

and a failure of leadership. Americans deserve better.

I therefore intend to oppose the effort to increase America's debt limit.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of final passage.

Raising the debt limit is necessary to preserve the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government.

We cannot as a Congress pass spending bills and tax bills and then refuse to pay our bills.

Refusing to raise the debt limit is like refusing to pay your credit card bill—after you've used your credit card.

The time to control the deficits and debt is when we are voting on the spending bills and the tax bills that create it.

Raising the debt limit is about meeting the obligations we have already incurred.

We must meet our obligations. Vote for this bill.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, the spending process in the Congress is broken. Some will argue that now is not the time to debate spending reform or budget reform. They will say that now is not the time to have a debate about our country's spending priorities. They will argue that right now we need to just "pay our bills" for past transactions and discuss reforms some time in the future. Raising the debt limit, however, does not count as "paying the bills." We are not paying our bills.

Last fiscal year, the real Federal deficit—the amount by which the Federal debt increased—was \$538 billion. When we raise the debt limit, we are not "paying our bills." We are merely taking out another line of credit—another loan—to allow for more spending that we can't afford. It is akin to a deeply indebted family getting a loan for a new car or getting a new credit card or line of credit without cutting up the old credit cards that got them in trouble in the first place.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the Federal Government spent roughly \$2.5 trillion during the last fiscal year. Let's look at that amount of spending another way. If the Federal Government spent \$2.5 trillion last year, that means that on average, \$6.8 billion was spent each day, or \$78,418 was spent per second by the Federal Government.

I believe that it is absolutely necessary to have an open and honest debate about our spending priorities. We are getting ready to increase this country's debt limit to almost \$9 trillion. Over the past 5 years, our national debt has increased by \$3 trillion, or nearly \$9,000 per American. That is a lot of money. In 1990, our total national debt was about \$3 trillion. That means that it took our country more than 200 years to accumulate that amount of debt—200 years to increase our debt by \$3 trillion. We just added that much new debt in only 5 years.

In 2001, the share of Federal debt per person in this country was a little over

\$20,000. That includes everyone—not just those in the workforce. According to the Office of Management and Budget and the Census Bureau, total Federal debt per American will rise to \$29,000 per American by the end of 2006. That is an increase of \$9,000 per man, woman, and child in this country since 2001. But a lot of people are quick to dismiss that figure. They will say that it doesn't matter, that we only need to worry about how debt and deficits compare to economic growth or to the size of the economy. I think a better rule of thumb is how Government growth compares to the growth of wages and earnings.

If regular Americans are tightening their belts, the Federal Government should do the same instead of engaging in yet another spending binge. Since 2001, total Federal debt per American has increased by \$9,000. But over that same time period, the average wages of American workers have only increased by \$4,200. Over the past 5 years, the growth of Federal debt per person has doubled the growth of average wages of American workers. What makes this situation even worse is that that \$9,000 increase in debt per person is just going to get bigger and bigger because we are not doing anything to cut spending or prepare for the impending fiscal crisis that will result from the retirement of the baby boomer generation. Interest on that debt is just going to get larger.

Last year, interest costs—the costs of Federal debt that the Government must pay to those who buy U.S. Treasury bonds—were about 8 percent of the total Federal budget. In contrast, the average American spends roughly 5 percent of his or her income on credit card debt and car loans according to the Federal Reserve. The Federal Government spent close to \$200 billion on interest costs alone last year. According to the Government Accountability Office, or GAO, interest costs will consume 25 percent of the entire Federal budget by 2035. Let's put that figure into perspective. Twenty-five percent of the Federal budget is a huge amount.

By way of comparison, the Department of Education's share of Federal spending in 2005 was approximately 3 percent of all Federal spending. The Department of Health and Human Services was responsible for approximately 23 percent of all Federal spending. Spending by the Social Security Administration was responsible for about 20 percent of all Federal spending. Spending on Medicare was about 12 percent of all Federal spending. Spending in 2005 by the Department of Defense—in the midst of two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a global war against terrorism—comprised about 19 percent of all Federal spending. Thus, if we do not change our current spending habits, GAO estimates that as a percentage of Federal spending, interest costs in 2035 will be larger than defense costs today, Social Security costs

today, Medicare costs today, and education costs today.

No family in America would ever be able to manage its finances this way. No family would be able to build up insane amounts of debt, unilaterally increase all of its credit card limits with no ability to ever pay them off, and still be able to spend, spend, spend without any accountability. We have some very serious problems to address regarding spending priorities in this country.

According to the Congressional Research Service, Congress appropriated \$64 billion in earmarks for 2006, the current fiscal year. That doesn't even include the earmarks from the highway bill that was passed in 2005. We are going to spend \$64 billion on earmarks and pork projects across the country this year even though it is estimated that the real Federal deficit—including the money that is regularly stolen from Social Security—will again surpass half a trillion dollars.

Earmarks are a serious problem because they put parochial interests ahead of national priorities. They put the interests of the next election ahead of the interests of the next generation. Some, however, argue that earmarks are not really a problem because they comprise a small percent of the budget. They argue that entitlement spending is the problem and that we ought to address that problem instead of focusing on earmarks. These arguments completely miss the point.

If entitlements are the real problem and earmarks are not a problem, then why did entitlement savings passed in the last budget resolution for fiscal year 2006 only amount to \$5 billion? If entitlements are the real problem, why did we spend 13 times more money on earmarks last year than we saved in entitlement programs? At that rate, we will solve our country's fiscal problems some time after never. The budget resolution we passed last year created entitlement savings of about \$40 billion over the next 5 years. We spent more on earmarks in 1 single year than we saved from entitlement programs over 5 years. Over the past 3 years—since 2004—we have spent nearly \$160 billion on earmarks and special interest pork projects according to the Congressional Research Service.

Since 1994, the number of individual earmarks has more than tripled, increasing from 4,126 in 1994 to 12,852 in fiscal year 2006. Of those 12,852 earmarks, over 95 percent were not even included in bill language. Instead, they were hidden within conference reports. Many never even saw the light of day until they were snuck into unamendable conference reports that were sure to be rammed through at the last minute. Earmarking is a very serious problem that needs to be addressed before we can get our fiscal house in order. However, there are also other spending issues that this body should address.

The issue of improper payments by the Federal Government is one that