

SENATE—Monday, March 27, 2000

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. THURMOND).

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain, Bishop David R. Brown, Chaplain of the American Legion, offered the following prayer:

O God of our hearts, we thank You for the fullness of joy which has come to us from serving You and has made itself apparent in the growth of this great country. We ask for Your unwavering blessings that we may rediscover and strengthen the faith in ourselves, the faith in each other, the faith in the process, and the faith in You that we may live our motto "In God We Trust."

O God of hope, grant wisdom and guidance to these men and women who have been placed in positions of trust by their peers. Lead them, O Beloved, so that the desire in each of our hearts for justice and equality will resound as a clarion call throughout this hallowed Senate Chamber. We ask that Your all-encompassing love and forgiveness make equal the voice of the power broker and the most humble citizen; make equal the voice of every citizen regardless of race, creed, or gender.

Beloved, help us to renew our faith and trust in those deeply felt spiritual and reasonable truths of our forefathers that all men and women are created equal. They proposed a theory. We ask You for the strength of heart and will to give it life throughout this land of ours so that we might shine as a beacon of hope and equality, of faith and trust, for the rest of Your creation. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable CRAIG THOMAS, a Senator from the State of Wyoming, led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The able Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, today the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 1:30, with Senators DURBIN and THOMAS in control of the time. Following the morning business period, the Senate will begin consider-

ation of S. Res. 14 regarding the desecration of the flag. Under a previous agreement, amendments by Senators MCCONNELL and HOLLINGS will be debated throughout the day.

As previously announced, there will be no rollcall votes today, with any votes ordered in relation to the flag desecration measure scheduled to occur on Tuesday at 2:15 p.m. Any Senators interested in debating this important measure should be prepared to do so today or early tomorrow.

I thank my colleagues for their attention.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2284 AND S. 2285

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I understand there are two bills at the desk due for their second reading.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the bills by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2284) to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

A bill (S. 2285) instituting a Federal fuels tax holiday.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I object to further proceedings on these bills at this time.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the rules, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. THOMAS. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The able Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is my understanding that you have or will shortly call us into a period of morning business.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THOMAS). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business not to extend beyond the hour of 1:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for not exceeding 10 minutes each.

Under the previous order, the Senator from Illinois, Mr. DURBIN, or his designee, will be in control of the first 45 minutes.

TOM FEREBEE SAW HIS DUTY AND HE DID IT AT HIROSHIMA

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, when a remarkable North Carolina native died on March 16, a more perfect world would have dictated that his death be given far more attention than it received, attention that would have invoked memories of a distinguished, decorated war veteran; a career Air Force officer; and a conscientious, hard-working real estate agent; and most importantly, it would have kindled memories of a kind, gentle grandfather who enjoyed bass fishing and tending to his beloved roses.

But, when death came to Thomas Wilson Ferebee, some of the media mentioned these fine personal qualities only in passing, but many others will remember Tom Ferebee's carrying out his awesome, solemn responsibility as lead bombardier on the *Enola Gay*. It was he, on duty that fateful day when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, helping to bring, finally, an end to the costly, destructive, most terrible conflict that history records as World War II.

The decision to use the atomic bomb was an extraordinarily difficult one. And, too often, revisionist historians have tried to rewrite the lessons of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with unjustified suggestions that Harry Truman's decision to use the bomb to end the war was immoral.

What would have been immoral, of course, would have been to force the world into a further, protracted, bloody struggle when the means were available to end it—with, in the end, less suffering, destruction, and killing.

The weight of that decision was placed on the shoulders of the crew of the *Enola Gay*, among whom was a farm boy from Davie County, NC. In nearby Mocksville, where Tom Ferebee went to school, nobody could have predicted that this four-sport star of baseball, football, basketball, and track would be remembered one day around the world.

Throughout his later years, Tom Ferebee was often questioned about his *Enola Gay* role. One journalist after another with their minds made up in advance tried to press Tom Ferebee to admit guilt about his role—which Tom Ferebee rejected, saying, for example in 1995:

I'm sorry an awful lot of people died from that bomb, and I hate that something like that had to happen to end the war. But it was war, and we had to do something to end it.

None of us who were on the *Enola Gay* ever lost a minute's sleep over it. In fact, I sleep

better because I feel a large part of the peace we have had in the last 50 years was what we brought about. If we hadn't forced the surrender, there would have had to be a land invasion of Japan and the estimates are that a million Americans and as many Japanese would have died in it.

Which is absolutely correct. The fact is, Mr. President, that Tom Ferebee and his comrades deserve better than to be symbols of phony guilt resulting from an absolute necessity of war. Tom Ferebee knew—as we do—that he did the right thing by carrying out his mission.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

THE BUDGET

Mr. REID. Mr. President, last year we spent a great deal of time talking about whether or not we should have an \$800 billion tax cut. We spent an inordinate amount of time working on that. The minority, the Democrats, thought we should not do that, that it was too much; that instead of having this large tax cut, we should have some targeted tax cut, much, much, much smaller. This debate went on for months. The sad part about it is, when we came to the appropriations bills, the 13 appropriations bills, suddenly there was no money. Even though there had been \$800 billion set aside, supposedly for tax cuts, there was no money to take care of the expenses that were necessary in the funding of this country.

Day after day we were talked to—some say talked down to—by our friends on the other side of the aisle, that the economy would come to a grinding halt if we did not pass this \$800 billion tax bill. Of course, that has not happened. Not only did the minority not buy the plan of the majority, but the American people did not buy the plan. In any poll taken, the American people decided there were more important priorities.

What were those priorities?

Education—when you have 3,000 children dropping out of high school every day, you would think that would be a priority.

Social Security is a priority. We have to make sure in the outyears Social Security is as good to people as it is today. Social Security is going to be doing just fine until the year 2035, maybe 2036. But after that period of time, people will only be able to draw 75 percent or 80 percent of their benefits. We need to make sure after that time they can draw all their benefits.

We have to make sure Medicare is taken care of, that we do something on this program that has been in existence for 35 years to take care of people who need prescription drugs; that is, all seniors. The average senior over age 65 fills 18 prescriptions a year. So we have

to make sure Medicare, a very important program that has done a great deal to help the American senior population, that has allowed them to live longer and live more productive lives—we have to make sure that as a component of that there are some benefits for prescription drugs.

We have to make sure the debt is paid down. During the Bush-Reagan years, we accumulated a huge debt of some \$5 trillion. It is time we started paying down that debt. We are not going to have the rosy economic scenario we now have forever. We are in the longest economic growth period in the history of this country. We are now in the 108th or 109th month, but that does not mean it will go on forever. It will not. I hope when the economic downturn comes, we will have paid down that debt and not have voted for irresponsible tax cuts.

It is interesting that the demagoguery and rhetoric has not stopped. It is at full blast—again, talking about tax cuts. Governor George W. Bush has recently proposed tax cuts which would add up to \$1 trillion over 10 years. House Majority Whip DELAY from Texas—Congressman DELAY—last week, when asked about this, said let's do that and even more. He wants even larger tax cuts than George W. Bush has called for. I think there could be no better example of ignoring the wishes of the American people and ignoring what the economy needs.

As justification for this \$1 trillion worth of tax cuts over programs such as saving Social Security, doing something about education, Medicare, and of course doing something about the national debt, the Governor and others in the majority continually point to the overwhelming tax burden on the American people. I imagine there were a few people around America this past Sunday wondering why have we been talking about that after reading newspapers all over America.

A column in the Washington Post from the front page reads: "Federal Tax Level Falls for Most; Studies Show Burden Now Less Than 10%."

This was not a partisan poll put out by the Democrats or some liberal think tank. This information is from a series of studies by liberal and conservative tax experts. It shows that taxes are at their lowest point in more than 40 years; Federal income taxes are at their lowest point in more than 40 years.

I ask unanimous consent the article that appeared in the Washington Post and other newspapers around the country be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Washington Post, March 26, 2000]

FEDERAL TAX LEVEL FALLS FOR MOST;
STUDIES SHOW BURDEN NOW LESS THAN 10%
(By Glenn Kessler)

For all but the wealthiest Americans, the federal income tax burden has shrunk to the lowest level in four decades, according to a series of studies by liberal and conservative tax experts, the Clinton administration and two arms of the Republican-controlled Congress.

Each of the studies slices the data in different ways, but the bottom line is the same: Most Americans this year will have to fork over less than 10 percent of their income to the federal government when they file federal income taxes.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates the middle fifth of American families, with an average income of \$39,100, paid 5.4 percent in income tax in 1999, compared with 8.3 percent in 1981. The Treasury Department estimates a four-person family, with the median income of \$54,900, paid 7.46 percent of that in income tax, the lowest since 1965. And the conservative Tax Foundation figures that the median two-earner family, making \$68,605, paid 8.8 percent in 1998, about the same as 1955.

Federal income taxes are so low for so many Americans that it is little wonder many voters place tax cuts near the bottom of their priorities in many opinion polls.

"It's a shocker," said Bill Ahern, spokesman of the Tax Foundation, of the group's calculation that families paid just 8.8 percent of their income in federal tax. Low federal taxes make it harder to make a case for tax cuts, he added. "With the lower- to middle-income taxpayers paying so little . . . there won't be pressure" for change.

George Velasquez agrees. "I don't have any complaints on the federal side," said the 29-year-old network engineer as he left an H&R Block office in Falls Church last week. Velasquez, who says he makes about \$50,000, said he got hit with unexpected state taxes when he moved recently, but thinks his federal taxes are fair.

The low effective rates are the result of years of tinkering with the tax code by Congress and various administrations—rates were cut in the 1980s, millions of Americans were removed from the tax rolls in 1990s by an expansion of a tax credit for the working poor, and a bevy of tax credits for children and education was added in 1997. More than one-third of eligible taxpayers pay no income taxes, according to the congressional Joint Committee on Taxation.

These effective tax rates don't include payroll taxes to fund Social Security and Medicare, which have risen since the 1970s, now taking on average about 9 percent of income, the CBO says. Most Americans, however, now receive far more in benefits after retirement than they paid while working. Federal excise taxes for such items as alcohol, gasoline and cigarettes—on average 1 percent of income—also aren't included; neither are state and local taxes.

But federal income taxes are a key point of contention between Texas Gov. George W. Bush and Vice President Gore in the presidential race. Bush has proposed a tax cut estimated to cost from \$1.1 trillion to \$1.7 trillion over 10 years as the centerpiece of his economic plan, much of it aimed at cutting tax rates for all taxpayers.

Gore has countered with what is now \$350 billion in tax cuts targeted at middle-income Americans. The size of Gore's package has grown in recent months as the vice president has added tax breaks aimed at what a