

take the W-4 form when you sign in with your employer and you say: I have four children. I own a home—check that box. Check about three or four boxes. From that, you provide opportunities for the deduction for, on average, a mortgage interest deduction, and a couple of other things. A table is then provided by the Internal Revenue Service that sets forth the exact amount of taxes that the employer will withhold and send the IRS, and that is the end of the transaction. You are not going to be hassled or forced to search for receipts; you are not going to wait in a long line at the post office to get your income tax return postmarked by April 15.

Now, in doing that, this plan will also eliminate the marriage tax penalty. But the plan only applies to people making \$50,000 a year or less in wages, if they are single, or \$100,000 a year or less, if they are married filing jointly. If they have less than \$2,500 in other income such as interest, dividends or capital gains if they are single, or \$5,000 or less in such other income if they are married and filed jointly, they are eligible to check the box that says, yes, I want to use the Fair and Simple Shortcut Tax plan, the FASST plan, which means I don't have to file a tax return. My withholding will be adjusted at my place of work, and the withholding will be sent to the IRS and there is no tax return.

Simple, yes. It is the only plan I know of that discusses simplicity. Everybody who talks about simplifying the tax program, in most cases, ends up proposing things that will make it horribly complicated. This will simplify it—but not for everybody.

Some people have unusual income characteristics, with four different jobs, and investments, and capital gains of \$20,000 or \$40,000 a year. It won't work for them. For the majority of the American people whose only income is their wage at work and they have a de minimis amount of other income in capital gains or interest—\$5,000 a year if they are married and filing jointly—all that other income will be tax free. So that is the incentive for savings and investment; that is the right incentive. All of the wage income—after several major deductions—up to \$50,000 single and \$100,000 married filing jointly—will be taxed at the single lowest rate. This plan extends the bottom rate and provides a de minimis amount of income tax free and you don't have to file a tax return anymore.

That makes a lot of sense to me and a fellow named Bill Gale at the Brookings Institution, who has done a lot of work on this issue of return-free filing. We are going to introduce legislation, which has been underway for a year and a half, I hope within the next week. As I indicated, Senator JUDD GREGG of New Hampshire has agreed to

cosponsor, and Senator DURBIN and, I hope, others, so we can begin discussing real simplification for tens of millions of Americans who always do the right thing. They always file a tax return, they always fill it out correctly, and they believe as an American it is their responsibility because we do things, as a country, to provide for a common defense, to build roads and schools, and to provide for a whole series of things. They understand their obligation to pay for the cost of a civilized society, to pay for the cost of democracy. But they ought to be able to do it in a way that is far simpler than the current system, and that is what we intend to accomplish with this legislation.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. COLLINS). Under the previous order, the Senator from Alaska is recognized.

THE FEDERAL FUELS TAX HOLIDAY OF THE YEAR 2000

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I am very pleased today to join with the majority leader, Senator LOTT, Senator CRAIG, Senator KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON, and a number of Senators on a very important piece of legislation that is before this body, entitled "The Federal Fuels Tax Holiday of the Year 2000."

This legislation is necessary because it will put a brake on the ever-rising gasoline prices that American families face every day. Unlike the airlines, the American family can't pass on the increased price in gasoline. Recently, the truckers came to Washington to express their concerns about the gas tax.

Energy and the cost of energy affects all of us in our lives in varying ways. So the idea of putting the brake on the ever-increasing gasoline prices that American families pay each day is very important.

It is my hope that we invoke cloture tomorrow to ensure that the American motorist and workers get a break.

Our legislation provides a tax holiday for all Americans, from the gas tax, that Democrats, with Vice President GORE casting the deciding vote, adopted in 1993. That 30 percent gas tax hike was the centerpiece of one of the largest tax increases in American history and we believe with gas prices approaching \$2 a gallon in some parts of the country, the American motorist should not have to continue paying the Gore tax.

I don't know if all my colleagues on the other side would agree with that nomenclature, but I think it is appropriate since the Vice President broke the tie which added a 30-percent gas hike.

In addition to temporarily ending the Clinton/Gore gas tax, our legislation guarantees that if the failed Clinton/Gore energy policies result in the price

of gasoline rising over \$2 a gallon, all fuel taxes will be lifted until the end of the year.

That means the American motorist will be relieved of the 18.4-cent-per-gallon gas tax. The trucking industry will not have to pay the 24.4-cent-per-gallon diesel tax. Barge operators will be relieved of the 4.4-cent-per-gallon inland waterway tax, and commercial and noncommercial aircraft operators will be relieved of the aviation tax.

It is certainly my hope that average gasoline prices do not rise above \$2. But it is clear to me that \$2 gasoline is well within the probability of becoming a reality because despite the administration's claims of victory about last week's OPEC meeting, Americans should not expect much, if any, of a price decline at the gas pump. Why? Let's look at it.

OPEC's decision to increase production by 1.7 million barrels per day is not, in my opinion, even a hollow victory for the Administration's, which lobbied for a minimum increase of 2.5 million barrels. The reality is that there isn't a real 1.7-million-barrel increase by OPEC.

Why do I say that? Let's look at the arithmetic.

OPEC agreed last year to 23 million barrels as their quota of production. They cheated by an additional 1.2 barrels, moving it up to 24.2. As a consequence, the difference between 1.2 and what they said we got as an increase of 1.7 is only 500,000 barrels of real increase. OPEC makes up 15.8 percent of American imports. As a result, we will be lucky to see another 78,000 barrels of oil in our market.

Will 78,000 barrels make a dent in gasoline prices? Not likely. Consider that motorists in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area use more than 121,000 barrels of oil in a single day.

With no relief in sight for the American motorist, we believe that the Gore fuel tax should be temporarily lifted. That would save American motorists about 4.4 barrels over the next 8 months.

If gasoline goes above \$2, our bill suspends all fuel taxes resulting in a \$19 billion saving to American motorists, truckers, barge operators, and airlines at the same time that fuel prices are near an all-time high. I believe the Government should suspend those taxes and ease the financial burden OPEC has placed on the American motorist and the industries that rely on fuel to move goods throughout this country.

I know some are concerned, if we suspend these taxes, that the highway trust fund, which finances roads, bridges, and mass transit, could be in danger. Again, I would like to put that fear to rest.

Our legislation ensures that the Highway Trust Fund will not lose a single penny during this tax holiday.

We require that all monies that would have gone into the fund had the taxes not been suspended be replaced by other Federal revenue. That could come from the on-budget surplus, as I have indicated, or from what I would like to see, which is a reduction of wasteful Federal spending.

I can assure the American motorist that highway construction projects this year and next year will be unaffected by the tax holiday that we are proposing. And when the trust fund is fully restored, all projects scheduled for beyond 2002 will be completed.

Some of the colleagues believe it is a mistake to establish a precedent wherein general revenues are used to finance highway construction. Ordinarily, I might agree with them, but not in this case.

All of my colleagues should remember that when the Clinton/Gore 4.3-cent gasoline tax was adopted in 1993, not a single penny of that tax was dedicated to highway or bridge construction. All the money was earmarked for Federal spending.

As I stated earlier, it was not until the Republicans adopted the 1997 highway bill that we shifted the 4.3-cent-per-gallon tax back to the highway trust fund.

Further, as I have indicated, Americans have paid \$42 billion since the Gore tax went into effect. Of that \$42 billion, \$28 billion was spent not on highways but on general government and went into the general fund.

Let me repeat that. Of the \$42 billion Americans paid under the Gore tax, \$28 billion was spent not on highways but on general government.

I believe under these circumstances that it is perfectly reasonable for general revenues to be used to repay the trust fund money that should have been spent on highways.

The question before the Senate today is very simple. Do Senators want to give American motorists a break at the gas pump when gas prices are at near record highs?

I think it is important for everybody to understand that we are the elected representatives of the people. What is their choice? Do the people want to have relief from the gas tax? Is that their priority?

We have polling information that I will submit for the RECORD that indicates overwhelming support for relief at the gas pump. I think the polling clearly shows that the American public, when offered an opportunity to reduce taxes, would much rather take it and run.

A Gallup Poll released last week found that although Americans think high prices are only temporary, they believe several things should be done to reduce taxes.

Eighty percent of the American people—I hope my colleagues and staff are listening and will take notes—favor

lowering gas taxes. Seventy-four percent—nearly three out of every four Americans—think that a temporary reduction of the gas tax is a worthy solution. That is three out of four.

Think about that. Seventy-four percent of Americans think a temporary reduction in the gas tax is a worthy solution.

Think about where we are and what the administration is telling us.

First of all, since I have been speaking about policies of the administration and the position of our Vice President, I want to refer to an article that appeared on October 23, 1999, in the State Times Morning Advocate at Baton Rouge, LA. The Vice President says he would be more antidrilling than other Presidents. More anti-drilling? Let me read the quote.

“I will take the most sweeping steps in our history to protect our oceans and coastal waters from offshore oil drilling,” he said in a press release. “I will make sure that there will be no new oil leasing off the Keys of California and Florida, and then I will go much further. I will do everything in my power to make sure that there is no new drilling off these sensitive areas, even in areas leased by previous administrations.”

He would cancel contracts and leases out there that were made by previous administrations.

(Mr. CRAIG assumed the Chair.)

Mr. MURKOWSKI. He further states: Existing leases and what oil and natural gas companies could do with them already are the objects of long-running legal disputes.

He says he would cancel leases in areas already leased by previous administrations.

These are existing leases; where is the sanctity of a contractual commitment? I believe if Florida and California don't want OCS activities off their coast, that is fine; that should prevail if that is what people want. In Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and my State of Alaska, where we produce roughly 22 percent of the total crude oil produced in the United States, these States should go ahead because they want this. They recognize the alternative is not very pleasant—and that is to import more oil.

I leave Members with the very ambiguous reference this administration has given, suggesting things will get better. There is a certain psychology in reassuring citizens that the price will come down. However, in reality, the consumption is up, production is down, we are 56-percent dependent on imports, and the forecast is we will be 65 percent in the year 2015 or thereabouts. These are hardly reassuring notes, taken verbatim from this administration, to suggest things will get better.

In conclusion, from the CBS “Early Show” on March 29, 2000, from Secretary Richards, the Secretary was

being questioned on his view of whether we could likely see some relief. He states as follows: This means for the American consumer, gasoline prices will gradually and steadily decline, according to the Energy Information Administration and my Department, by as much as 11 cents by the end of September or the end of summer.

That is quite a while. What do we do in the meantime?

Then he says: The bottom line is, I am just quoting our investigators and our official people who are saying 11 cents by the end of summer, possibly 15, 16 cents by the end of the year.

That is an indefinite forecast, in my opinion.

I appeal to the Chair to recognize that we can't believe the Secretary that the price is coming down. Every Member should support this legislation because it will keep the pressure on the administration to ensure it stays below \$2 and this tax holiday won't be a reality. It will give the American consumer a safety net. Think about that.

The administration says: Don't worry, prices are on the decline. OK, if prices are on the decline—which I don't believe they are in the short term or the long term, but we will see who is right or wrong—we go ahead and pass the elimination of the 18.4-cent-gallon Federal tax, suspend it for the balance of the year, if the price goes to \$2 a gallon for regular. That is a balance that puts the administration on notice to practice what they preach. If they preach the prices are coming down, this will never happen anyway. We are giving the American consumer a safety net. That safety net is real and it says if the price goes up to \$2 the 18.4 comes off. I think that is a fair balance.

I will show this chart one more time. I find it outrageous. Who do we look to for imports? We look to Saddam Hussein and Iraq: Last year 300,000; now it is 700,000 barrels a day.

Where does the money go? It is going to Saddam Hussein. We fought a war over there—remember—in 1991. We lost the lives of 147 U.S. men and women. We fought a war to keep Saddam out of Kuwait. What did Saddam do when he lost the war?

Talk about environmental degradation. This is a picture of Kuwait with the oil fields on fire. We see the fires in the background. Here is an American with the firefighters helping put that fire out. That is the kind of guy we are dealing with to depend on imports. We had 23 soldiers taken prisoner over there. It has cost the American taxpayer \$10 billion since the war in 1991 to keep Saddam Hussein fenced in enforcing the no-fly zones. Within the last week, we did two bombing runs in Iraq because he was in violation of the no-fly zone, and we had anti-aircraft action.

Isn't it incredible? We talk about foreign policy or energy policy of this administration, and we are feeding Saddam Hussein millions and millions of dollars so he can take that cash-flow and pay his Republican Guards who keep him alive. He doesn't funnel that into his economic system for the benefit of his people. He is in cahoots with the North Koreans, developing missile technology and our bombing airplanes are carrying his fuel. How inconsistent, how ironic. Talk about a full circle. We are importing 700,000 barrels a day, we are bombing him, we are using his oil that we refine to fill up our airplanes.

I may be reaching a little bit, but this is reality. We are importing 700,000 barrels a day.

It is my understanding this matter will come up tomorrow and we will have a number of Senators active in the debate on the merits of the basic presentation.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURKOWSKI). Without objection, it is so ordered.

ENERGY CRISIS

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, for the last number of minutes I have listened with great interest to the comments of my good friend from Alaska describing the energy crisis in which our Nation now finds itself. I use the word "crisis" with some reservation because my guess is most Americans don't think we are in a crisis. They have good jobs, they probably got raises this year, they feel their jobs are secure, they have plenty of spendable income, and while they may be paying 30 or 40 cents or even 50 cents a gallon more for gas this year than last year, at least the gas is still there and the pump does not say "no fuel available," they don't sense a crisis.

I traveled home to my State of Idaho this weekend. I drove out to Dulles Airport. I got on a Boeing 777 that burns tens of thousands of gallons of fuel in the course of a day and I paid \$70 or \$80 more for each one of my tickets because of the cost of jet fuel. As I traveled across the country I found the airports full of Americans and foreign travelers. Yet, no sense of urgency or crisis did they appear to feel.

When I got home to my home State of Idaho and began to travel across the northern end of the State, I saw that spring is breaking out very quickly in the marvelous wheat belt of northern Idaho that spreads into Washington and Oregon over to Pendleton and Wala Wala. It is a highly productive area

that oftentimes yields 100 to 110 bushels of wheat per acre annually without benefit of irrigation.

What was out on those rolling wheat fields this weekend? Large 4-wheel-drive tractors, oftentimes pulling 40- and 50-foot spreads of harrows and springtooths, beginning to till the soil, all of them with a 250- or 400-horse diesel engine under the hood of that tractor, burning hundreds of gallons of diesel fuel each day.

This year those farmers will be paying another 50 or 60 cents a gallon for that fuel. Yet this is just the beginning of the growing season in our Nation. We are now tilling and planting. We will spend the summer cultivating and spraying to protect our crops from weeds and insects. Then in the fall, huge combines will roll out on the fields, once again driven by diesel fuel—a source of energy that has historically been so abundant in our country and so relatively inexpensive.

Today, a river conservation group announced that some rivers in our country are endangered because they have been dammed. In the past America has placed large dams across some rivers and put large turbines in the dams to generate electricity. In a relatively cavalier way, this group said that my river, my Snake River of Idaho, is the most endangered. Why? Because of dams. They want the dams removed. Yet those dams produce hundreds of thousands of kilowatts a year to light the cities of Portland and Seattle, Boise and many other cities and towns. And somehow, all in the name of the environment, they cavalierly suggest we start taking down relatively modern structures that produce large amounts of inexpensive electricity without burning fossil fuels.

The reason I draw these verbal pictures today is that no one senses a crisis. This administration, for the last 8 years, has not proposed a single policy initiative that would produce 1 gallon more domestic crude oil for our Nation. In fact, the Clinton/Gore administration has done quite the opposite. They, through punitive environmental policies, have suggested continually that we close more and more federal land to any further oil and gas exploration and production. They have even proposed to take down some of the hydro dams I have talked about, once again all in the name of the environment.

Now, the Clinton/Gore administration has an energy policy of sorts. They have talked a lot about solar and biomass which is not a bad idea as long as we don't kid ourselves into believing they will solve all of our problems. They have also talked about developing more powerful wind energy technology to produce more power—not a bad idea either.

But the myth of that kind of technology is that to replace the dams on the lower Snake River with photo-

voltaic cells or windmills, the entire State of Idaho would have to be covered with solar cells just to offset the difference. My guess is there would be a Vice President who would reject such an idea because the result would be unsightly. It would destroy the vistas that are so beautiful in my State right now. It would be uncomely to the American environmental eye. And I would agree with him.

But I would not agree with this Vice President, when he stands and says that he will not tolerate drilling offshore California, offshore Florida, offshore our East coast, or in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Clinton/Gore administration has an energy policy of sorts and the Vice President's desire to take down dams, prevent new oil and gas exploration, and instead cover my State of Idaho, or Arizona, or California, with solar cells and wind farms is its hallmark.

The reason I mention these frustrations I have, and I think some Americans share, is that for a good long while now we have not had a consistent energy policy for our country that is a combination of all these things: Research for new technology, conservation so we use less and gain more from it, while at the same time producing as much of our own fossil fuel resources as possible.

In just a decade or so, we have increased our electrical generation by some 200 percent by the use of coal, but we have reduced the sulfur oxide emissions from coal during that same time by over 20 percent. Through technology, we are using more fossil fuels more efficiently and more cleanly and more of our electricity is generated with such fuels. That is the way you do it. You do not take those kinds of sources off line; you say those are the sources that can generate the abundance of power that drives our industries and heats and cools our homes.

So let's be wiser and smarter with our technology than just saying to a certain political interest, I am with you, we will just take that all out of production and off line, because it does not fit somebody's environmental agenda.

Among all the things the rivers conservation group said today, about taking dams out on the Snake River, there is something they did not say. They did not say the removal of those dams would destroy the barge traffic on the Snake-Columbia River system. All of the grain and timber and paper and coal that now travels the river in barges would have to move in 18-wheel trucks over the highways of the Pacific Northwest. Tens of thousands more trucks would have to be employed to haul the freight and replace the slack water transportation system that would be destroyed were the dams removed.

Is that an environmentally sound thing to do, to employ thousands and