COMMENDING SENATOR LANDRIEU

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I wish to commend the able Senator from Louisiana, MARY LANDRIEU, for the excellent manner in which she rendered on this day, February 23, 1998, George Washington's Farewell Address to the people of the United States.

Incidentally, Washington did not publicly deliver this address. It is dated September 17, 1796, and it first appeared 4 days later in the Philadelphia Daily American Advertiser and then in papers around the country.

SCHEDULE

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, this morning, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 3 p.m. by previous consent. At 3 p.m. the Senate will begin debate on the campaign reform bill. As previously announced, no rollcall votes will occur during today's session of the Senate. However, Members should be prepared for votes during Tuesday's session of the Senate. Also, by previous consent, on Wednesday, February 25, at 11:30 a.m., the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the veto message to accompany H.R. 2631, the military construction appropriations bill, with 2 hours of debate in order and a vote occurring on the veto message upon the expiration or yielding back of that time. However, our former colleague, Senator Ribicoff, passed away, and it is my understanding that a few of our colleagues intend to attend his funeral on Wednesday morning in New York. Therefore, I now anticipate the vote with respect to the veto message to occur at approximately 3 p.m. We will notify all Members as to the votes on Wednesday, February 25, after consultation with the minority leader.

As Members are now aware, there are a number of important issues that we hope the Senate will be able to address prior to the Easter recess. Therefore, all Members' cooperation is appreciated on the scheduling of votes and floor action.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I now ask unanimous consent, notwithstanding the agreement of October 3, 1997, that no amendments be in order prior to the motion to table the McCain amendment.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business until the hour of 3 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for not to exceed 10 minutes.

Mr. BYRD addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia is recognized.

THE HIGHWAY BILL

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I have come to the floor today to reiterate the pressing need for early Senate action on S.1173, the highway bill, commonly referred to as ISTEA II. The federal-aid highway program expired on September 30, last year. In November, Congress passed a short-term extension of the program, but we included in that stop-gap measure a deadline for enacting a new highway bill this year. And I remind my colleagues, the deadline of May 1 is fast approaching. The clock is ticking; the calendar is running. After May 1, 1998, no state will be able to obligate any federal highway funds unless a new highway bill has been signed into law by that time.

So, Mr. President, at this point, there are exactly 40 session-days remaining—including today—until the clock strikes midnight on May 1 and every state's ability to obligate federal highway funds is suddenly and indefinitely cut off. The longer the Senate waits to take up the legislation, the more likely it is that the federal-aid highway program will lapse and road work in many states will slow to a trickle or come to an abrupt halt. Unlike past delays in reauthorizing the highway program, the obligation of highway funds will not go forward after that date, if there is not new authorizing legislation enacted by Congress in the meantime. Mr. President, that means that unlike those past reauthorizations of the highway program, this year it will come at the height of the construction season. As a result, construction workers are likely to be laid off, at a time of the year that many of them depend upon their largest paychecks to come in to help them and their families.

And these lay-offs will not be mere statistics, Mr. President. We are talking about the loss of real jobs for real people who have real families. There are thousands of road construction workers around the country whose jobs are in greater and greater risk each day that we delay action on the highway bill. We in the Congress have an obligation to those workers and their families, our constituents, to beat the May 1 deadline and prevent those lay-offs and work stoppages from occurring.

Let me describe just how important this highway legislation is for the construction industry. According to the most recent biennial report of the U.S. Department of Transportation on the condition and performance of the nation's highways, federal, state, and local governments combined invest approximately $39 billion annually in capital improvements to our roads and bridges. That is a lot of money. That is $39 for every minute since Jesus Christ was born. Federal funds account for 44% of that investment. That means, in little more than two months, almost half of all the funds spent on road construction in this country will dry up—disappear—and the results will be unfortunate for many who work in road construction and related industries. Construction laborers and employers, those who supply construction materials and equipment, thousands employed at engineering and design companies—these people and their families face an uncertain future because of the Congress' failure to act promptly on this very important highway bill.

Even now, the approaching May 1 deadline is having a disruptive impact on road construction in some states, and the disruptions will grow exponentially if the deadline comes and passes without enactment of a new highway bill. For instance, the state of Missouri has announced it will stop bid-lettings in April, Illinois and Ohio will follow suit on May 1, and the Tennessee Department of Transportation has told contractors that the state will delay all federally-funded highway projects beginning in March, when they will run out of available intrastate maintenance money. They will run out of resources from other Federal programs soon thereafter.

So the State of Missouri will let its last Federal contract in March. As I have already indicated, the State of Ohio will stop bid-letting on or around May 1, and the State of Illinois has reported that in the April-to-June timeframe it will be required to defer over one-quarter of a billion dollars in planned Federal projects.

As states announce delays in project bid-lettings, contractors know they will have more difficulty in finding work for their employees and making payments on their machinery and facilities. If Congress has not enacted a new highway bill by May 1, contractors across the country will have to begin laying off their employees as projects are completed. According to officials at the Associated General Contractors, most companies will not begin rehiring construction workers until at least a month after new legislation is enacted. Furthermore, companies will stop using their concrete, pipe, steel, cement, asphalt and guardrail suppliers and won't use them again until 45–60 days after new legislation becomes law.

In addition, if the federal highway program is left unfunded for a number of months, the employees of the construction companies will attempt to find employment elsewhere, I should think. They have to continue to put bread on that table for a wife and for children. If they are successful in gaining other employment, the construction companies will have to hire new employees, often requiring expensive and time-consuming job training.

If new federal highway funds are not available after May 1, much of the summer construction season will be gone. If there is no new highway bill until September, the entire fall construction season will be lost, and since winter road construction is nearly impossible in many of our northern tier states, construction and related industries in those states may be out of