

the cost of fertilizer. All of this is directly linked to the cost of energy.

We can explore and debate future energy policy, but we have to be very honest in dealing with the reality of the challenge facing families today. That is why I am hoping—and I hope the Senator from Nevada agrees with me—that there can be an agreement very soon between the Democrats and Republicans to reorganize this Senate and to move forward.

There are so many issues of importance to this Nation that need to be addressed and addressed quickly. We have before us the whole issue of education. This bill was pending in the Senate before we took up the tax bill, and we will return to it. The sooner the Senate gets organized, the sooner we are in business under the new leadership of the majority leader, TOM DASCHLE, the sooner we can return to issues of education.

There has also been talk about issues involving a Patients' Bill of Rights. That is something which I have supported. It means when your doctor makes a decision for you and your good health, it will not be overruled by an insurance company. That seems pretty basic to me, but we need to pass legislation to make sure the health insurance companies and the HMOs do not go too far and make these medical decisions.

Energy is another issue. We want to work with the President and the White House. We should go to that issue. We should work on it. There are some important issues to be resolved. One of them is whether or not we should drill in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This is a piece of real estate in Alaska that is owned by the American people and which has been set aside to be maintained as a wilderness.

There are not many places on Earth that are set aside and maintained as a wilderness. Many of us think, particularly in this fragile ecosystem in Alaska, with the wildlife that is there—some of it is very rare, with species that are not found in other places—that for us to invade that territory to be drilling for oil and gas is to run the risk that we might disturb that balance, and, once having done that, we may face consequences which we cannot repair. The best of intentions of the Congress and the President notwithstanding, Mother Nature and God have decided how certain things will exist.

If we want to bring in the trucks and the pipelines and start drilling away for oil and gas, we should stop and ask the hard question: Is this really our best alternative to find fuel for America's future?

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, it is estimated, has 180 days' worth of energy for the United States. Mr. President, 180 days is, of course, almost 6 months, but that represents energy that is taken out of Alaska over a 10-year period. It means a very small part of our energy picture.

Even with drilling in this wilderness and running the risk of disturbing this ecosystem forever, we are still going to find ourselves dependent more than 50 percent on foreign oil and energy to sustain the United States. Many of us think that before we start drilling in wilderness areas such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, we should explore alternatives, including conservation.

I see another Senator on the floor. I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

The Senator from Wyoming.

SENATE AGENDA

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I want to talk about the direction the Senate has been taking. Certainly, we have many things to do. We have moved through a number of important issues—the budget and meaningful tax relief. We now move to education and energy.

I have to respond to the comments of the Senator from Illinois on energy and suggest this energy crisis did not just happen in the last 5 months. It is interesting to note that for the past 8 years we have not had an energy policy. We have let ourselves get into a position where we are totally dependent on OPEC and foreign production, and it has put us in this position.

It is also interesting to note that it may not always be a shortage of oil but that refining may have something to do with it. We have not built any new refineries over the last number of years, and the idea of accusing someone of causing the problem—we need to take a look at it.

We have many things to do, there is no question, but we need to deal with domestic production and we need to deal with the transportation of energy. We in Wyoming could produce energy for California if we had a way to get it there. We need refineries to refine gasoline. We need to get away from having to develop 15 types of gasoline. It is easy to get away from the facts and get off into blaming somebody for this behavior.

The Senate needs to move on to education. It has been on this issue for quite a long time. It has not moved. We have had a certain amount of obstruction. When there are still 300 amendments, it is a little hard to talk about wanting to move forward, but perhaps we will be able to do that.

I hope when we do, we take a long look at where we want to be in education. Too often, we get so involved with little issues that are either political or they have to do with one minute thing. The fact is, we do not have a clear vision of what the role of the Federal Government is in education, and we need to define that role.

In elementary and secondary education, the Federal Government provides about 7 percent of the funding. Why should they also provide all the rules and regulations that go with it?

That has been the position many have taken: If we are going to give them any money, then we have to tell them how to do it.

One of the arguments, of course, is how do we help support education, have a policy on education, but allow the differences that exist in the local education facilities.

What is needed in Chugwater, WY, is different from what is needed in Pittsburgh, PA. We have to allow flexibility for local school boards and States.

I hope to take a look at where we want to be and have a vision of where we are going. Of course, we want high-quality education. We want accountability for education. We have to have quality teachers. We need to have choices for families, whether it is charter schools or schools of choice as we have in my hometown. The public schools have a different approach to it. Parents can decide where they want to send their children. These are the items about which we have to have a vision instead of coming out every day and wrestling over something that has very little impact. Where do we want to be 10 years from now or 15 years from now with regard to education.

Our hope as we change leadership—and that is not the end of the world—is that we move to govern and we move to do the things for the American people that we want to see happen over time: Where do we want to be and what is our role in getting there, that we can measure; high standards; we have to have funding that works; increased flexibility for local control; provide options for students. Those ought to be our goals. We should state how we will get there.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the hour of 12:30 having arrived, the Senate will now stand in recess until the hour of 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:31 p.m., recessed until 2:16 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. INHOFE).

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. 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. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business until 3 p.m., with Senators speaking for up to 10 minutes each, and that the time be equally divided in the usual form.

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