

Mr. REID. Those bills have been reported out of committee?

Mr. FRIST. The military tax bill has been reported out. We have the Moscow treaty, which is very important, that we passed through the Foreign Relations Committee. We would like to address that as soon as possible. There are other pieces of legislation that are being looked at now. So we do have a number of items we can go to.

Mr. REID. One final question, Mr. President: What time do you expect the vote to be on Monday? We have people on our side, and I am sure on your side, who are interested in that.

Mr. FRIST. Approximately 5 o'clock.

Mr. REID. I would just say, if we could make that 5:15, it helps one of our Senators.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished assistant Democratic leader. I know that our Republican colleagues are hoping to adjourn shortly so they can accommodate their schedule. I want to respect that, but I know Senator BIDEN also wanted to come to the floor for some brief remarks with regard to North Korea, which is why I originally came to the floor.

I wish to comment for a moment and thank the distinguished Senator from Nevada for his comments on the Estrada nomination. I think it may arguably be the most serious of all nominations which has been presented to the Senate by this administration—the seriousness of knowing so little with so little information having been provided, and with so significant a level of intransigency with regard to a willingness to provide the information we seek. We have a constitutional obligation to advise and consent.

For the life of me, I don't understand how anybody could be called upon to vote on the qualifications of this or any other individual with so little information provided, and with the arrogance demonstrated by this nominee and in this case by the administration with regard to our right to that information.

I am very troubled. I know when you look at the array of Hispanic organizations that have now publicly declared their opposition to a Hispanic nominee, you get some appreciation of the depth of feeling about this issue, about this candidate, about his qualifications, and about the stakes as we consider filling a position in the second highest court in the land.

I will have a lot more to say about this next week.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now return to legislative session and proceed to a period for morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. DASCHLE. Reserving the right to object, I know Senator BIDEN had hoped to be heard.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, if the Democratic leader will hold it for just one second, we will allow plenty of opportunity. Be thinking of the time that you need.

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

THE ONGOING CRISIS IN NORTH KOREA

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I commend the Secretary of State for the strong presentation to the United Nations Security Council that he made yesterday. He confirmed what many of us already knew—that Saddam Hussein is a threat who has, once again, failed to live up to his commitments to the international community.

And he did it at a place many of us had been pressing him and the administration to do it—at the United Nations.

I hope that President Bush will use Secretary Powell's presentation to build a broad international coalition to confront Iraq. Our national security is better served if he does.

But, as the world's attention was focused on Secretary Powell and his presentation, an even more ominous development regarding weapons of mass destruction was taking place in North Korea.

Yesterday, North Korea announced that it had flipped the switch and restarted a power plant that can be used to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

This is but the latest in a series of aggressive steps North Korea has taken to kick into gear its programs to develop weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them—steps that our intelligence community believes indicate that Iraq is months, if not years, away from being able to take.

At the U.N., Colin Powell talked about the potential that Iraq may build a missile that could travel 1,200 kilometers. In 1998, North Korea fired a multi-stage rocket over Japan, proving they are capable of hitting one of America's closest allies—and soon, America itself.

In November 2001, intelligence analysts presented a report to senior administration officials that concluded North Korea had begun construction of a plant to enrich uranium for use in nuclear weapons.

In October 2002, North Korea informed visiting U.S. officials that it had a covert nuclear weapons program.

In December 2002, North Korea turned off cameras that were being used to ensure that 8,000 spent nuclear fuel rods were not being converted into weapons-grade material.

Days later, North Korea kicked out an international team of weapons inspectors.

And, within the past week, the administration confirmed that North Korea has begun moving these fuel rods to an undisclosed location.

On Tuesday, former Assistant Secretary of Defense and Korea expert Ashton Carter called these events “a huge foreign policy defeat for the United States and a setback for decades of U.S. non-proliferation policy.”

He is right. But it is potentially even worse. North Korea could have six to eight additional nuclear weapons before autumn.

And we know, when it comes to nuclear weapons—it only takes one. Remember, everything North Korea makes, North Korea sells.

Those scuds we intercepted on a ship to Yemen—and then inexplicably returned—weren't a gift. They were an example of business as usual from what even this administration has acknowledged is the world's worst proliferator.

As alarming as this information is, the administration's reaction is even more troubling. The President said in the State of the Union:

the gravest danger in the war on terror . . . is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

As the chronology of events I detailed above indicates, the administration knew about North Korea's plans on enriching uranium as early as November 2001, and yet it has said little, and done less, to stop these plans.

We have heard the administration—through leaks in the press from unnamed sources—suggest that we cannot focus on North Korea because it will distract attention from Iraq.

And we have even heard—and this is on the record—that some in the administration believe that North Korea's expansion of its nuclear arsenal is not even necessarily a problem.

Proliferators with nuclear weapons are a problem—a serious one. And our attention should be focused on all the threats we face. It is well past time that the administration develop a clear policy on North Korea.

Earlier this week, an administration official testified before the Senate that we will have to talk directly to the North Koreans. But he went on to say that the administration had not reached out to the North Koreans to schedule talks and did not know when that might happen.

In the State of the Union, the President stated that the United States is “working with the countries of the region . . . to find a peaceful solution.” All indications, however, suggest that the countries in the region appear to be taking a course directly at odds with the administration's latest pronouncements.

North Korea is a grave threat that seems to grow with each day that passes without high-level U.S. engagement. It is one the President must redouble his efforts to confront.

The President should stop downplaying this threat, start paying more attention to it, and immediately engage the North Koreans in direct talks.

Secretary Powell was very effective in outlining the threats Iraq poses. But