

Sen. Sam Ervin Says

WASHINGTON — There is much concern abroad in the land over the condition of the Federal budget and how we can find a better way to find sufficient monies to fund priority spending and eliminate unnecessary programs.

The fiscal situation today declares that hard choices must be made. There is no longer the prospect that there will be "peace dividends" that will carry us through the rest of this decade to fund new programs for national purposes. What this means is that nothing on the horizon will allow a painless way of financing a multitude of new spending proposals that will confront us in the immediate future.

All of this makes it more imperative that Congress reform its budget making processes. Basic Congressional tools to control Federal spending have changed little since the passage of the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 — more than 50 years ago. Expenditures have grown a hundredfold since the 1920's. In the 43 years since 1931, only six have ended up with a surplus in the Federal Budget. In the three fiscal years 1971, 1972, 1973 deficits have ranged between \$24 and \$29-billion annually.

Nearly nine-tenths of the work of the Congress concerns spending and taxation. The Employment Act of 1946 commits the federal government to relate its money actions to the overall needs of the national economy — to avoid high unemployment and excessive inflation. The Constitution clearly gives the Congress the power of the purse. What is needed is a better procedure to deal with spending and revenues. Members of Congress constantly confront demands for higher spending and lower taxes. In recent years, this problem has reached crisis proportions.

To find a way out of this dilemma, on April 11th, I introduced the Congressional Budgetary Procedures Act, S. 1541. This legislation recently was approved by the Senate Budget Subcommittee. The bill now being considered by the full Government Operations Committee would establish a standing Committee on the Budget in each House. The budget appropriations process would begin November 15 leading to a Congressional resolution on the Budget by April 15. This would pave the way for Congressional action on all appropriations and new authorizing legislation by June 30th prior to the beginning of the new fiscal year on July 1st.

Under this legislation, Congress would decide on the appropriate level of surplus or deficit based on economic conditions, based on estimated revenues, and would direct changes in revenues or the debt limit. Moreover, the Congress would base spending totals on an overall spending ceiling and subceilings to which all spending bills would be linked. Appropriations and other spending bills would have to comply with budget ceilings and allocations, subject to changing economic conditions and national needs. The legislation also establishes the concept this Congress would base spending on priorities for allocating spending among competing national needs.

We are long overdue for a meaningful budget reform. I hope that Congress will be able to act on this measure soon. It will provide a needed reformation of the Congressional budget process.



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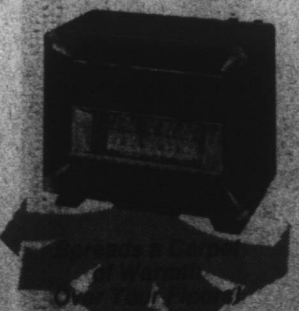
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