

May 4, 2006

**Extension of Remarks - Coburn Statement Opposing Final Passage of
Emergency Supplemental Bill**

EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL SPENDING

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, in the past week, the Senate has voted to reduce the overall cost of H.R. 4939, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Hurricane Recovery, 2006, now totaling nearly \$110 billion by a mere \$15 million. I'm delighted that President Bush has pledged to veto this bill because Congress has, once again, been unable to resist the temptation to load up a must-pass bill with pork.

Mr. President, I offered several amendments to eliminate non-emergency items in this bill. I appreciate the patience of my colleagues. I'm very pleased and encouraged that this body is increasingly willing to depart from our business-as-usual practices.

That's good, because the American people are paying attention to this process. In a recent Wall Street Journal/NBC poll, the American people said that ending earmarks should be the number one priority for Congress this session. Thirty-nine percent said that members should be prohibited from "directing federal funds to specific projects benefiting only certain constituents." It's interesting to note that ending earmarks was ranked ahead of immigration reform, which was cited as the number one priority by 32 percent of Americans.

I hope that these results, combined with polls showing a 22 percent approval rating for Congress, will encourage conferees to avoid a confrontation with President Bush over spending. I would hope that when conferees look for items to remove from this bill they take a close look at my amendments that lost by a narrow margin as well as those I withdrew.

Mr. President, I believe that in this time of war and disaster recovery the American people expect us to make hard choices about spending. Taxpayers want us to be serving in a spirit of service and sacrifice, not searching for new ways to raid the public treasury.

Congress is raiding the treasury in two ways with this bill. First, many of the items in this bill should be considered in the regular appropriations process and through the regular order. The War on Terror is no longer a surprise. We're entering our fifth year of this war. It shouldn't come as a surprise to Congress that we have needs related to this effort. We've also developed a good

understanding about many of the priorities in the Gulf Coast that could have been addressed in the regular budget process.

Congress has also added billions of dollars for items that have no connection to the War on Terror and the Gulf Coast recovery. Again, few of these items are true emergencies. The American people deserve to understand what defines a true emergency. According to the budget resolution for fiscal year 2006 all of the following five criteria must be met to be considered an emergency:

- Necessary, essential, or vital;
- Sudden, quickly coming into being, and not building up over time;
- An urgent, pressing, and compelling need requiring immediate action;
- Unforeseen, unpredictable, and unanticipated; and
- Not permanent, temporary in nature.

Designating a project as an “emergency” excuses Congress from paying for a project. The result of abusing the “emergency” designation is an even greater emergency. Our nation’s debt is nearly **\$8.4 trillion**. Each American’s share of this debt is **\$27,964.86**. Our national debt is increasing by an average of **\$1.95 billion** per day. Social Security, Medicare and the standard of living of future generations of Americans are in jeopardy as a result of decades of fiscal irresponsibility and rationalizations for spending more money today without considering the consequences tomorrow.

The Social Security trustees’ reported this week the program will exhaust its trust fund and begin running annual cash deficits in 2040. A year ago, that prediction was 2041 effectively meaning two years have been lost by a refusal to act. The trustees reported Social Security’s unfunded liability is \$13.4 trillion.

Of course, the real problem with Social Security and Medicare is much worse because the federal government uses an Enron-style accounting scheme. We habitually borrow or, more accurately, steal money from these trust funds to pay for more spending today.

When the 77 million Baby Boomers begin to retire in 2011, our nation will be faced with the greatest economic challenge in our history. If we continue to indulge in earmarks, the gateway drug to spending addictions, we will never address these complex challenges, particularly if we can’t resist the urge to abuse the earmark process on a bill designed to address the emergency needs of our troops and displaced people in the Gulf Coast.

Another reason we must act today to rein in wasteful spending is because our ability to influence world events is diminished by our debt to other nations. We now have the distinction of being the world’s largest debtor nation, and this bill will add to that debt. Many serious economists are warning that our

excessive borrowing from foreign sources could cause the value of the dollar to collapse, which would lead to a disaster for our economy. It is incredibly short-sighted for this body to sell treasury bills to countries like China so we can finance economic development programs and other pet projects while, at the same time, we hope to encourage China to be more aggressive in terms of discouraging Iran from developing nuclear weapons. This is not just a numbers game. The future vitality of our nation is at stake. We are slowly but surely whittling away our national power and ability to leverage other nations away by our refusal to make hard choices about spending.

Many of the items in this bill are obviously not emergencies, which is why this bill will be vetoed by President Bush if it is sent to him in its current form. Again, I hope conferees do not force the President to take this step. I'm confident the President will veto this bill. He understands that it is more important to secure the next generation rather than the next election.

Past presidents and Congresses have made hard choices during difficult times. Between 1939 and 1942, Congress and FDR cut spending for nondefense programs by 22 percent. In 1950, President Truman and Congress cut nonmilitary spending by 28 percent. I would suggest to my colleagues that if we want to be here past 2006 we better do the same.

Still, I agree with my colleagues who say that the President's priorities don't come down from heaven. I would suggest, however, that we are all subject to the judgment that comes down from the taxpayers. If we flippantly disregard the President's insistence that we make hard choices, the judgment of the taxpayers will not be kind to any of us.

Families across this country are faced with hard choices every day in order to live within their budget. They have elected us to make hard choices. Our refusal to do this only reinforces the perception that we are disconnected from the priority-setting reality that governs the rest of the country.

It is wrong, for example, for this body to fund pork projects like grape research in the state of California then force the taxpayers in my state and every other state to pay for a so-called 'emergency' project that has been ongoing for the last 46 years and has already received more than \$130 million from the American taxpayer. Where this body sees an emergency the taxpayers often see a series of misplaced priorities.

The state of California received 549 federal earmarks this year totaling \$733 million. That included \$10 million in federal resources alone for museums. Is it more important to protect the residents at risk from flooding by the Sacramento River or to fund grape research? Congress is spending over \$3.6 million on a grape research center in California this year. We are spending another \$1 million on a pedestrian walkway project in Calimesa and a half a

million on pedestrian/bike improvements on Tower Bridge in Sacramento? What is more important for Sacramento? Why can't we prioritize today so future generations are not forced to make even tougher choices between massive tax hikes, drastic cuts to Medicare and Social Security or the defense of our nation?

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Cowardice asks the question - is it safe? Expediency asks the question - is it popular? Vanity asks the question - is it popular? But conscience asks the question - is it right?"

I plead with my colleagues. Do what is right. Our nation is on an unsustainable course and that course correction must begin today, not when it is too late.

I yield the floor.