and respectful and, above all, fair and just as we do this process.

TRITIUM PRODUCTION PROVISION IN THE STROM THURMOND NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 1999

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, on another subject, and the primary purpose of my being here this afternoon is to talk about the issue of tritium. It was a much debated issue in the Armed Services Committee bill.

I thank the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator STROM THURMOND, for his outstanding leadership, his commitment to this country and his dedication to America. He, at age 40, volunteered to fight—he was a judge—he forced his way into World War II, went off to Europe and volunteered on D-Day not just to land, he volunteered to get in one of the glider planes that they pulled up and let go and flew over the enemy lines and landed who knows where, in Belgium or somewhere near, to form commando groups to assist in the invasion effort.

Senator THURMOND recounted, when they asked him how rough the landing was, ''Well, I'll just say you didn't have to open the door, you could just walk out the side of the plane.'' It is kind of hard to land one of those things in hedgerows and who knows what else when they are coming down. He served his country.

I asked him, ''What happened after the surrender of Germany? Were you there all the way to the surrender, STROM?''

He said, ''Yes,'' he was there until the day of the surrender, and then he was put on a train and sent to the Pacific, but Japan surrendered before he reached the battlefront in the Pacific.

He is a true patriot and has done an outstanding job on this entire defense bill—the Strom Thurmond National Defense Authorization Act. I do appreciate his willingness to work with us as we endeavored to reach a compromise on the question of tritium.

There was a colloquy on the floor of this body yesterday between Senator WARNER, Senator KYL and Senator ROBERT SMITH. Due to Hurricane Georges ravaging my hometown of Mobile, AL, I was not able to be here. But I appreciate Senator WARNER's expressed concern for the people of our State during that colloquy. I would like to make a few comments, since I was not able to be here at that time.

First and foremost, tritium is an essential element for maintaining the safety, security and reliability of a national nuclear weapons stockpile. Without it, as Senator JON KYL alluded to yesterday, we place our ability to meet our stockpile needs under the START I treaty, by 2005, in a precarious situation.

Therefore, regardless of how passionate we may become in debating the merits of the options on this issue, let there be no doubt that the core of this discussion lies in the U.S. national interests. And we cannot compromise that issue. We cannot compromise the national security interests of the United States.

For the last several years, the Department of Energy has been pursuing a dual-track strategy in considering two technologies for tritium production: One is a commercial light water reactor and the other a proton accelerator. I firmly believe it was premature for the House of Representatives to engage in a political effort that would have eliminated one of those options; that is, the commercial light water reactor option.

I personally believe that the commercial light water reactor option would be the most cost-effective and is the most proven way to produce tritium. So, we will have that debate coming up next year. We will go into some detail about it.

But beyond my own personal belief in the commercial light water reactor option, I continue to be committed to the support of the role that the experts at the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense must have to select the best option. We have had a process that has been going on for 2 years to have them analyze the options and make a selection. I believe they are better suited to deal with these technological questions than are Members of the House and the Senate.

So I worked hard, along with Senator SHELBY and Congressman ROBERT ADERHOLT and BOB RILEY and BUD CRAMER, and other Senate and House colleagues with the Senate Armed Services Committee and the House National Security Committee on this issue.

We did what we could to raise the issue. We let everyone who would listen know we were making a mistake to allow the politics of the moment rule the day. The amendment to eliminate the commerical light water reactor option was never debated in the House, but was attached to a large defense bill, and boom, passed. There was no discussion or debate on a measure that interrupted and abrogated the almost 2 years of study on tritium production by the Department of Energy.

There has been a lot of discussion about it. We concluded, according to recent CBO studies—that the accelerator option would cost between $4 billion and $13 billion more than the commercial light water reactor. That is a lot of money. We do not have $4, $5, $6, $7 billion or more to waste on that process.

So we have not had the final decision. The Department of Energy is analyzing it. They need to be allowed to complete their analysis. And that is what I believe was achieved in this bill. The process was allowed to continue. It was delayed somewhat, but I do not think it was delayed too long. But the Department of Energy will make its decision. And next year I suppose we will make our decision in this body, and then in the other body, as to how tritium should be produced and in what process.

So I am pleased that we have reached this accord. Senator LOTT stated yesterday that ''we cannot afford to delay this program.'' I cannot agree more. And I hope this message is understood as we go forward to reaching a final solution on the production of tritium, an essential component for our nuclear arsenal.

In June, I entered a number of letters in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD on this issue. We had letters from the Secretary of Defense, Secretary Cohen, and from the then Secretary of Energy, Secretary Peña, and the White House—all expressing grave concern about a political decision on a scientific, technical and defense issue. And Senator CARL LEVIN, my good friend from Michigan, was very strong in resisting this effort that had begun in the House of Representatives. So we now find ourselves on the right path again.

Secretary Richardson needs to move forward deliberately and aggressively in selecting the proper option. The Department's implementation plan must be submitted early next year and should be carefully considered by this body, thoroughly debated and swiftly acted upon.

The majority leader, TRENT LOTT, and others have indicated they will be thoroughly engaged in the debate when it comes. This is the next and logical step in the tritium story. Its outcome will provide a roadmap to a future guarantee for our Nation's security. I plan to be engaged in that important debate. I encourage my colleagues to do so as well.

I thank the Chair.

NATIONAL SALVAGE MOTOR VEHICLE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT OF 1998

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of calendar No. 495, S. 852.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 852) to establish nationally uniform requirements regarding the titling and registration of salvage, nonrepairable, and rebuilt vehicles.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the immediate consideration of the bill?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill, which had been reported from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, with an amendment to strike all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''National Salvage Motor Vehicle Consumer Protection Act of 1997''.

SEC. 2. MOTOR VEHICLE TITLING AND DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS.

(a) AMENDMENT TO TITLE 49, UNITED STATES CODE.—Subtitle VI of title 49, United States