SENATE—*Thursday, March 30, 2000*

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. THURMOND).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, offered the following prayer:

Blessed Father, thank You for motivating millions of Americans to pray for the women and men of this Senate and all of us who are privileged to work with them. Around the clock, prayers of intercession are prayed for the work of this Senate. Help us to remember that You are seeking to answer those prayers as the Senators are offered Your wisdom and guidance. Your mighty power is impinging on them as a result of people's prayers. An unlimited supply of supernatural strength and vision from You is ready to be released because of the faithful intercession of Your people. Grant the Senators a sense of awe and wonder and humility by realizing that their creativity comes from Your Spirit as a result of the prayers of the American people.

Help us to be ready to pray for each other here in the Senate family. We renew our commitment to pray not only for those with whom we agree, but also for those with whom we disagree, our political adversaries and those who test our patience. Bind us together as prayer partners as we deal with the diversity of ideas, for You are our Lord and Savior. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable MIKE CRAPO, a Senator from the State of Idaho, 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, I understand the Democrat leader has a statement to make. Let me just say to our colleagues, we are going to take up the bill providing loan guarantees to those who would develop the technology and make the investments to bring local television to rural America. We expect there to be opening statements this morning. Let me say, since there is no one here on the other side to debate the issue, I intend at some point to ask unanimous consent that we might have an hour or so for opening statements and then I might be recognized to offer an amendment at that point. If there is an objection to that, then I will go ahead and offer an amendment at the conclusion of my statement.

Let me say we should have votes throughout the day. We are confident we will finish this bill today—or we hope to.

Following the disposition of this bill, there will be a cloture vote on the motion to proceed to the gasoline tax legislation. After the cloture vote, the Senate will begin a period of morning business with statements expected by Senator BROWNBACK on the marriage penalty.

I thank our colleagues for their attention.

Mr. President, before I go into a discussion of the bill, I ask unanimous consent I might yield to the Democrat leader to make a statement on his leadership time, and then that I might be recognized to make the initial opening statement.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, while the two managers of the bill are on the floor, the Senator from Texas asked that there be an hour for opening statements. The Senator from Maryland, the manager on the minority side, thinks that is a good idea.

Mr. GRAMM. Mr. President, that being the case, let me ask unanimous consent, following the comments of the acting Democrat leader, that there be an hour equally divided for opening statements and that at the conclusion of that hour I be recognized to offer an amendment.

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

GAS TAX REPEAL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I want to take a little while this morning to lay the foundation for a vote we will be taking later today. There is going to be a limited amount of time to talk about the cloture vote on the gas tax repeal.

No one is happy about the cost of gasoline in America today. It is something of which we are all aware, especially those of us on the west coast. In the State of Nevada, there are places where gas can cost more than $2 a gallon. In California, that is the rule rather than the exception.

However, what the majority is attempting to do today, in moving this legislation forward, is something that should not take place. The bill was placed on the calendar under what we call rule XIV. That means it is acted on in an expedited fashion. It goes right here. It has not had a single hearing in the Finance Committee, the committee of jurisdiction. There is no companion bill that has passed the House. If this bill is passed by this body, only two things can happen: No. 1, it will lie here on the desk indefinitely; or, No. 2, it can be sent to the House where it will be automatically blue slipped, meaning that the bill is dead. So it is quite clear the repeal of the gas tax is nothing more than an effort to make a political statement, and I think the political statement is not appropriate.

If the majority is serious about this matter, it should call up, for example, the House-passed tax bill. There is one there, H.R. 3081, dealing with minimum wage and various other tax matters.

I do not believe there is anyone in this body who does not want a tax decrease on fuel. But this is not the way to go about it. Let's keep in mind where we are. OPEC has agreed to produce more oil. In addition to that, there are other nations, such as Mexico and Norway, that have agreed to produce more oil. It is going to take some time before these gas prices go down, but they will.

To show how really frail in logic the majority is on this matter, they recognize it should be just a short-term fix. That is, by the end of the year a certain mechanical thing would happen that would reestablish the tax. Remember, we are talking about a tax of 4.3 cents per gallon. So I think the action by the majority leader is wrong.

There are a lot of things we can do, I think, to meet some of the demands for fuel we have in this country. For example, there are 300,000 barrels of oil every day produced in our country, in Alaska, that are shipped to Asia. Should that oil not be shipped to the United States? Obviously, the answer is yes.

There is also every reason to believe there are things we can do to lessen our dependency on this foreign oil. We could develop alternative fuels. I think we could improve the efficiency of energy use through different economy measures. One of the things we have

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

not done for many years is advance and enhance fuel efficiency standards, what we call CAFE. Given the modern technology that we have, there is no reason in the world we cannot produce automobiles in America that are more fuel efficient. We did it once before, and it was tremendous. It was unheard of, that cars would get over 20 miles to the gallon of gasoline, but we were able to do that through modern technology.

We need to promote renewable energy. In what ways? Geothermal, solar, wind. As soon as the energy crisis was over, it seemed we backed off from that as a government. We fight every year in this Senate Chamber. Every year, there is a battle. I am the ranking member of the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee on Appropriations. Senator DOMENICI, from New Mexico, is the chairman. We have an ongoing battle in here every year, trying to get more money for alternative energy programs—geothermal, solar, wind.

There are other things that simply need to be done that are not being done. Reducing the price of fuel by 4.3 cents a gallon for part of a year is not the solution to the problem.

It is important that we recognize some of the things that are being written around the country. There are lots of things being written about how foolish it would be to reduce the price of gas for part of the year by 4.3 cents a gallon, especially when one keeps in mind the tremendous infrastructure needs in this country.

Take, for instance, the State of Nevada. I hope to travel to Nevada tomorrow to be part of a very large celebration. That celebration will deal with cutting a ribbon to open a highway project, the largest public works project in the history of the State of Nevada, except for Hoover Dam and a few other programs. Certainly, without question, it is the largest public works project that relates to highways. This one thing we call the spaghetti bowl cost $100 million.

Those moneys came from this tax. When the American consumer goes to the fuel pump and buys gasoline, there is money taken every time, about 18 cents a gallon, and put into a trust fund. That money can be used for the construction of roads, bridges, highways. That is why I am able to go to Las Vegas tomorrow and cut the ribbon on this project. It will alleviate traffic problems significantly in that area.

These programs take place all over America, and if we cut this program, if we eliminate this 4.3-cents-a-gallon gasoline tax, it will mean we will not have approximately $6 billion a year for construction projects around the country.

That is why there is a bipartisan effort to defeat this foolish proposal to take away this tax.

I was here yesterday afternoon when Senator WARNER of Virginia, who serves, and has served for many years, on the Environment and Public Works Committee and is one of the senior members of that committee, said it is not the right thing to do. Sitting in the position of Presiding Officer yesterday was Senator VOINOVICH of Ohio. He was relieved of his duties as Presiding Officer and came down and gave a speech as to why this should not be done.

I hope we will look at this and realize that papers all over America, not the least of which is the New York Times, talks about the ''Gasoline Tax Follies.'' This means it is simply a foolish thing to do.

Quoting from the New York Times:

> Let's start with why the oil cartel should love this proposal.
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> Put yourself in the position of an OPEC minister: What sets the limits to how high you want to push oil prices? The answer is that you are afraid that too high a price will lead people to use less gasoline, heating oil and so on. Suppose, however, that you can count on the U.S. Government to reduce gasoline taxes whenever the price of crude oil rises. Then Americans are less likely to reduce their oil consumption if you conspire to drive prices up—which makes such a conspiracy a considerably more attractive proposition.

They go on to say:

> A cynic might suggest that that is the point.

They are being critical in this article, among other things, about Gov. George W. Bush pushing for repeal of this gas tax. In fact, they say, as others say, it appears his solution to all the problems in America today is tax reduction. For example, we know he wants over a $1 trillion tax cut over the next few years. The American people do not accept this. Why? Because they think it is more important that we have targeted tax cuts and we also spend these moneys, if we have extra moneys, to do something about education, to fix the prescription drug problem we have with Medicare, make sure we bolster Social Security, and, most important, that we do something to reduce the $5 trillion debt that has accumulated.

This New York Times article goes on to state:

> A cynic might suggest that that is the point. But I'd rather think that Mr. Bush isn't deliberately trying to throw his friends in the oil industry a few extra billions; I prefer to believe that the candidate, or whichever adviser decided to make gasoline taxes an issue, was playing a political rather than a financial game. . . .
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> This is one case in which a tax cut would lead directly to cutbacks in a necessary and popular government service.

I hope the Senate, in a bipartisan fashion, will resoundingly defeat this effort to roll back this 4.3-cents-a-gallon gas tax. There are other places we can look to move taxes back or adjust taxes. Certainly, this is not one of those places. We need to do better than this.

I repeat, I hope in a bipartisan fashion this afternoon we will defeat the motion to invoke cloture on the repeal of the 4.3-cents-a-gallon gas tax.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2314 AND S. 2323

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bills by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

> A bill (S. 2314) for the relief of Elian Gonzalez.
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> A bill (S. 2323) to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to clarify the treatment of stock options under the Act.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bills will be placed on the calendar.

LAUNCHING OUR COMMUNITIES' ACCESS TO LOCAL TELEVISION ACT OF 2000

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now proceed to the consideration of S. 2097, which the clerk will report by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

> A bill (S. 2097) to authorize loan guarantees in order to facilitate access to local television broadcast signals in unserved areas, and for other purposes.

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill which had been reported from the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, with an amendment to strike all after the enacting clause and insert in lieu thereof the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Launching Our Communities' Access to Local Television Act of 2000''.

SEC. 2. PURPOSE.

The purpose of this Act is to facilitate access, on a technologically neutral basis and by December 31, 2006, to signals of local television stations for households located in unserved areas and underserved areas.

SEC. 3. LOCAL TELEVISION LOAN GUARANTEE BOARD.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established the LOCAL Television Loan Guarantee Board (in this Act referred to as the ''Board'').

(b) MEMBERS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to paragraph (2), the Board shall consist of the following members:

(A) The Secretary of the Treasury, or the designee of the Secretary.

(B) The Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, or the designee of the Chairman.

(C) The Secretary of Agriculture, or the designee of the Secretary.

(2) REQUIREMENT AS TO DESIGNEES.—An individual may not be designated a member of the Board under paragraph (1) unless the individual is an officer of the United States pursuant to an appointment by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.

(c) FUNCTIONS OF THE BOARD.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Board shall determine whether or not to approve loan guarantees