jams need our help. They want their highway taxes used to get them out of gridlock, but we cannot do that while the Senate is stuck in legislative gridlock. I urge the majority leader to get the Senate—and the country—out of gridlock by calling up the highway bill now.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Monday, February 23, 1998, the Federal debt stood at $5,519,492,792,898.57 (Five trillion, five hundred nineteen billion, four hundred ninety-two million, seven hundred ninety-two thousand, eight hundred ninety-eight dollars and fifty-seven cents).

Five years ago, February 23, 1993, the Federal debt stood at $4,195,090,000,000 (Four trillion, one hundred ninety-five billion, ninety million).

Ten years ago, February 23, 1988, the Federal debt stood at $2,472,592,000,000 (Two trillion, four hundred seventy-two billion, five hundred ninety-two million).

Fifteen years ago, February 23, 1983, the Federal debt stood at $1,207,534,000,000 (One trillion, two hundred seven billion, five hundred thirty-four million).

Twenty-five years ago, February 23, 1973, the Federal debt stood at $452,993,000,000 (Four hundred fifty-two billion, nine hundred ninety-three million) which reflects a debt increase of more than $5 trillion—$5,066,499,792,898.57 (Five trillion, sixty-six billion, four hundred ninety-nine million, seven hundred ninety-two thousand, eight hundred ninety-eight dollars and fifty-seven cents) during the past 25 years.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I want to thank those who have participated thus far in this debate about campaign reform. I am sure that many of those who view C-SPAN with any regularity are experiencing a sense of deja vu about this debate, wondering whether or not we haven't already had debate very similar to this and whether we are not stuck in the same spot, whether we are ever going to stop talking about it and actually start moving toward some resolution. Today we are about to find out. This will give us the opportunity for the first time to vote this afternoon at 4 o'clock to indicate to the American people that, indeed, we have resolved to deal with the extraordinary problems that we have in campaign finance today. This is probably going to be our best chance in a generation for meaningful campaign reform, and a clear-cut vote is something that will allow us to move to that next step toward resolution. We do not need any procedural excuses, no amendment trees, no obfuscation. This will be clearly an up-or-down vote on the McCain-Feingold bill, through a tabling motion, that we have sought now for some time.

The vote on Senator MCCAIN's amendment answers the question, are you for reform or not? A vote against McCain-Feingold is a vote, in my view, to end reform, at least for this Congress, once again. I am very proud of the fact that each one of the members of the Democratic caucus will stand up and be counted. And my hope is that a number of Republicans will join us in this effort. The only question is how many Republicans and Democrats will come together in the middle to make this a reality this afternoon.

I believe the fate of campaign reform rests in the hands of those who have not yet publicly taken their positions with regard to campaign reform. It has been a generation since the last time we passed any meaningful legislation having to do with campaigns. In 1971 and in 1974, Congress enacted major reforms that first limited the amount of money in politics and, second, required candidates for the first time to disclose how they got their money. Today those laws are outdated and virtually useless, and some have been circumvented by new decisions and, as a result of those decisions, loopholes that have been created in the campaign finance law.

Other aspects of that reform effort in 1971 and 1974 today are unenforced or completely unenforceable because of the systematic defunding of the FEC, the Federal Election Commission. Still others have been overturned by narrow and, many believe, incorrect court decisions. Many reforms were thrown out by the Supreme Court in 1974 in the 5-to-4 ruling, a very controversial ruling, in Buckley v. Valeo.

So, for the last 23 years now, Democrats have tried to overcome obstacles put in place by the Buckley ruling and to pass a campaign finance reform modification, a realization that what happened in 1974, and what was addressed in that Court decision, needs to be addressed with clarification in statute.

So, consider the record of a decade, beginning in 1988. At the opening of the 100th Congress, then majority leader ROBERT BYRD introduced a bill to limit spending and reduce special interest influence. We had a record-setting eight cloture votes when that happened. Democratic sponsors modified the bill to meet objections, but the fact is that it was killed in a Republican filibuster.

In the Democratic-led 101st Congress, the House and the Senate passed campaign finance bills. President Bush threatened to veto the bill, effectively killing it, because it contained voluntary spending limits.

In the 102d Congress, also a Democratically-led Congress, again the House and Senate passed campaign finance reform bills and President Bush vetoed the bill with the backing of all of his Republican filibuster.

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In the 103d Congress, again under Democratic control, we passed a campaign finance reform bill with 95 percent of the Democrats in the Senate and 91 percent of the Democrats in the House voting for reform. Again, Republicans filibustered the move to take the bill to conference.

That brings us, then, to the 104th Congress, supposedly the reform Congress. Senators MCCAIN and FEINGOLD introduced their bipartisan reform plan, and reform at that point, for the first time in almost 2 decades, actually seemed to be within reach. Republicans, again, in the Senate, filibustered the measure, while Republicans in the House introduced a bill to allow more spending—a family of four would have been able to contribute $12.4 million in Federal election. The legislation again failed to produce results of any kind. As a result of that impasse, nothing was done for the remaining months of the 104th Congress, which now brings us to this Congress and last year.

In his State of the Union Message in January of 1997, President Clinton called on Congress to pass campaign finance reform by July 4, 1997. In the House, Republicans have voted time and again against bringing campaign finance reform to the floor. Speaker GINGRICH has promised consideration this year, but also shook hands with the President on a campaign reform commission that really never came to pass. Here in the Senate, we have traveled a tough road to get here today. We forced our way to the floor and refused to yield; poison pills, amendment trees and cloture votes were all tactics used, and this is probably the last opportunity we have to do something meaningful in the 105th Congress.

The problem is really one that can be described in one word: money. The amount of money, after two decades of delay, has skyrocketed. That is the fundamental problem. We hear talk in this debate about hard money and soft money, this money and that money. They are not the core of the problem. The core of the problem is that there is just too much money in politics, period. Total congressional campaign

spending in 1975 was $115 million; in 1985, $450 million; in 1995, $765 million. We are expected, for the first time in this cycle, to exceed $1 billion in election year spending, shattering every other record we have ever seen in politics in 220 years. A 73 percent increase over the previous Presidential cycle is anticipated in the year 2000. In other words, what we spend in 2000 on Presidential politics will exceed by 73 percent what we spent in 1996 on Presidential politics. To put that in perspective, wages rose 13 percent, college tuition rose 17 percent—politics has increased in spending 73 percent.

The average cost of winning a Senate seat in 1996 was $4.5 million. To raise that much money, a Senator has to raise approximately $14,000 a week every week for 6 years. Given the current political rate of inflation, by the year 2023, in just 25 years, it will cost $145 million to run for the U.S. Senate.

We have pages on the right and left, Republican and Democratic pages. I talk to them; I look at them; I encourage them to run for public office. But how can I tell them that I want them to run if in their lifetime they will be asking the question: How do I raise $145 million to have the position you have today, Senator DASCHLE? I can't answer that. I don't know the answer to that. And I am troubled by that. What happens if the U.S. Senate is only made up of those who have $145 million to spend? Is it a truly democratic legislative body if we lose the opportunity to bring in families who pay their bills and confront all of the many, many challenges that an American family faces today and has a real appreciation of the enormity of those challenges? If that vacuum, that void, is demonstrated cycle after cycle, year after year here in the Senate, what kind of decisions will this body actually make affecting those working families? If we don't have the broad representation anticipated by our Founding Fathers, do we then have the kind of democracy so anticipated? Mr. President, I don't think we do.

So, indeed, it is not a question of soft money or hard money; it's really a question of money. Do we tell our pages, we want you to be women and men in the U.S. Senate in your lifetime, but we also expect that sometime, if you choose to do so, in order to be successful you will have to raise $145 million? I hope not.

Obviously, this legislation is not going to solve that problem entirely, but it is going to give us an opportunity to deal with it more effectively. At the very least, what we ought to do is recognize that if we do not solve this problem, we are never going to be able to encourage effectively people getting into public life, people expecting to serve in public office.

The antipathy, the skepticism, is reflected in the polls taken of the American people these days. They understand the circumstances. They understand that it is not just a question of a Senator or a Congressman spending inordinate amounts of time and effort raising money. They understand that there is a problem that goes beyond whether or not a young person today, contemplating public office, can come up with $145 million. What they understand is that just the sheer effect of money is as important as the amount of money.

In the eyes of most Americans, the current system makes Congress appear to be for sale to the highest bidder. The recent Harris poll shows it very clearly. Mr. President, 85 percent of people think special interests have more influence than voters; 85 percent, almost 9 out of 10 Americans today, said if you put a special interest and a voter side by side, there is more likelihood that a Senator is going to listen to the special interest than he is to the voter. Three-quarters of voters think Congress is largely owned by special interests. Voter turnout has plummeted, public confidence in this institution has eroded, and democracy simply can't survive with the cynical atmosphere that exists today.

It is just amazing to me as I talk to world leaders who come from all parts of the world, who have not experienced democracy until just recently—they are from countries where they have not had a chance to vote; they are from countries where totalitarian regimes are the order of the day, where their whole lives were dictated by government in large measure that had everything to do with every facet of their lives. Now they have this new-found freedom, and, in an explosion of interest in democracy and the joy of participation, we are seeing record numbers of turnout, 80, 90 percent at the polls. They come from Eastern Europe, they come from Africa, they come from Asia, all expressing to us this profound joy that they now have democracy. But do you know what they say to us? They say, what is amazing to us is that when we look at your country, you have more freedom than we even have today and yet your participation in that freedom is the lowest of any country in the world. How is it that you can be so free and yet so callous towards that freedom, so unwilling to commit to prolonging that freedom, that democracy? And they worry out loud about how long our freedom can last if no one cares; how long will it be before we lose part or all of it because we don't care.

Mr. President, it is so critical that we restore trust and confidence in our democracy, that we recognize we are dealing here with a very, very fragile institution that will rise or fall based in large measure on whether or not we care enough to make participation in democracy a real aspect of this country's future.

So that is, in part, what this is about. Do we care enough? Are we prepared to take the responsibilities seriously that we hold as U.S. Senators to bring back participation, to allow the voters more confidence that we are listening to them and not the special interests, and to deal with the reality—the reality that I can't ask a young person today to come up with $145 million when he or she is my age and wants to run for the U.S. Senate?

We also have a serious problem with regard to the ads themselves and all that comes from spending this money. It is the amount of money, the perception of to whom we are indebted, but now we also have a problem with the virulent advertising that comes from it. I believe that negative advertising is the crack cocaine of politics. We are hooked on it because it works. We are hooked on it because we win elections using it. There is no accountability, no reporting; it is publicly not tied to any candidates. And I expect that in 1998 we are going to see a meltdown of the process, because we are going to see more virulent ads than we have ever seen in our lifetimes. The crack cocaine of politics will be at work again.

Negative ads from anonymous sources push candidates to the margins. Candidates become bit players in their own races. How many times have I heard candidates actually say, ''I couldn't keep track of who was on my side. I'd watch television and I'd hear my name used pro and con, and I didn't have anything to do with those ads. I am sitting like a man at a tennis match, watching both sides play it out.'' And the debate now is defined by who has the most money; that is how it is defined.

The solution to all of this is not going to be achieved today. There are those who look at all of this and contend that nothing is wrong. Some have argued that the system is not broken, that we actually need more money in politics. We believe the system is badly broken, and so do the American people.

They don't want to be subjected to this barrage of negative advertising that we know we are going to see again. They don't want to see the dumbing down of politics year after year, in spite of the fact that we see the creeping up of costs, the explosion in increases in costs.

So it brings us really to the issue of the day: McCain-Feingold. It does not cover all the critical components of reform, overall spending limits, but it lets us at least get off dead center. If it doesn't address the central problem, it does address several problems, including banning one very, very difficult aspect of campaign finance today—soft money; setting restrictions on independent expenditures; better disclosures so people have an idea of who is giving how much to which candidate and why; and it limits the ability of the superrich to buy political office.

So we are here and all 45 Democrats stand ready to pass it. We have made a lot of changes to pick up Republican support. We have dropped spending limits, we have dropped reduced TV rate, we have dropped PAC restrictions, we codified the so-called Beck decision having to do with labor contributions.

There is no more we can do, particularly since McCain-Feingold is the least we should do. We want to do more. If we were in the majority, we would fight to cap spending. The Valeo decision, as I said, was 5 to 4. Mr. President, 126 scholars have said spending limits are constitutional. But we simply can't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. We are confronted with a systemic problem, and we need a systemic solution. We have a chance to make some changes we plainly know are needed to restore some dignity and sanity to this process.

So much time and money in this Congress has been spent already to investigate perceived abuses in the 1996 election. There are cries of outrage, cries of shock and indignation. The American people are cynical because they don't think Congress is going to do anything about it. They believe that the politicians' self-interest will again override the public good. If, after all the hearings, all the press releases, all the statements, all the reports, all the votes, we do nothing, then frankly, Mr. President, that cynicism will be justified.

The American people get it. They know the system is broken. They know we have an opportunity to fix it, but they don't think we will. We should surprise them. We need sincere bipartisan efforts to clean up our own house. We need Republicans to join with Democrats to make that happen this afternoon.

People who think they can quietly kill this effort are wrong. One day, hopefully today, but one day we will succeed. We will not give up. But this is the time to do it. If we squander this opportunity, it will not go unnoticed. If we seize this moment, we can make history and do the right thing for those people who want to be a part of the process, for all Americans, for people who want once more to participate in our Federal elections system. This is our opportunity. Let's do it right. Let's do it this afternoon. I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the hour of 10:30 a.m. having arrived, morning business is closed.

PAYCHECK PROTECTION ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume consideration of S. 1663, the Paycheck Protection Act, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1663) to protect individuals from having their money involuntarily collected and used for politics by a corporation or labor organization.

The Senate resumed consideration of the bill.

Pending:

McCain amendment No. 1646, in the nature of a substitute.

Mr. MCCONNELL addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky is recognized.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I am sorry the Democratic leader has left the floor. I did want to make a couple of observations.

First, with regard to the Buckley case, it was 9 to 0 on the issue of spending is speech. Quoting that great conservative Thurgood Marshall:

One of the points on which all Members on the Court agree is that money is essential for effective communication in a political campaign.

This was an extraordinarily important Supreme Court decision. It wasn't 5 to 4 on any of the critical issues, and, as a matter of fact, Mr. President, the Court has had an opportunity over the last 22 years to revisit the Buckley case in various subcomponent parts and has consistently expanded the areas of permissible political speech.

I heard the Democratic leader saying all of this spending is getting out of control. Bear in mind that what he is saying is that all of this speaking is getting out of control. What he is suggesting, and our dear colleagues on the other side are suggesting, is we need to get somebody in charge of all this speech and, of course, it is the Government that they want to be in charge of all this speech. The courts are not going to allow that. They didn't allow it in the mid-seventies, they haven't allowed it any time they have revisited that issue since, they are not going to allow it now, and they are not going to allow it ever, because it is not the Government's business to tell citizens how much they get to speak in the American political process.

The suggestion was made that all this spending is out of control. I always say, how much is too much? I asked my colleague from Wisconsin during the debate last October, how much is too much? I could never get an answer. Maybe today we can get that answer. How much is too much?

In the 1996 campaign, the discussion was intense. Spending did go up, the stakes were big—big indeed. It was the future of the country—a Presidential election, control of Congress. But we only spent about what the public spent on bubble gum.

Looking at it another way, Mr. President, of all the commercials that were run in 1996, 1 percent of them were about politics. Speaking too much? By any objective standard, of course not. Of course not.

It is naive in the extreme to assume everybody in this country has an equal opportunity to speak. Dan Rather gets to speak more than I do and more than the Senator from New Hampshire does, as do Tom Brokaw and Larry King and the editorial page of the Washington Post. Maybe we ought to equalize their speech. I am saying this, of course, tongue in cheek. But you can make the argument, it is the same first amendment, the same right applies to all of us.

I wonder how they would feel if we said, ''OK, you are free to say what you want on the editorial page, but, henceforth, your circulation is limited to 5,000. We haven't told you what to say, but we think you are saying it to too many people, and so the Government has concluded that this is pollution.''

I heard the Democratic leader talking about all this polluting speech—I am not sure that is the exact word he used —all this negativity, all this hostility. Most of the negativity and hostility I see is on the editorial page of the American newspapers. Maybe we ought to suggest they can't do that in the last 60 days of the election.

There isn't a court in America that is going to uphold this bill. But the good news is they are not going to get it and have the chance to uphold it.

The Democratic leader said we wanted to quietly kill it. We are not quietly killing it, we are proudly killing it. We are not apologizing for killing this unconstitutional bill. We are grateful for the opportunity to defend the first amendment. No apologies will be made, not now, not tomorrow, not ever. The Government should not be put in charge of how much American citizens as individuals or as members of groups or as political candidates or as political parties may speak to the people of this country.

I heard the Democratic leader complain that candidates can't control the campaigns. Well, it is not theirs to control. Of course we don't like issue advocacy. Of course we don't like independent expenditures. But the Supreme Court has given no indication that the political candidates are entitled to control all of the discourse in the course of a campaign. I wish I could control the two major newspapers in my State that are always against what I am doing. It irritates me in the extreme, Mr. President. But I am not trying to introduce a bill around here to shut them up the last 60 days of an election.

The good news is there has been a whole line of court cases on this question of trying to control what is called ''issue advocacy''; that is, groups talking about issues at any time they want to, up to and including proximity to an election.

The FEC has been on a mission for the last few years to try to shut these folks up. They have lost virtually every single case in court. As a matter of fact, in the fourth circuit in a case about a year and a half ago, not only did the FEC lose again, but the court required that they pay the lawyer's fees for the group they were harassing. It was pretty clear, Mr. President, there is no authority to do this.

That is really where we are in this debate. The American people are not expecting us to take away their right to speak in the political process, and the Supreme Court has made it very, very clear. Let me say it again. They have said, unless you have the ability to amplify your voice, your speech is