

October 16, 2007

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator McConnell:

I am requesting that I be consulted before the Senate enters into any unanimous consent agreements or time limitations regarding S. 1771, the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act. Unless my concerns with the legislation as drafted are addressed, I will object to any unanimous consent agreement or the waiver of any rule with respect to this bill.

S. 1771 authorizes \$29 million of new funds without any offsets.

Earlier this month, the Senate voted to increase the federal government's debt limit to \$9.815 trillion. It is beyond irresponsible to add to this debt that will be inherited by our children and grandchildren. Even our best intentions, need to be paid for with offsets from lower priorities or wasteful spending.

On February 5, 2007, I sent a letter to my colleagues outlining my intent to object to any legislation authorizes new spending that is not offset by reductions in real spending elsewhere. I strongly believe that Congress should stop borrowing and spending beyond our means. Instead, Congress, like all families, ought to prioritize spending and reduce less important spending when greater priorities arise.

There is no shortage of potential offsets for this bill within the Department of Justice, which administers the program. The Department has \$1.6 billion in unobligated balances, which are funds that have been appropriated but not spent.^[1] In fiscal year 2006, the Department spent \$45.9 million on conferences, a 34 percent increase since fiscal year 2000.^[2] The Inspector General examined just ten conferences and found that the Department spent an estimated \$1.5 million on food and beverages. "This included paying \$4 per meatball at one lavish dinner and spreading an average of \$25 worth of snacks around to each participant at a movie-themed party."^[3] It is estimated that the current fiscal year 2008 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations bill contains Congressional earmarks totaling \$587 million and the bill exceeds the President's request

^[1] <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2008/pdf/balances.pdf>

^[2] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/14/AR2007091401260.html>

^[3] *ibid*

by more than \$2 billion.^[4] Clearly, there is wasteful spending that can be reduced to pay for this program.

I hope that these concerns can be addressed with the bill's sponsors. I do support efforts to increase the safety of swimming pools and spas. That desire, however, must be done in a fiscally responsible manner.

Thank you for protecting my rights in regards to this legislation.

Sincerely,

Tom Coburn, M.D.

CC: The Honorable Mark Pryor

^[4] <http://taxpayer.net/TCS/PressReleases/2007/07-09scjs.html>