



UNITED STATES SENATE
BUDGET COMMITTEE
RANKING MEMBER CHUCK GRASSLEY

Opening Statement by Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Ranking Member, Senate Budget Committee
Markup of S. 1275, the REEF Act
Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Budget Committee doesn't hold many markups on legislation in its jurisdiction. The last real markup we had was in 2019—when we reported out the bipartisan budget process reform legislation you put together with our mutual friend, the late Mike Enzi.

By law this committee is supposed to report out a budget resolution every year by April 1st. That's our statutory duty, and the reason this committee was created. But we haven't marked up a budget resolution since Chairman Enzi held the gavel.

Members on our side have been hopeful that the committee would eventually turn to giving the 50-year-old Congressional Budget Act a much-needed tune up, as you've previously suggested.

But so far this Congress, the Senate Budget Committee has held 14 hearings on climate change. We've had hearings on immigration, inequality, and even on abortion. But not a single hearing on how we can work together to reform a budget process that everyone agrees is broken.

That means this markup may be the only opportunity to put forward ideas to bring the Budget Act into the 21st century. For that reason, I filed several amendments that address some of the problems with the current dysfunctional budget process.

But out of respect for you, Mr. Chairman, and the sponsor of the bill before us, Senator Fischer, I don't plan on offering any of my amendments. But I hope you'll understand the frustrations on our side and take a look at the solutions I am proposing.

These aren't partisan, gotcha amendments. Several of my amendments would add bipartisan provisions from the Enzi-Whitehouse budget process reform bill. I want to work with you, Mr. Chairman, not against you.

A markup of a bipartisan bill, followed by what I hope will be a primary health care hearing with a bipartisan tone, is a nice change of pace. And I hope after next week's hearing on the President's budget request we can identify more opportunities to find common ground.

Now, let me address the bill we're considering today, S.1274, the REEF Act.

There are plenty of programs that I think ought to be exempt from sequestration cuts. That said, the Budget Committee shouldn't be in the business of approving new exemptions to sequestration on a piecemeal basis

without thoughtful consideration. Otherwise, we risk opening the floodgates to a rash of new exemptions that undermine sequestration as a budget enforcement tool and grow our already massive deficits.

However, the bill before us today deals with a unique case. The railroad unemployment insurance program is designed to be self-financed by taxes on railroad employers.

But unlike many other unemployment programs, or other benefits administered by the Railroad Retirement Board, railroad unemployment benefits are subject to sequestration.

As far back as 1986, the heads of the Congressional Budget Office and Government Accountability Office told this committee that subjecting railroad unemployment benefits to sequestration was probably a legislative oversight. Thus, arguments to add this program to the exemption list have merit.

However, there's a serious problem with the bill from a Budget Committee perspective. According to CBO the bill would increase spending and deficits, however small in the scheme of things. This legislation is probably more likely to get to the President's desk if it's ultimately paid for.

But at this stage of the process, I'll support moving the bill forward.

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