

we as an economy, we as a country, are doing extremely well. We have to feel good. We have to have confidence in our economy, confidence in our Government. We can only do that by understanding that we need to work together in a bipartisan fashion to move the country along.

We can do that by, first of all, allowing up-or-down votes on the minimum wage, repeal of the gas tax, and if the majority leader wants to bring forward the TEAM Act, let us have a debate on that like we have done in the Senate for over 200 years.

NUCLEAR WASTE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I also say that my friend, my colleague from the State of Nevada, Senator BRYAN, is also going to address the Senate on a very important issue dealing with nuclear waste. I underscore and underline his statement and join with him in recognizing that we have some serious problems in transporting nuclear waste across this country. It can be avoided if we follow what, again, the President wants to do and not have the interim storage of nuclear waste.

Mr. DORGAN addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota [Mr. DORGAN] is recognized.

Mr. BRYAN. Mr. President, I wonder if my friend and colleague will yield for the purpose of a unanimous consent request.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BRYAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at the conclusion of the remarks of the distinguished Senator from North Dakota, that morning business be extended for a period of 10 minutes so I might be permitted to address the Senate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BRYAN. I thank my colleague, and I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized for 10 minutes.

NOT GRIDLOCK, BUT A GAG RULE

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, it has been kind of an interesting couple of days in the Senate, and I noticed in the newspaper this morning in the headlines the word "gridlock," which I am sure will please some in this Chamber, because yesterday they were trying to persuade the press to use the word "gridlock." They said what is happening in the Senate is gridlock.

What happened yesterday was quite interesting. Those who suggest this is gridlock in the Senate came to the floor of the Senate yesterday, offered a piece of legislation and then, prior to any debate beginning on that legislation, the same people who offered the

legislation filed a cloture motion to shut off debate that had not yet begun on a piece of legislation that had been offered only a minute before.

Someone who does not serve in the Senate or does not understand the Senate rules might scratch their head and say, "How on Earth could someone do that with a straight face? How could someone, without laughing out loud, offer a piece of legislation before debate begins, file cloture to shut off debate on a piece of legislation they have just now filed, and then claim that the other side is guilty of causing gridlock?"

Only in the Senate can that be done without someone laughing out loud at how preposterous that claim is.

This is not gridlock. It is more like a gag rule, where you bring a piece of legislation to the Senate because you control the Senate floor and you say, "Here's what we want to do, and, by the way, we're going to use parliamentary shenanigans to fill up the parliamentary tree so no one has an opportunity to offer any amendments of any kind, and then we are going to file a motion to shut off debate before you even get a chance to debate."

No, that is not gridlock, that is a gag rule. From a parliamentary standpoint, it can be done. It was not done when the Democrats were in control in the 103d Congress. We never did what is now being done on the floor of the Senate: filling the legislative tree completely and saying, "By the way, you have no opportunity, those of you who feel differently, to offer amendments."

But we will work through this, and we will get beyond this. I will say to those who claim it is gridlock, it is clear the Senate is not moving and the Senate is not acting, but at least the major part of that, it seems to me, is because we have people who decide that it is going to be their agenda or no agenda, and they insist on their agenda without debate, their agenda without amendments.

What we have are three proposals that have been ricocheting around the Chamber the last couple of days, and there is a very simple solution. We have a proposal called the minimum wage. Many of us feel there ought to be some kind of adjustment in the minimum wage. It has been 5 years. Those working at the bottom of the economic ladder have not had a 1-penny increase in their salaries. Many of us feel there ought to be some adjustment there.

The second issue is, the majority leader wants to cut or reduce the gas tax by 4.3 cents a gallon.

And the third issue is a labor issue called the TEAM Act.

The way to solve this, instead of linking them together in Byzantine or strange ways, is simply to bring all three measures to the floor one at a time, allow amendments to be offered and then have an up-or-down vote. This is not higher math; it is simple arithmetic. Bring the bills to the floor.

Our side has no interest, in my judgment, in filibustering on any of those

bills, at least not that I am aware of. I do not think we ought to filibuster any of those bills. Bring the bills to the floor, have a debate, entertain amendments, have a final vote, and the winner wins. That is not a very complicated approach. It is the approach that would solve this problem.

I listened carefully yesterday to a speech on the Senate floor that was essentially a campaign speech—hard, tough, direct. It was a Presidential campaign speech. You have a right to do that on the Senate floor. I do not think it advances the interests of helping the Senate do its business. I almost felt during part of that speech yesterday there should be bunting put up on the walls of the Senate, perhaps some balloons, maybe even a band to put all this in the proper perspective.

The Senate is not going to be able to do its work if it becomes for the next 6 months a political convention floor. I hope that we can talk through that in the coming days and decide the Senate is going to have to do its work. We have appropriations bills we have to pass. We have other things to do that are serious business items on the agenda of this country. I do not think that we can do this if the Senate becomes the floor of a political convention from now until November.

I want to speak just for a moment about the proposed reduction in the gasoline tax. Gasoline prices spiked up by 20 to 30 cents a gallon recently. When gasoline prices spiked up and people would drive to the gas pumps to fill up their car, they were pretty angry about that, wondering, "What has happened to gasoline prices?"

Instead of putting a hound dog on the trail of trying to figure out who did what and why, what happened to gas prices, immediately we had some people come to the floor of the Senate and say, "OK, gas prices spiked up 20, 30 cents a gallon. Let's cut the 4.3-cent gas tax put on there nearly 3 years ago."

I do not understand. I guess the same people, if they had a toothache, would get a haircut. I do not see the relationship. Gas prices are pushed up 20 to 30 cents so they are going to come and increase the Federal deficit by cutting a 4.3-cent gas tax.

I would like to see lower gas taxes as well, but I am not going to increase the Federal deficit. The Federal deficit has been cut in half in the last 3 years. Why? Because some of us had the courage to vote for spending decreases and, yes, revenue increases to cut the deficit in half.

The central question I have is this: If you cut the gas tax, who gets the money? There are a lot of pockets in America. There are small pockets, big pockets, high pockets, and low pockets. You know who has the big pockets and small pockets. The oil industry always had the big pockets. The driver has always had the small pockets.

Guess what? When you take a look at what is going to happen when you see

a gas tax reduction and have some people talk to the experts, here is what you find.

This is yesterday's paper: "Experts say gas tax cut wouldn't reach the pumps. Oil industry called unlikely to pass savings on to consumers."

Energy expert Philip Verleger says:

The Republican-sponsored solution to the current fuels problem . . . is nothing more and nothing less than a refiners' benefit bill. . . . It will transfer upwards of \$3 billion from the U.S. Treasury to the pockets of refiners and gasoline marketers.

The chairman of ARCO company says:

My concern is, quite frankly, how the public will react to what the Senate does.

He said:

Some Democrats have already said 'before we pass the gas tax, we want to make sure we see it at the pump.'

He said:

I'll tell you, market forces are going to outstrip the 4 cents a gallon. You're not going to be able to find a direct relationship between moving that and 4 cents. Then prices could go up, go down, could stay the same, and there you have the question of how the public is going to perceive that.

The majority leader's aides in the paper today said they had:

. . . received assurances from the oil companies that the full extent of any cut in the gas tax will be passed on to consumers.

However, officials at several major oil companies said yesterday that no such assurances had been or could be given.

"Even asking for them represented a mistaken return to direct government involvement in setting prices," several energy experts said. . . .

Bruce Tackett, a spokesman for Exxon Co. USA in Houston, said, "We have not made any commitments to anyone 'regarding a 'future' price. Not only have we not made a commitment, we can't. In a competitive market, the market will set the price."

An Amoco Corp. spokesperson said:

We've received no official request, and we haven't spoken to anyone about this.

Mobil Corp. said:

Mobil doesn't believe that a reduction in the tax will automatically mean a reduction in the pump price. . . . In the end, it will be the marketplace that sets the price at the pump.

The point is this gas tax reduction sounds like an interesting thing, but if you take \$3 billion out of the Federal Government and increase the deficit, which you will do—I think the so-called offset is a sham—but increase the Federal deficit, take \$3 billion, put it in the pockets of the oil industry and the drivers are still going up to the same pumps paying the same price for their gas, who is better off? The taxpayer? No. Is the Federal deficit better off? No, that is higher. The oil industry is better off.

I guess my hope is that we will decide for a change here in the U.S. Senate to do the right thing. The right thing, it seems to me, is for us to proceed on the agenda. Yes, the majority leader and the majority party have the majority, they have the right to proceed down the line on their agenda. We are 47

Members in the minority. We are not pieces of furniture. We are people that have an agenda we care deeply about. We also intend to exercise our right in the Senate to offer amendments and to try to affect the agenda of the Senate.

For those who say we have no right to offer amendments, that we will be thwarted in any attempt at all to offer our agenda, we say it will be an awfully long year because we intend to advance the issue of the minimum wage. The minimum wage ought to be adjusted. People at the top rung of the economic ladder have a 23-percent increase in the value of their salaries and their stock benefits last year; the people at the bottom of the economic ladder, those people out there working for minimum wage, have for 5 years not received a one-penny increase, and lost 50 cents of the value of their minimum wage. We are not asking to spike it way up. We are just asking for a reasonable, modest adjustment of the minimum wage. We ought to do that.

Gas tax, bring that to the debate. I do not intend to vote to reduce the gas tax. I would like to. I would like to see people pay less taxes in a range of areas, but I do not intend to vote to increase the Federal deficit. I have been one, along with others, who care and continue to ratchet that Federal deficit downward. I do not intend in any event to transfer money from the Federal Treasury, so the deficit increases, to the pockets of the oil industry, and leave drivers and taxpayers stranded high and dry.

The TEAM Act that has been introduced in the last day or so, bring that to the floor, entertain amendments, have a vote on that. That is the way the Senate ought to do its business. It is probably not the most politically adept way. It does not most easily advance an agenda of someone, but a way for the Senate to advance these issues, have a vote, and determine what the will of the Senate is.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. INHOFE). The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. BRYAN. I thank the Chair.

NUCLEAR WASTE

Mr. BRYAN. Mr. President, there has been, as my colleague from North Dakota has pointed out, a number of disappointments in terms of things that have reached the floor, and with the overhang of Presidential politics in this year. One of the most disturbing things to me is the power of special interests at work in this Congress and their effort to bring a piece of legislation to the floor, S. 1271, which we are told will reach the floor sometime in the next few weeks. That is the effort of a powerful lobby, well financed, very effective, the nuclear power lobby, to bring a proposal to locate an interim storage of high-level nuclear waste in my State of Nevada.

One can hardly open a newspaper or one of the many Capitol Hill news-

letters these days without seeing one of the nuclear power industry's many misleading, and in my view, intellectually dishonest advertisements urging Members of this body, of this Congress, to support S. 1271, which is the latest nuclear power industry's piece of legislation.

There are many things wrong with S. 1271, Mr. President. The obvious reason for my strong interest in the bill is an utter and complete disregard for the rights and interests of public health and safety of the men and women who I represent, my fellow Nevadans. Contrary to the wishes of the great majority of Nevadans—Democrats, Republicans, independents, those who choose no political affiliation—the overwhelming majority are strongly opposed to this so-called interim storage facility.

The problems with this legislation are more than a question of unfairness, which I will have occasion to speak to at some length during the debate on this issue. It is much more than unfairness, because most of the mistruths that are being spread about this legislation in the nuclear waste program in general affect not only my own State but many other States, as well.

First and foremost, I think it is important to emphasize that this piece of legislation is unnecessary. It is unnecessary. I have served in this body long enough to know that on many pieces of legislation, it is a very difficult balance. Some things that you like, some changes that you do not, there are some pluses and minuses. But always there should be at least some overriding necessity for that piece of legislation to be acted upon. In this instance, there is absolutely no need at all.

The scientific experts, experts independent of the nuclear power industry, independent of the environmental community, independent and in no way connected with my fellow constituents in Nevada, have concluded that there simply is no problem with leaving the high-level nuclear waste where it currently resides, and that is at the reactor sites. Most recently, the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, a Federal agency created by the Congress for the sole purpose of monitoring and commenting on the high-level nuclear waste program, that Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board recently stated, "There is no compelling technical or safety reason to move spent fuel to a centralized storage facility for the next few years."

Mr. President, that view has been endorsed by the Clinton administration as well because they can see through the transparency of the nuclear power industry's scare tactics. They have indicated that if this legislation should pass this Congress it will be vetoed.

Let me say for those who have watched this issue over the years, scare tactics have become the kind of conduct that we expect from the industry. More than a decade ago we were told