

DAVE DURENBERGER
MINNESOTA

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

March 15, 1985

Mr. Harold Weisberg
7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Maryland 21701

Dear Harold:

Thank you for your comments on your concerns about increased defense spending and reduced social spending.

For the coming fiscal year (FY 1985), the Reagan Administration has requested an overall defense budget authority of \$313 billion. There is no question that this is an enormous amount of money--far above the total budget of \$297 billion which Congress anticipated spending this year. Reductions are mandatory, both because our economy cannot sustain such rates of spending and because of some of the items in this year's defense budget are simply not needed for our security. The MX missile is a good example.

So, in some respects, the budget message which the Administration is sending us this year is the same old tune--an apparent belief that our security is increased simply by increasing spending. I have worked to reduce the size of these requests in the past, and will continue to do so. Money does not automatically result in a sounder defense.

But hidden beneath this message is an important point which many Americans may have missed: the battle to reduce defense spending is gradually being won. For example, the FY 1985 budget is close to President Carter's defense budget projection of \$290 billion and by the time Congress finishes this year may be right at it! When President Reagan first came to office, he planned to spend \$333 billion in FY 1985, not the \$313 billion he's now requesting. His initial five-year plan for FY 1982-1986 sought \$1.488 trillion, but the actual amount set aside by Congress will cap that five-year amount at no more than \$1.354 trillion--an enormous amount of money, but a reduction of \$134 billion (9%) in the five-year plan.

This does not mean we can rest on our laurels. We can't. But it does show that Congress has been doing a good job of imposing a degree of budgetary realism on the Defense Department. It also suggests that we have to spend more time discussing the actual contents of each budget request--our policies--and not just numbers alone. Money which is not spent wisely is money which is wasted and which can harm our defense. So I hope to see more attention focused on our actual defense policies, and not just on the size of our budgets. I discuss

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this difference in some detail in my new book, Neither Madmen Nor Messiahs. If Congress can play a role in this area, it will truly contribute to the national defense.

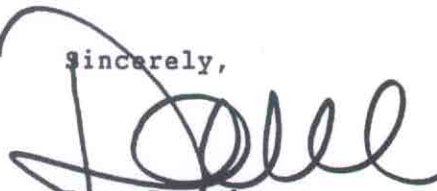
The last two years have seen major changes in government spending and tax policy as we have worked to get our economy under control. While I am willing to work with the President in his efforts to reduce inflation and the deficit, a balanced federal budget is not the only priority that faces the people of this country. There are human needs priorities that are every bit as important--particularly at a time when so many people are out of work and struggling to make it through the recession.

We cannot continue to focus the entire budget battle on the 15 percent of the budget that funds the so-called "social programs." If the theme of the '80s is to "do more, more effectively, with less," it's a theme that has to apply to every area of government activity--including the military, including the public works projects that Congressmen prize so dearly.

I have refused to support many of the President's proposed cuts in social programs, particularly when other less damaging options were available. I would much rather build one fewer destroyer, or defer the construction of two dams than cut deeply into human needs programs. I would rather defer some heavy construction projects whose benefits are decades away than cut deeply into programs that have an immediate and irreplaceable impact on human needs. And I am convinced that the people in this country share my feelings.

In general, I intend to continue doing what I have done for the past four years. I will support the President when I think he is right, and I will oppose him when I believe his actions are not in the best interests of Minnesota and the nation. You can be certain that I will continue supporting the essential programs that meet basic human needs for a large segment of our population.

Sincerely,



Dave Durenberger
United States Senator

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