

I don't think we have any such priorities at the present time. I don't think we have had any in the 6 years I have been in Congress. And I wonder if there isn't some way of obtaining a better sense of direction.

Mr. MAYO. We both have responsibilities in this regard. The administration has the responsibility in the first instance in preparing its budget to give its appraisal of relative priorities. That is what the budget is. It is a financial plan, it isn't just a collection of figures.

The Congress has a very important responsibility, too. The Congress decides upon the President's recommendations and molds those recommendations into specific program authorizations through the actual appropriation of funds. For many, many years we have taken the position that it is the appropriation process which is the ultimate arbiter of national goals and priorities.

Once the Congress has spoken, and the President has approved the bills in question then that establishes the dimensions of the spending process that have been established—although there may be differing spending patterns depending on what type of program you are talking about.

I think this is still the right way to approach it. The decision was taken last year to put in a further control. We have had experiments around the edges of this in the past, and really, the debt limit in a sense is an attempt at an overall budget review. But debt control is after the fact.

The attempt to impose outlay ceilings reflects a feeling of frustration, perhaps, in trying to get all of these things united together, because it is such a complex job.

Representative BROCK. Isn't it a little bit hypocritical for the Congress to impose a debt ceiling or to impose an expenditure ceiling and then go ahead and vote two or three times as much for appropriations? Isn't that having your cake and eating it too?

Mr. MAYO. It does create some difficulties. It is like the ad for the car that is now kind of out of date—bigger on the inside and smaller on the outside. You can only go so far. You can't have a negative wall on your car. And neither can you have an appropriation process that holds candy out to the baby and then proceeds to take it a little further away after many commitments have been made. Such a procedure tends to divert your spending restraint.

We all agree, there must be spending restraint. But a ceiling tends to divert restraint toward the things that are more easily cut off. And you are much harder put in many instances to take a big project that is part way along and incur the extra costs of having to postpone that. You have to make a judgment there. It may cost the Government many, many—depending on the projects—hundreds of thousands of dollars more to postpone and then to start it up again, or even more to just dump it and say, well, that has gotten too low a level of priority.

Representative BROCK. But I take it that the sense of your response is that you would be reluctant to advocate another similar ceiling?

Mr. MAYO. I would be reluctant. It doesn't mean necessarily that we may not find it necessary to agree with the Congress as to the need of such a ceiling, but I would like to rely more on the appropriation process in the first instance as the controller of the ultimate level of the Federal spending. It is easier to turn the faucet off at the boiler