

**Floor Statement of Senator Daniel K. Inouye
In Support of the 2009 Omnibus Bill
March 2, 2009**

Mr. President, I rise today in support of H.R. 1105, the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009. This is a measure that should have been completed last year but was not because of the previous Administration's unwillingness to negotiate in good faith. But today we have the opportunity to put partisanship behind us and to continue the task of rebuilding our economy, reinvesting in America, and frankly, making our government work again.

I want to point out that today is March 2. We are now almost half-way through the fiscal year. Except for defense, veterans and homeland security, our executive branch agencies are all still operating under a Continuing Resolution.

Under the Continuing Resolution, no new programs can begin. Funding levels are held to last year's level. This means that even things such as price increases due to inflation and the cost of civil servant pay raises must be absorbed within the existing agency funding levels.

Many worthy initiatives which were approved by the Appropriations Committee are being held at artificially low spending totals. And as we all know, the Continuing Resolution will expire on Friday.

It is not in the best interest of the taxpayer or the agencies we are funding to operate the federal government on auto-pilot. A year-long Continuing Resolution does not allow a federal agency any flexibility to address changing priorities. Passage of H.R. 1105 begins the process of returning our departments and agencies to a more regular order. We simply must complete this bill this week.

The 2009 Omnibus bill has strong support from both sides of the aisle, including the Vice-Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Senator Thad Cochran. Further, the distinguished Minority Leader was accurate with his comments in January that this bill has been fully vetted and is ready for immediate passage.

This measure is not, as some have suggested, duplicative of the spending provided by the recently-enacted American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. This argument misses the point entirely. The purpose of the Recovery package is to jump-start economic growth by making significant investments above the annual budget. The Omnibus is the baseline budget.

But equally important to the funding contained in the bill is the fact that the Omnibus will provide much-needed guidance to Executive-branch agencies that have been operating without such guidance under the Continuing Resolution. In addition, there are a number of new initiatives across the government that cannot be implemented without passage of this bill.

The Omnibus will enable agencies to act with increased certainty and efficiency as they will now have the revised instructions and in some cases the increased resources they need to carry out their missions. It is my sincere hope that this is the last Omnibus we see for some time to come, as it is my intention as the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee to pass each of our annual appropriations bills through regular order. But having said that, it is clearly impossible for Fiscal Year 2009, and for all the reasons mentioned above, there is no doubt that this bill is far superior to yet another Continuing Resolution.

Mr. President, the \$410 billion in spending contained in this bill will accomplish a number of objectives, including giving extra momentum to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act by funding additional projects and therefore saving thousands of additional jobs. In this time of economic crisis, nothing is more important than keeping America working.

I would offer just a few examples of the kinds of initiatives that are included in the 2009 Omnibus:

Energy Security: There is perhaps no issue more critical to the future safety and prosperity of our nation than energy security. The Omnibus invests in America's Energy security by prioritizing research and development of renewable energy and energy efficiency including: solar power, biofuels, vehicle technologies, energy efficient buildings, and advanced energy research.

Law Enforcement: In the absence of strong support for law enforcement, the current economic downturn threatens to increase violent crime throughout our nation. As cash-strapped states struggle with tight budgets, this legislation will help keep Americans safe by supporting the Community Oriented Policing Services, or COPS program and the Byrne Justice Assistance Grants, which help state and local law enforcement fight and prevent crime in communities across America.

Public Health and Safety: In the wake of disturbing incidents of compromised food safety that have jeopardized the health of our citizens, we have significantly increased investments for the Food and Drug Administration to strengthen the Food Safety and Inspection efforts. This bill will also protect the health and well-being of Americans by cleaning our air and water. It contains investments significantly above the former Administration's inadequate request for clean drinking water and wastewater, cleaning up hazardous waste and toxic sites, and for implementation of the clean air act.

Health Care: Millions of Americans are struggling to gain access to quality, affordable healthcare, particularly during these difficult economic times. This legislation will give scores of Americans better access to health care through state access health grants, and State High Risk Insurance Pools, and by supporting community health centers and rural health facilities.

Education: As our economy struggles to regain its footing, millions of Americans are understandably fearful that they will not be able to afford to pay for their children's college education. This bill provides \$1.9 billion to support Student Financial Aid programs including Perkins Loans and federal supplemental educational opportunity grants.

Mr. President, every day thousands of Americans are losing their jobs. Every day, state and local governments see increased demand and decreased resources. Every day, projects that could provide good jobs for working Americans are delayed or cancelled due to an inability to properly fund them.

The Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009 will provide resources, guidance and new initiatives at a time when they are desperately needed. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the passage of H.R. 1105.