

**Transcript of Floor Statement by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND)
on Byrd Amendment (#2735) to Remove Reconciliation Instructions
in Senate Budget Committee-Reported FY 2005 Budget Resolution
March 10, 2004**

Let me say we don't need the reconciliation process to extend the middle-class tax cut the chairman has referenced. I support and I will work to get votes to extend the \$1,000 childcare credit, to extend the marriage penalty relief, and to extend the 10-percent bracket. I am absolutely confident that we can get the votes to do that outside of reconciliation.

What is wrong here is to use reconciliation for tax cuts. Reconciliation, which is a fast-track process in the Senate that limits our right to debate, that limits our right to amend, is used for something other than deficit reduction. The only reason Senators agreed to give up their basic rights was because we were in a crisis that required deficit reduction. This is adding to the deficit--not reducing it. The chairman said this budget before us has a record amount of deficit reduction. This budget before us has a record amount of debt increase. This budget before us will increase the debt of the United States by \$2.86 trillion over the next 5 years.

The former Budget Committee chairman, Senator Domenici, said this about reconciliation:

“Frankly, as chairman of the Budget Committee, I am aware of how beneficial reconciliation can be to deficit reduction. But I am also totally aware of what can happen when we choose to use this kind of process to basically get around the Rules of the Senate as to limiting debate. Clearly, unlimited debate is the prerogative of the Senate. That is greatly modified under this process. I have grown to understand that this institution, while it has a lot of shortcomings, has some qualities that are rather exceptional. One of those is the fact that it is an extremely free institution, that we are free to offer amendments, that we are free to take as much time as this U.S. Senate will let us to debate and have those issues thoroughly understood both here and across the country.”

Finally, the simple fact is, the reconciliation instruction in this budget resolution doesn't assure that those tax cuts--the middle-class tax cuts--will be the ones that are, in fact, brought back to us by the Finance Committee.

We all know the budget resolution does not make the specific decisions of how the revenue is raised by the Finance Committee.

The chairman of the committee has said over and over in the Senate, we do not control the specifics of what the Finance Committee does. All this reconciliation instruction does is give \$80 billion to the Finance Committee. They can use it for any tax-cutting purpose.

Again, we can have an extension of the middle-class tax cuts, \$1,000 child credit, and 10-percent bracket, the marriage penalty relief without the blunderbuss of reconciliation.