

a \$7 tax break. That is what this debate comes down to.

I plead with the public, please let your Members know that at the very least you think these ideas ought to be raised for debate and discussion and we ought to have the right to decide in a democratic fashion whether or not their votes, representing your ideas, are going to be cast in favor of a tax break for a few or trying to do something with that \$1.6 billion that could affect the quality of public education in this country for years to come.

I urge you over this weekend, and I urge the media, to spend at least as much time between now and Monday venting this issue as we have on an issue that, frankly, has very little to do with the quality of life in this country. We need that kind of debate. We need the opportunity to cast some votes that offer real choices—real choices—about the educational priorities of this country.

#### CONNECTICUT'S NCAA TOURNAMENT WIN

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, on a happier note, I was up until about 12:30 this morning, along with some other people from the Nutmeg State. It was not Minnesota that we were facing on a wooden floor in Greensboro, NC, but it was a dogfight—Huskies versus Huskies, the University of Washington versus the University of Connecticut basketball team. I know none of these young people I see here today were up that late. They were studying very hard, if they were up that late.

The March Madness that we talked about last night watched Richard Hamilton, with zero time left on the clock, fade back and, over the outstretched arms of a 7-foot center from the University of Washington, hit a shot that was nothing but net.

I know I speak for all 3.5 million people in Connecticut when I say we are proud of our Connecticut Huskies and the job they did. If Senator HELMS and Senator FAIRCLOTH, my colleagues from North Carolina, were here, I would challenge them, because on Saturday we are going to beat that No. 1 team and go to the Final Four in San Antonio, TX.

Mr. President, I yield the floor. I see the distinguished Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished Senator. What is the business before the Senate, Mr. President?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is now in executive session. The pending business is the Resolution of Ratification to accompany the Protocols to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 and the accession of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

Mr. BYRD. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I may speak out of order as in legislative session.

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

#### ON SPRING

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, a great poet of the last century, William Wordsworth, wrote a famous piece of poetry which schoolchildren ought to memorize. They used to memorize it. It begins:

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle in the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay;  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

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For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

Wordsworth surely wrote those lines thinking, of course, of spring and perhaps of March, for again this March, the crisp brown leaves of winter are scattering before the blustery winds, and the daffodils are dancing in the breeze. And like those bright heralds of spring, I come to the floor today to celebrate today's vernal equinox, that celestial marker of winter's end and the beginning of perhaps the most blessed season of the earth's awakening. The dark, cold days of winter may now be safely said to be behind us and we may all begin to think optimistically about shedding our somber coats of wool, our bulky cocoon of hats, gloves, and scarves.

This winter has had more than the usual share of dreary, wet days in the Washington area. Locales more accustomed to winter and to winter's sun-tans have borne the psychic weight of day after day after day of unrelenting rain, of 3 months of steady downpour, floods, and mudslides. The mountains of my own West Virginia shouldered aside cold winds that left her ancient hollows heaped with snow—white, cold snow—that otherwise might have fallen on Washington, sheltering us in warmer air that caused flooding rains instead. There is hardly a spot in the nation that has escaped some abnormal weather occurrence, be it flood, freeze, gale, or tornado. I am sure that everyone joins me in welcoming the fading of El Niño's influence over the global weather patterns, but it will be a while before things return to normal. In the Senate, we have begun the recovery from winter's chilly wrath with the consideration of an emergency supplemental appropriations bill that will help to repair the worst of the nation's weather-spawned disasters.

But just when we begin to doubt that the sun will ever replace automobile headlights as the main source of illumination on our commutes to and from work, the morning brightens to reveal long skeins of Canada geese again filling the sky with their sweet music as

they wing their way back northward. The robins, returned to our lawns again, search out worms in the warming earth, and the bluebirds busy themselves with nest building.

I asked the robin, as he sprang  
From branch to branch and sweetly sang,  
What made his breast so round and red;  
Twas "looking at the sun," he said.

The forsythia joins the crocus and daffodils in painting watercolor washes of lavender and yellow across lawns and roadsides. Spring's pale buds are peeping out from under the somber skirts of winter, giving hope on every tree and bulb. The annual pageant of the cherry blossoms cannot be far behind.

Mr. President, I admit to being no great fan of winter. I had all of the snow—all of the snow that I ever cared for when I was a boy, walking through the hills and mountains and hollows of West Virginia. Neither I nor my little dog, Billy, truly enjoys making our round of the neighborhood in the cold and lonely evenings of winter. I do not like to travel on wet or icy roads, on days so gray that the dawn seems to fade seamlessly into dusk, when snow or sleet drives sideways into the windshield—no, I would rather be hibernating in a comfortable chair with a good book, thank you. Not the trash that one finds on the book stands at the airports, but a truly good book written by Emerson or Carlyle.

And the beauty of the winter landscape is for me too austere, all shades of gray, brown, white, and black, dull after the scarlet and bronze riot of the fall. Give me instead the cheerful chaos of spring, with its stained glass window of colors, its energy, and its great sense of purpose.

I asked the violets, sweet and blue,  
Sparkling in the morning dew,  
Whence came their colors, then so shy;  
They answered, "looking to the sky";

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I asked the thrush, whose silvery note  
Came like a song from angel's throat,  
Why he sang in the twilight dim;  
He answered, "looking up at Him."

So give me dew, instead of frost, on the grass in the morning, and thunderstorms instead of blizzards in the afternoons. And fill my evening sky with fireflies, not icy, twinkling stars. Let me feel the cool breeze from the West Virginia hills on my face while the sun warms my back, and let me listen to the cheerful cacophony of frogs while I spade up sweet garden soil in which I shall soon plant my tomatoes—my tomatoes—Big Boy or Better Boy or Beefsteak—whatever. I see our Presiding Officer, who comes from the hills and lakes of Minnesota, smiling. He, too, is thinking of spring.

Spring is a season for all the senses, a season savored all the more fully because it follows the season of greatest limits. Oh, give me the season so loved by poets, by Wordsworth.

Having begun with one great poet, perhaps it is only fitting that I close with another, whose life overlapped the

first. Robert Browning surely appreciated the mysteries and the joys of spring. As a poet must do if his works are to stand the test of time, he has distilled a deep feeling, the abiding joy and contentment in the Creator's handiwork, and decanted it in words of pure and simple beauty:

The year's at the spring,  
And day's at the morn,  
Morning's at seven;  
The hill-side's dew-pearled;  
The lark's on the wing;  
The snail's on the thorn:  
God's in his heaven—[and]  
All's right with the world!

The vernal equinox is at hand, Mr. President, tolling its celestial chime of spring. Oh, welcome, spring! What a difference it makes. At the thought of spring, again to the words of William Wordsworth, "And then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils."

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KYL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 5 minutes.

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

Mr. GRAMS. Thank you very much.

#### RECOGNITION OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURE WEEK

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon just briefly to recognize National Agriculture Week. It is no secret that America's farmers are the most productive in the world, and it is so appropriate that we take a few moments to recognize their many, many contributions.

Agriculture is traditionally viewed as small family farms producing for a regional market. Local grain elevators, shipping interests, processors, banks, and consumers are all vital components in meeting the demands of a continually changing domestic and world market.

From the grocery store in Minneapolis to the rural implement dealer, each of us has an interest in ensuring a vibrant agricultural economy. But the foundation remains the individual producer. These are families who rise each morning and labor into the night to provide each of us the food we eat. These independent-minded individuals are heavy on common sense, and they are not predisposed to taking short cuts or pat answers.

Without a doubt, some of the best advice I receive comes from the savvy business men and women who are commonly called "farmers."

I was raised on an old-fashioned dairy farm in rural Minnesota. I know firsthand the hard work and dedication that it takes to do a job that is often overlooked and unrecognized.

However, a farmer's responsibility goes far beyond producing a crop or making sure that the cows are milked. To ensure continued productivity, he also must be an environmental steward of the land that he cultivates. In many cases, this leads to lower fertilizer inputs and enhanced wildlife habitat.

Mr. President, the last few years have brought about some great changes in agriculture. The 1996 farm bill was a step, I believe, in the right direction, yet the job is not yet finished. If farmers are to produce for the marketplace, we must give them the tools they need to manage their operations.

This includes addressing such issues as regulatory reform, risk-management options, and Federal crop insurance reforms. By providing farmers with the flexibility to manage their own businesses, we are ensuring a better future for everyone.

In an effort to produce for changing markets, groups of farmers across Minnesota are exploring ways to enhance their income and productivity through value-added ventures and cooperative research agreements.

It is this spirit of innovation that should be encouraged and not stifled by the heavy hand of Government. These farmers are the leaders of tomorrow who will ensure a safe and steady food supply for America and the world well into the next century.

So in short, Mr. President, we owe all those involved in agriculture a debt of gratitude, and I am very proud to join my colleagues in recognizing the outstanding contributions of America's agricultural sector.

With that, Mr. President, I thank you and yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes each.

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

#### THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Thursday, March 19, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,537,630,079,097.83 (Five trillion, five hundred thirty-seven billion, six hundred thirty million, seventy-nine thou-

sand, ninety-seven hundred dollars and eighty-three cents).

One year ago, March 19, 1997, the federal debt stood at \$5,369,097,000,000 (Five trillion, three hundred sixty-nine billion, ninety-seven million).

Five years ago, March 19, 1993, the federal debt stood at \$4,216,608,000,000 (Four trillion, two hundred sixteen billion, six hundred eight million).

Twenty-five years ago, March 19, 1973, the federal debt stood at \$456,926,000,000 (Four hundred fifty-six billion, nine hundred twenty-six million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$5 trillion—\$5,080,604,079,097.83 (five trillion, eighty billion, six hundred and four million, seventy-nine thousand, ninety-seven dollars and eighty-three cents) during the past 25 years.

#### MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

#### EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting a treaty which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

#### MEASURES REFERRED

The following bill, previously received from the House of Representatives for the concurrence of the Senate, was read twice, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 2294. An act to make improvements in the operation and administration of the Federal courts, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

#### REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Mr. DOMENICI, from the Committee on the Budget, without amendment:

S. Con. Res. 86. An original concurrent resolution setting forth the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal years 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003 and revising the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 1998 (Rept. No. 105-170).

#### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second time by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. WYDEN (for himself and Mr. SMITH of Oregon):

S. 1807. A bill to transfer administrative jurisdiction over certain parcels of public domain land in Lake County, Oregon, to facilitate management of the land, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. REED (for himself, Mr. KENNEDY, and Mrs. MURRAY):

S. 1808. A bill to amend title XXVII of the Public Health Service Act and part 7 of subtitle B of title I of the Employee Retirement