacetime has been about 46 to 47 months. The 22 month lag in the proposed amendment between national income growth and outlay growth is about half this length. Thus, outlays in a recession would be increasing with rates of growth of the previous expansion, and during recoveries, growth in outlays would be limited to the growth in income during the previous downturn, providing a countercyclical fiscal policy that would tend to moderate the business cycle.

In addition, Congress could continue to enact unbalanced budgets during a recession if three-fifths of the members of both houses agreed. While this vote standard is stringent -- as it should be -- it is by no means insuperable. If an economic crisis urgently demanded additional Federal spending, the mechanism for permitting it would be firmly in place. In addition, the amendment would permit Congress to waive the amendment's requirements in time of declared war.

Moreover, unforseen spending needs could be accomodated in advance through the establishment of a reserve or contingency fund to cover outlays that exceeded their expected level. The increase in actual 1980 and 1981 outlays resulting from economic changes, for instance, was about 5% of total outlays each year. Thus a reserve of 5 to 8% would likely be sufficient.

At the same time, recessions should not be automatic justifications for greatly increased spending. While certain payments, such as those for income support, would rise with higher unemployment levels, the Congress should be expected to make up at least part of the difference by further trimming back lower priority spending. The three-fifths vote requirement would ensure that this option were given a fair hearing.

It should also be noted that actual receipts would not have to equal statement receipts. The amendment would permit an actual deficit resulting from lower than expected receipts, as can occur in a recession.

The second major objection, that the amendment would be circumvented, is similarly with little foundation. In particular, the terms "outlays" and "receipts" are explicitly defined both in the amendment and in the legislative history; there should be no dispute about their meaning, and thus no successful attempt to subvert the amendment's intent by redefining its terms.

In addition, the amendment specifically prohibits the exclusion of off-budget outlays from the budget statements. Thus, the present tactic of maintaining high spending levels by shifting programs "off-budget" could not be used to circumvent the requirement for a balanced budget statement.

It is true, of course, that the amendment would not eliminate spending pressures; this is neither possible nor necessary. The amendment would, however, provide a far more effective means for coping with these pressures, to ensure that they do not play the inordinate role they have in recent years in keeping spending high.

In fact, the amendment would transfer much of this influence from the special interests to the general body of taxpayers. Because there would be two or three critical votes each year relating to the aggregate levels of spending, taxing, and deficits, the electorate could more easily determine compliance with the amendment, thus ensuring that their voice would be heard in congressional debates.

Furthermore, the Constitution already contains an enforcement mechanism for the amendment in Article I Section 8, which authorizes the Congress to enact legislation that is "necessary and proper" to uphold the Constitution. While no explicit sanctions are imposed against members of Congress and the President if they fail to abide by the balanced budget amendment, both are obligated to take oaths of office that require compliance with the Constitution.

A final concern is the wisdom of addressing economic matters in the Constitution. This is a false issue; the Constitution already deals with many areas of economic activity. For example, it regulates certain taxing powers, the imposition by States of tariffs and/or duties, Congressional appropriation procedures, and the coinage of money. It also assigns Congress the authority to regulate interstate commerce. The addition of the balanced budget/tax limitation amendment to the Constitution, by establishing a standard for budget-making procedures, follows in this spirit.

Status of the Amendment

The amendment endorsed by the President (S.J. Res. 58) was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee on May 19, 1981, by a vote of 11 to 5. Currently, the proposal has 62 co-sponsors in the Senate, including 44 Republicans, 17 Democrats and one Independent. Other Senators have indicated they plan to vote for it, with 67 Senators required for passage.

In the House, a similar resolution, H.J. Res. 350, has 231 co-sponsors, with 290 needed for passage. The House Judiciary Committee has yet to vote on the resolution. However, a discharge petition (requiring 218 signatures) would bring the amendment to a vote on the floor if the Committee does not take action. Prospects for obtaining a sufficient number of signatures on the discharge petition appear to be very good.

A convention call for the purpose of proposing a balanced budget amendment has been before the States since 1975. A constitutional convention called by the State legislatures is one of two methods of proposing amendments to the Constitution. To date, 31 States have called for such a convention, with Alaska earlier this year being the most recent State to ratify a convention call. Also, one house in each of nine other State legislatures has passed convention call resolutions. Only three more States are needed for a convention to be called, but it is unlikely that any additional States will pass resolutions in 1982 since most State legislatures are now out of session.

The large number of States which have called for a convention is a major factor in the growing congressional support for the amendment. The Founding Fathers were aware that Congress might be reluctant to approve changes in the Constitution which affected its own powers. For that reason, the first procedure they adopted for amending the Constitution was the constitutional convention method, which required a call from two-thirds of the States. The second method, requiring a two-thirds vote of both houses of Congress, and subsequent ratification by the States (used for all amendments which have been added to the Constitution) was approved later.

The last time the convention method came as close to success was in 1912 when 31 States called for an amendment to provide for the direct popular election of senators. The Senate was reluctant to approve this amendment since it would disturb the traditional means by which its members were elected by the State legislatures. But with only one more State needed to ratify a convention call, the Senate conceded and joined with the House to approve the 17th Amendment, which was ratified by three-fourths of the States within the following year.

Conclusion

The overwhelming popular support for a balanced budget amendment stems directly from Americans' understandable frustrations with years of high inflation, high interest rates, rising taxes, real declines in purchasing power, and a seemingly endless cycle of Federal deficit spending. Individual Americans, who must live within their own means, have every right to expect and demand that their government do so as well.

The balanced budget/tax limitation amendment would, at long last, firmly engrave this basic fiscal standard in the Constitution, and thus help restore some much-needed budgetary discipline at the Federal level.

That the Federal government has made several attempts to balance the budget and provide fiscal discipline cannot be doubted. We have tried statutory approaches, we have reformed the budget process and we have, program by program, cut the rate of growth in government spending. Yet government indebtedness grows larger each year. Only a balanced budget amendment would make sought-after reductions in Federal deficits both sure and permanent.

The amendment would, finally, help fulfill the popular mandate evident in Ronald Reagan's election as President, and would help reverse the decade-long trend of economic decline in the U.S. As the President stated on July 12 of this year:

> All over America, citizens are asking each other the same question: Why is the government incapable of doing what their families, municipalities and State governments do as a matter of course, spend within the limits of their revenues?...Americans understand that the discipline of a balanced budget amendment is essential to stop squandering and overtaxing. And they're saying the time to pass the amendment is now.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

November 17, 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR ELIZABETH H. DOLE

FROM: MORTON C. BLACKWELL

SUBJECT: Social Security Options

Attached is a letter from Ben Kinchlow who is a top aide to Pat Robertson at Christian Broadcasting Network.

They did a survey on the 700 Club in which they urged people to call in on toll free numbers to register their opinion. There was no discussion of the issues -- he just explained our question to him of the options available and asked people to call one number if they were for additional taxes; another if they were opposed. The same was true of the question on whether to lower benefits.

Their results show that 19% favored an increase in taxes and 81% favored a reduction in benefits.

Enclosure

The Christian Broadcasting Network Inc.

November 12, 1982

Morton Blackwell
Special Assistant to the President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Blackwell,

Just a brief note. Sorry I missed talking to you this morning, but please convey my appreciation to Mazell for her assistance.

We did a survey on the "700 Club" today regarding "the best way to preserve the Social Security system." Although the final tally is not in at this writing, based on previous surveys, we estimate some 10 to 15 thousand respondents.

Making allowances for errors (you can allow as high as 10% if you choose), the figures have, in times past, very closely tracked the national sentiment on issues. Results taken from attached report are:

Increased taxes - 19 percent in favor.

Reduced benefits - 81%

We can provide final figures through the Washington office if you are so inclined. Thank you. (202-638-4734)

Your servant,

Ben Kinchlow

BK:bl

Enc.

file Balanced Budget Amendment

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

SCHEDULE PROPOSAL

June 28, 1982

TO: FRED RYAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENTS AND SCHEDULING

FROM: ELIZABETH H. DOLE

REQUEST: U.S. Capitol Steps Balanced Budget Speech

PURPOSE: To enable the President to move into the public forefront in support of the Balanced Budget Amendment.

BACKGROUND: Floor debate on the Balanced Budget Amendment will begin in the Senate immediately prior to the Senate Fourth of July recess and is likely to resume on July 13, 1982, and continue for approximately ten days before a floor vote.

In Stockman's testimony, the Administration has announced support, with small exceptions, for SJR 58, the Balanced Budget Amendment. In excess of 60 Senators, are already serving as co-sponsors.

This speech by the President will be the cornerstone of a full day of White House focus on balanced budget, including high-level briefings of grassroots leaders, local press activities, etc.

PREVIOUS PARTICIPATION: NONE

DATE: Wednesday, July 14, 1982 DURATION: 1 hour

LOCATION: Capitol Steps (West Face)

PARTICIPANTS: Cabinet Members, Hill Co-sponsors, White House guests and general public.

OUTLINE OF EVENT: The President proceeds to the Capitol, moves immediately to the dais on the steps, offers remarks and departs en route White House.

MEDIA COVERAGE: Prepared Text.

RECOMMENDED BY: Mike Deaver, et al.

OPPOSED BY: None

PROJECT OFFICER: Red Cavaney

file

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

too much Hill focus

It is proposed that an independent citizen's organization be formed to spearhead passage of the balanced budget amendment. This bi-partisan umbrella organization would be designed to generate grassroots support for each of the two phases critical to passage. The objective of Phase I is passage of SJ Res 58 and HJ Res 350 in the current session of Congress, hopefully before the debt ceiling vote. Phase II's objective is ultimate ratification by the requisite number of states.

Structure

It is envisioned that the organizational figureheads would be National Co-chairmen and, therefore, propose the following:

R.R. people who buy into something
Bring in private groups

Economic credibility — Howard Jarvis
Friedman — Governor
Mayor — NTLC
- Business — State Legislator — NTU
Dart — - Minority - EV Hill — Senator — Dolan
E.V. — - Bi-partisan — Representative — Weyrich
Gramm — Lewis K. Uhler — Phillips
Hance — TARA.

A National Steering Committee would be formed of key donors and spokesmen.

The day-to-day operations and oversight responsibility will be borne by an Executive Director. In this regard, it is proposed that Grover Norquist serve in this capacity for Phase I. His resume is attached. As the new Executive Director of Americans for the Reagan Agenda, he could take this on as his first major task and utilize his current facilities, thereby keeping fixed overhead to a minimum during Phase I. Phase I staff would consist of the Executive Director, a fund raiser and a secretary. Phase I (six months) funding is projected at $100,000. ?

Individual state chairmen and/or co-chairmen would also be appointed for all 50 states and asked to develop their own statewide steering committees.

Announcement

To gain maximum national publicity, it is proposed that the announcement coincide with Presidential recognition, preferably an event announcing his support for SJ Res 58 and HJ Res 350. Under consideration is a Presidential announcement from the Capitol steps with Members and supporters in attendance. The Senate steps would pose no problem, but contact has not been made with the Speaker regarding the main steps. Invitees, in addition to Senate and House sponsors would include governors from states with balanced budget laws on books and those in favor of such state legislation, members of this national citizen's committee, members of organizations dedicated to fiscal responsibility (National Tax Limitation Committee, etc.) and general-purpose organizations who favor balanced budget legislation.

Co-chairman
Nat. Steering committee
process for naming state chairmen
Nat. Chairman — state & CD chairmen — get targets of Rollins, RNC, NRCC

In conjunction with such an event, it would be important to have a briefing session at the White House to fully prepare supporters to immediately begin advocacy. The primary advocacy thrust would be concentrated in the Congressional districts during Phase I. Preferably, six weeks are needed from time of announcement until maximum grassroots impact can be observed. Less than three weeks, and the result is negligible.

Timing

Initial discussion focused on a May 24 or 25 announcement, immediately prior to the President's departure for California and the Members' Memorial Day recess. This was based on a late-June debt ceiling vote with an SJ Res 58 vote in mid-June and an HJ Res 350 discharge petition and vote shortly thereafter.

It now appears that the House vote on the FY 1983 budget proposals will be on Monday, May 24. This causes the added problem of "losing" the balanced budget news item amidst the coverage of the House vote and its immediate aftermath.

If the debt ceiling vote can be deferred until late-July/early-August, it may be preferable to target the immediate post-European period for the announcement. Such a delay will not adversely affect the independent citizen's organization, which can get immediately underway with recruitment and fund-raising. An Oval Office photo (5 min.) for the "in-organization" group could help speed their efforts in the absence of the actual public Presidential event in late May.

Tactics

The key thrust will be targeted toward the following avenues:

a. Speaker's Bureau: On the national level, effort at providing speakers with name recognition for key media events and major national forums. Will require briefing Fact Sheet and Sample Speech.

b. Local Newspaper Ads: To prepare camera-ready copy of an ad to be provided to all local committees. Locals only need typeset name of Members to be contacted and obtain funds through local contributions in order to place ad.

c. Tailored Radio Spots: Preparation of "masters" that can be provided to locals for tailoring and subsequent placement, based on local contributions.

d. Direct Mail: Rather than incur expense of a newsletter, will look to established mailers for placement of op-ed pieces and articles regarding the establishment of an independent citizen's committee and urging contact to get support for the balanced budget amendment.

GROVER NORQUIST

Age 26

Harvard College B.A.--Economics

Harvard Business School M.B.A.

Currently Executive Director, Americans for the Reagan Agenda, a new lobby chaired by Lyn Nofziger which has just begun to operate.

Also doing creative work with Voters for Common Sense, a California organization concentrating on opposing the political ambitions of Tom Hayden.

Until April, 1982 was Executive Director of College Republican National Committee. Managed there a budget of more than $200,000 and extensive field program which brought number of College Republican clubs to all time record of more than 1,100 clubs.

From spring, 1978 through summer, 1979 was on staff of National Taxpayers Union, first as Associate Director and then as Executive Director.

Worked for Howard Jarvis for one month in 1979 before returning to Harvard to enter Business School.

Good working relationship with leaders of the National Tax Limitation Committee including Craig Stubblebine of Claremont College who drafted the Balanced Budget-Tax Limitation Amendment.

Hard working, talented, well acquainted with tax-coalition leaders across the country.

A quick note from

PATRICK PIZZELLA

Morton,

In Feb of 1981, (when I was out of work) I wrote the attached piece + sent you a copy. At the time you pointed out that an administration running a deficit would have an awkward time selling a constitutional amendment. Well I guess we have all just become "super salesmen." Anyway please take another glance at my thoughts.

PP

file

A PUSH FOR A BALANCED Budget AMENDMENT TO The U.S. CONSTITUTION

ADVANTAGES to: 1) America
2) Conservative Movement
3) Reagan ADMINISTRATION

1) Requiring The Federal gov't to balance its budget -- constitutionally -- is good long term policy for America. It eliminates deficit spending -- except in time of emergency -- and it permanently forces politicians to be more careful in budgetary matters.

Approximately 36 states have their own constitutional requirement to balance their state budgets. Had our Founding Fathers thought deficit spending by the federal gov't would have been a problem for future generations there would have been 11 amendments in the Bill of Rights

If the political pendulum should start swinging the other way in a few years (I doubt it) the most difficult thing for the liberals to do would be to repeal a constitutional Amendment.

2) Until the election of Ronald Reagan what offensive victory has the conservative movement in America had on a national scale in our lifetime? -- in this century? Conservatives have defeated ERA, the D.C. Amendment, Repeal of 14b, Salt II public financing of Congressional elections... etc

all defensive battles.

A Balance the Budget Constitutional Amendment is achievable and would be a permanent example of the success of the conservative movement.

Picture this sceanario -- if the Balance Budget Amendment passes both Houses of Congress and it is sent to the states -- 30 of which have already called for a Constitutional convention on this subject -- we will be able to have an entire generation of politicians from Maine to Hawaii on record on this popular issue. A state legislator who votes against the Balance Budget Amendment will carry that vote with him for the rest of his political career -- if he has one left.

If the Balance Budget Amendment fails to pass the U.S. Congress then conservatives candidates & PAC's would be able to use the issue in the 1982 Congressional elections.

3) We all know that setting the agenda -- the terms of political debate is important if the Reagan administration is to be successful. Its vital that the public perception of the Reagan administration's committment to reducing gov't spending be sustained throughout the next 4 years. Carter had so many economic plans there was no clear image for the American

people to grasp.

If the Reagan administration supports a Balance Budget Amendment and it passes Congress, then as this battle goes to every state legislature it will be a reminder to the public of Ronald Reagans' committment to total fiscal reform. Cabinet memebers & administration economists could testify in state capitals across the country.

If Congress does not pass the Balanced Budget Amendment then the administration can easily paint Congress as a scapegoat, who isn't sincere about balancing the federal budget.

Summary: (A) It's simple, popular & has widespread public support.
(B) The 30 states that have already called for a Constitutional Convention has already laid a lot of the ground work in the states.
(C) It's Good for the country, the conservative movement & the Reagan Administration

I Suggest Ronald Reagan officially kick off the drive for a Balanced Budget Amendment on Labor Day 1981-- on the theme of ensuring that future generations of working Americans will be safeguarded from deficit spending.

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