

Statement of
The Honorable Tom Coburn

United States Senator
Oklahoma
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Senator Tom Coburn
Opening Statement for the Hearing
"The Legality and Efficacy of Line-Item Veto Proposals"

I would like to thank Senator Feingold for calling this hearing and the witnesses for being here today. We appreciate hearing your testimony on this issue.

By the end of this week, our national debt will climb above the thirteen-trillion dollar threshold. In view of this rising debt, Congress has the responsibility to consider all measures which will contribute to the fiscal discipline that is currently lacking in our federal government. Among these measures is the line-item veto, which we are here to discuss today. I believe a line-item veto is one of the many tools Congress needs to utilize in our efforts to control the rising debt, and as such I am a co-sponsor of S.524, the "Congressional Accountability and Line-Item Veto Act of 2009," which Chairman Feingold has introduced.

The line-item veto will allow the President to single out wasteful spending in legislation and will give Congress the opportunity to reconsider its spending priorities in view of our rising debt. I am hopeful this veto power will expose our appropriations process to the oversight and critical evaluation it needs, but believe this reform must only be viewed as one of the first steps towards fiscal responsibility, rather than one of the last.

Both Congress and the President already have all the necessary tools to rein in runaway spending, but neither branch has shown the political will to do so. The line-item veto would add one more tool to this arsenal, but it will still require the President and Congress to have the courage of their convictions when it comes to spending. All too often, Washington politicians enact process reforms to great fanfare, only to cast these reforms aside as they find it politically expedient.

If the President utilizes a new line-item veto power aggressively and Congress supports this effort by approving rescission requests, the federal government might, finally, begin to follow the path to fiscal responsibility. If Congress continues to spend irresponsibly, however, the line-item veto could simply become another process reform that is cast aside whenever Congress views it as an obstacle to what they desire.

I sincerely hope the line-item veto can become an effective tool to rein in federal spending and begin our government along the path to fiscal responsibility. I believe the proposals before us today are an appropriate first step along that path, and I am thankful this hearing provides the opportunity to evaluate the legality and efficacy of these proposals. I thank the Chairman for calling it.