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ACTION Extension of Remarks

Budget Bill.EXTENSION OF REMARKS

OF

HON. WILLIAM S. VARE,
OF PENNSYLVANIA.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Friday, October 24, 1919.

Mr. VARE. Mr. Speaker, there are two essential features in the budget bill which command the attention and support of those who are looking toward the formation of some system by which a more efficient and logical method may be employed for the appropriation and expenditure of Government funds.

The first of these is the centralization of authority and responsibility for the submission of the budget in the hands of the President. At the present time the estimates are made up in the main by the chief clerks of the various departments, in consultation with the Secretaries and the various bureau chiefs. These are submitted to the Secretary of the Treasury, who in turn submits them to the congressional appropriation committees, without revision.

It is quite natural that the Secretary of the Treasury, as a Cabinet officer, would hesitate to revise estimates of another Cabinet officer, who would have direct knowledge of his particular department and the bureaus of which it is composed.

With the creation of the bureau of the budget in the office of the President with a sufficient expert force, the President should have first-hand knowledge of the requirements of each department. The new law will very properly place full jurisdiction over estimates in the hands of the President without the division of authority we now find under the estimate system. It is a step in the right direction for economy and efficiency.

The second outstanding feature is the creation of an accounting department, which shall be established separate and apart from and independent of any department having authority to spend the moneys of the Treasury. It will have certain powers of investigation and the right to criticize or reject expenditures.

While the head of this department is to be appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, he may be removed by joint resolution of the House and Senate. This should keep the office independent for action and serve as a check on extravagance. It is in line with good business methods.

In the city of Philadelphia for the last 40 years all expenditures of the municipal government have been audited by the city controller, whose office is separate and apart from the office of the mayor and the various directors of departments. His powers are similar to those given the auditor by this bill.

He is elected by the people, however. He appoints his own office force. The present incumbent, Hon. John M. Walton, has held the position for approximately a quarter of a century, and is popularly known as the watchdog of the city treasury.

In addition to the passage of this bill, it has been suggested that the present rules of the House be so changed that one general budget committee shall be named to limit the amount of appropriations for each department to sums within the estimated revenue. There seems to be a diversity of opinion on the proposed change of the rules.

Surely some system should be devised whereby there could be a check placed on the vast sums of money that have and are being appropriated. I am hopeful that this can be brought about by the appointment of a central committee without deprecating the importance of existing committees.

Budget legislation has been discussed by the various leaders of the House since I first became a Member in May, 1912, and I am very much pleased to have seen the House pass the bill by almost a unanimous vote.

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