

Mr. Speaker, I voted against the Line-Item Veto Act of 1996 even though it was sought by a Democratic administration because I felt that it was unconstitutional and that no president either Republican or Democrat should have the unilateral power to change the law by themselves. My reservations were justified when in 1998 the Supreme Court ruled this provision unconstitutional. It would be the height of irony for a Congress that already failed in its constitutional responsibility to check the inappropriate use of Federal power by this administration with a record of the largest deficits in American history to surrender even more authority.

The proposal that is being offered although called a "line item veto" is nothing of the sort. While it attempts procedurally to make it easier for the President to eliminate spending, it still may be found unconstitutional. What is especially troubling is the provision that would permit the President to withhold funding for an item in an enacted appropriation bill for up to 90 days regardless of Congressional action. This could have a devastating impact on transportation programs such as Amtrak which the administration has led a crusade to shut it down. Given the precarious financial situation that Amtrak faces, the ability to delay funding for 90 days could have the effect of pushing Amtrak over the edge in leading to its collapse.

Personally, I have been happy to vote against programs I thought were unaffordable as well as go after them on the House floor. During the 109th I have already led efforts with some of my conservative colleagues against wasteful non-priority programs such as the upper Mississippi lock and dam project and costly sugar subsidies. If Congress wants to get serious about fiscal discipline, then a few simple but important steps taken would make a significant difference.

For example, it is long past time to restore the pay-as-you-go budget procedures. This pay-as-you-go concept required Congress and the administration to adopt a sustainable budget policy where money to pay for either new spending programs or costly tax cuts would have to be provided without increasing the deficit. In addition, just letting Congress know what it's voting on would be helpful. The Republican leadership routinely overrides the requirements in our rule that provides for three days to review conference committee reports.

One of the greatest failures of Congress for the 10 years that I have been in office has been its inability to exercise fiscal discipline. During the Bush administration we have seen year after year of record-breaking deficits with the highest increases in over 50 years. If we simply commit to follow our already established rules, we would do more good and pose less harm

Opposing the "Line-Item Veto" Act

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than the budget fig leaf that is being considered today. This bill is an attempt to disguise the fact that we have a budget problem because of the administration and Republican leadership refusal to do their job and to provide the tools to help the rest of us do ours.