

SENATE—Monday, April 10, 2000

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

PRAYER

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

Lord of creation, You have written Your signature in the bursting beauty of this magnificent spring day in our Nation's Capital. We thank You for the rebirth of hope that comes with this season of renewal. You remind us: Behold, I make all things new. As the seeds and bulbs have germinated in the earth, so You have prepared us to burst forth in newness of life. We forget the former things and claim Your new beginning for us. Help us to accept Your forgiveness and become giving and forgiving people. Clean out the hurting memories of our hearts so we may be open communicators of Your vibrant, creative spirit as we tackle problems and grasp possibilities of this day for the sake of our beloved Nation's future. By Your power. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable Thad Cochran, a Senator from the State of Mississippi, 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 PRESIDING OFFICER. The acting majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, on behalf of the majority leader, I am pleased to announce that today the Senate will be in a period of morning business throughout the day with time reserved for Senators DURBIN, THOMAS, CRAIG, MURKOWSKI, and BROWBACK. Cloture was filed on the gas tax bill on Friday. Therefore, pursuant to rule XXII, all first-degree amendments must be filed by 1 p.m. today. By previous consent, the cloture vote has been scheduled to occur at 2:25 p.m. on Tuesday. That vote will be the first vote of this week. The Senate will also consider the marriage tax penalty bill during this week's session and the budget conference report. Therefore, Senators can expect votes to occur on Friday.

I thank my colleagues for their attention and cooperation.

GAS TAX CONSIDERATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we were able to work our way through the budget this past week. It took a lot of time and cooperation, but I think we were able to make a lot of headway. We are disappointed that a number of our amendments were not adopted.

The good news—and I think we should focus on this a little bit this morning—is the fact that gas prices are actually declining, on an average of almost 3 cents a gallon this past week. There is a long way to go to decline to where they first started picking up, but progress has been made.

With the vote on the gas tax bill coming up this week, I think we should recognize that the crisis we did see is certainly being diminished, if not alleviated. No one is happy about the cost of a gallon of gasoline. I stopped over the weekend with my daughter, and she filled up their vehicle's gas tank and commented about the price of gasoline. That is the way it is. Gas is too high. However, what we are attempting to do this week is something we should reexamine. We should recognize that if this bill is passed by the Senate, it will either be held at the desk indefinitely or would be what we call blue slipped, if it is sent to the House of Representatives.

We should focus on things other than this legislation. For example, if the majority is serious about this matter, we could call up H.R. 3081, the House-passed tax bill which concerns the minimum wage. That is on the Senate Calendar. We could work on that. That would allow other amendments to be offered that are meaningful.

There isn't anyone in this body who does not want to see a decrease in the cost of fuel prices. Simply stated, this is not the way to go about it. OPEC has signaled its willingness to produce more oil. Non-OPEC nations have agreed to contribute some 700,000 barrels a day to alleviate this crisis.

We would be better off focusing on doing things so we are not as dependent on foreign oil. We have to import 55 percent of the oil we consume in this country. For example, we need to do something to make sure that the oil that is produced in Alaska is used in the United States and not shipped to Asia. We have to do something to make sure we develop a long-term energy policy and do something with alternative fuels. Solar, wind, and geothermal are areas we need to explore. We have spent very small amounts of money each year on hydrogen fuel development; this, some day, will overtake the fossil fuels that we use.

There are a lot of things we need to do. One of the things we need not do is try to explain to the American public that we are doing something by reducing the 4.3-cent-a-gallon tax for part of this year. No. 1, in a number of States, if the Federal tax is knocked off, the States are obligated by law to pick up that extra 4.3 cents, or whatever it is, that the Federal Government knocks off.

In short, I think we could be using this time in a much more productive fashion than debating the 4.3-cent-per-gallon tax reduction which is cosmetic in nature only and is certainly not even a short-term fix.

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. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Under the previous order, the time until 1 p.m. shall be under the control of the Senator from Illinois, Mr. DURBIN, or his designee.

Mr. DORGAN addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

CONGRATULATING THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA HOCKEY TEAM FOR THEIR NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I came to the floor today as we begin business this week to talk about two issues. First, let me describe what happened Saturday evening on the east coast. There was a hockey team from the University of North Dakota that went to the east coast to play in the NCAA Division I hockey championship. When they finished that competition, the North Dakota Sioux were Division I national champions once again. In fact,