

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD
EXTENSION OF REMARKS
CONGRESSMAN LES AuCOIN

Mr. Speaker: The Office of Management and Budget presented a budget a week ago that is austere and, on the whole fiscally sound. It is a conservative spending program that is badly needed in our war on inflation. Now that the initial cries of anguish about certain program cuts have begun to subside, it is time to reflect calmly on the handywork of OMB in designing our inflation fighting strategy for the next fiscal year.

On the whole, the budget clearly meets some important tests for today's fight: Austere, lean, conservative yet sensitive to social needs. But what of tomorrow? Will this budget stand the test of our future needs? In one very important area, the answer is, unfortunately, no.

In proposing to cut the expenditures for the U.S. Forest Service by 15 per cent, OMB has adopted a short-sighted and irresponsible strategy. In its rush to marshall our weapons against inflation, it in effect has said, "We'll use any weapon, even though it will cause us problems tomorrow."

The proposed cut in the Forest Service budget means reductions in its programs for reforestation and timber stand improvement, reductions that in practice will amount to between a quarter and a third over last year alone. This is a sizable and indefensible cut.

In its haste to slash the budget, OMB has forgotten a simple truth: Trees take time to grow.

From planting to harvest, the average Douglas fir takes from 30 to 40 years to grow to maturity before it can be cut. Science has done much to reduce the growth time and produce an exceptional quality of timber. Despite our best efforts, trees simply do not grow overnight.

The Resources Planning Act of 1974 recognizes this simple truth. A plan to fully use our national forest lands and provide a plentiful supply of timber for the forest products and homebuilding industries, the Resources Planning Act sets forth certain spending targets needed to meet this goal. The amount in the proposed budget for reforestation is fully 59 per cent below the amount called for in the Act.

This is money for planting trees, for research and fire suppression, for preparation of timber sales. This is not money spent with no eye to the future; it is an investment to guarantee a plentiful supply of timber in years to come.

Page Two

In Oregon, there is currently a backlog of 177,119 acres of national forest land in need of replanting. The \$21.7 million cut in reforestation funds will mean reducing by half the number of acres that could be planted next year and adding another 25,000 to the existing backlog.

Two years ago, I led a delegation to OMB consisting of representatives from the forest products industry and organized labor to plead the cause that planting trees wasn't an expenditure, but a good investment. Evidently, we've got to make the same case again. We've got to make the point that reforestation is an investment that pays dividends to taxpayers, stimulates productivity and holds down inflation.

The proposed cuts in reforestation and timber stand improvement will, I predict, ripple through the forest products industry and in the long run help to push home prices higher than they are today.

For the last year, I chaired an 11-member task force investigating the home price problem. We learned that one cause of higher home prices is poor management of our timber base. The recommended cuts do not give us much cause for optimism that our economic strategists have recognized this problem.

I remind my colleagues again of the simple truth: Trees take time to grow. We cannot, five or ten years down the road, present a full budget to the Forest Service, expect it to replant cut-over acreage and have the trees ready for harvest on schedule. It simply cannot be done. Every year lost in reforestation is a year's delay, and a shorter supply, in harvestable timber 30 years hence.

Timber from each acre of national forest land can build two average size houses. With a national backlog of more than 1 million acres in need of replanting, we are jeopardizing the building of more than 2 million homes down the road.

I commend the President and the OMB for holding down the deficit to no more than \$29 billion, but it must be done with an eye toward winning the war against inflation, not just one battle.

The cuts in the Forest Service budget are a short-term strategy to win a battle; but they sow the seeds for long-term problems and will contribute to our eventual defeat in this fight.