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U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

Washington, DC 20515

April 6, 1994

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TELEPHONES:
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[REDACTED]
Lancaster, PA 17601

Dear [REDACTED]:

Thank you for contacting me to give me your suggestions for a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution. As you may know, just recently balanced budget amendment legislation failed to pass in the Senate by the necessary two-thirds vote.

The fundamental problem in dealing with the federal budget deficit is political not constitutional. We have had our Constitution for over 200 years, and serious deficits have not existed through most of this time.

Amending the Constitution to deal with a problem that is primarily political would be a grave mistake. The Constitution is an expression of permanent policy and economic conditions are ever-changing. In the words of Charles Schultze, a former presidential economic advisor: "No constitutional amendment can be written to cover the budgetary exigencies of the future. If interpreted literally, the amendment could lead to radically inappropriate budget decisions... If interpreted loosely, the amendment would lead to a sharp deterioration in the quality of...governmental process generally."

Again, thank you for sharing your views with me.

Sincerely,

Martin O. Sabo

MARTIN OLAV SABO
Chairman

MOS:ej

COPY to Brian Lamb

*Copies sent to all
budget committeemembers*

[REDACTED]
Lancaster, PA 17601

30Apr94

Martin Olav Sabo, Chairman
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

COPY

Dear Mr. Sabo:

Thank you for your letter of 6Apr94.

You say Charles Schultze, former presidential economic advisor said, "No Constitutional amendment can be written to cover the budgetary exigencies of the future..." etc.

I just did write just such an amendment. It covers any budgetary exigency now or in the future. If there is a war, the amendment covers that. If the budget goes over in peacetime, it covers that. If there are past debts, it covers that. There is nothing in the amendment saying the budget cannot go over, if we must meet some exigency.

If such an exigency comes up, and the Congressmen are not paid, the taxpayer will be made aware of it and can cover the Congressional shortfall in their 1040 -- they can then pay for the exigency in the 1040 voluntarily, or be taxed for it later. If a Congressman is just in it for the money, and cannot wait from October 1 to about February of the next year to get the money donated to him by the taxpayer, he can just decide not to run for another term, or can resign. Good riddance. It will make room for a more honest, conscientious person. A term limit amendment would be redundant. A line-item veto amendment would also be redundant, as it is included in this amendment.

You say "serious deficits have not existed through most of this time". True. Not until Reagan came along and said "Go to it, guys" -- unbridled capitalism, laissez faire, free rein for the businessman, the S&L scandal, Ivan Boesky, etc. -- did the lawyer mentality in Congress get up the courage to act like late 19th and early 20th century "robber barons". The Founding Fathers expected the Congressmen to act honorably, like men, and not like children. They also expected each bill to cover a specific item or area, not be a catchall for pork. If Congress cannot wait and must have its fix of guaranteed annual wage (in monthly increments) and unlimited PAC money, it can always declare a war every few years. Grow up.

Again, this amendment will be an expression of permanent policy and will make the Constitution better, for a stronger republic.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]