British Petroleum and Amoco merged shortly thereafter. Last year, Exxon and Mobile merged. BP/Amoco is currently attempting to acquire California-based ARCO. If one overlays gas prices with these mergers, it is straight up. It is common sense: Less competition, higher prices.

There are secret oil company documents that we know have been filed as part of the Federal Trade Commission's lawsuit to block the merger. Those secret documents ought to be made public. One can see, if one reads the filing, that the FTC has made explosive charges of oil price manipulation by BP. We know that a lot of BP's oil is being exported from this country. If we are going to allow this merger to take place, we should at least insist that oil stay here rather than stand up in this Chamber and say we are going to repeal the 4.3-cent-a-gallon tax which is going to destroy the highway trust fund. The people in my State are against this proposal.

Between 1973 and 1995, we banned the export of the Alaska North Slope crude. The GAO has said that lifting this export ban increased the price of crude by more than $1 a barrel.

We can create an energy policy that will result in the lowering of gas prices and, by the way, help the environment and clean up our air. What do we do around here? We do not do the long-range planning. We are not listening to the people who have studied this issue for years. We are turning a blind eye to these mergers which make prices skyrocket. We are not doing anything about stopping the exportation of Alaskan oil. We are not increasing the fuel economy standards.

We are taking the short view and trying to make political points by saying: If we take away that 4.3-cent-a-gallon tax, it is going to solve our gas price problem. That is not the answer. The American people are smart. They see this for what it is: A political ploy; it does not do anything; it robs our States of needed money for highways while they keep cutting back the funds the President requests for energy efficiency.

I stand here as someone who has been involved in energy efficiency issues since I was a county supervisor in the seventies. That is when we had those long lines because gas prices were high and people were scared. By the way, that is when the American car companies lost their market share because it was the foreign carmakers that were making the fuel-efficient cars. Why don't we learn from history? Why don't we do the right thing instead of this short-term idea that makes no sense at all, that will only hurt our environment, will hurt our people, will hurt our ability to build the highways we need in the future, and absolutely does nothing about lessening our dependence on foreign oil.

I am very pleased I had this opportunity to speak because I think this issue is clearly one of the most important we can consider.

My last point is, half of our trade deficit is due to imported oil. What is reducing the gas tax 4.3 cents a gallon going to do to lessen our dependence on foreign oil? Zero. Nothing. Nada. Let's do something that is going to help our balance of trade, that is going to help our environment, that is going to help our economy, and that is going to help our people.

I thank the Chair.

Several Senators addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island. The Chair inquires how much time the Senator from Rhode Island will use.

Mr. REED. Somewhere between 5 and 7 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I remind the Chair, ordinarily we go back and forth.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island has been here waiting, so the Chair decided to recognize him.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, who controls time on this side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from Alaska, or his designee, is to be recognized for up to 75 minutes.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

COMMONSENSE GUN CONTROL MEASURES

Mr. REED. Mr. President, last week, by a bipartisan vote of 53–47, the Senate adopted the Reed amendment to the budget resolution calling on the conference committee on the juvenile justice bill to submit a report by April 20 of this year, which is the 1-year anniversary of the tragedy at Columbine High School, and include in that report commonsense gun control provisions which this Senate passed last May.

These provisions include an amendment that child safety locks be sold with all handguns; an amendment to close the gun show loopholes so a complete background check can be done on all purchasers at gun shows; a ban on the importation of high-capacity ammunition clips; and a ban on juvenile possession of semi-automatic assault weapons.

We adopted the Reed amendment, sponsored by many and supported by 53 Senators, because we wanted to send a message to the leadership of the House and Senate that America has waited too long for us to respond to the tragedy at Columbine High School, too long to respond to the pervasive floodtide of gun violence that every day kills 12 American children.

We have been down this road before. In 1993 and 1994, after a long legislative battle, we were able to pass the Brady law and the assault weapons ban over the objections of the gun lobby and their allies in Congress. Since 1993, we have seen a 20 percent reduction in crime in the United States. Gun crimes in particular fell 37 percent between 1993 and 1998.

No one can claim the Brady law or the assault weapons ban alone was the cause of this decline. There are other factors. We also know that preventing 500,000 felons, fugitives, and other prohibited purchasers from easily obtaining firearms has made a significant contribution to that reduction in gun violence.

The American people were with us when we passed those commonsense gun initiatives in 1993 and 1994, and they are with us today. Eighty-nine percent of Americans favor requiring a background check on all sales at gun shows. A similar percentage, 89 percent, favors requiring child safety locks be sold with all handguns.

Unfortunately, the gun lobby and its allies in Congress are trying to hide behind a claim there is inaction in enforcement, arguing that we need tougher enforcement, not new gun laws.

We agree, we need good, strong enforcement of our gun laws. We need additional resources devoted to this task. That is why we support the President's request for substantial new resources for gun law enforcement, including 1,000 new prosecutors, 500 new ATF agents and inspectors, an expansion of the Project Exile program to toughen sentences for gun crimes, and new ballistics testing procedures. We need all these things.

But the gun lobby presents us with a false choice between tougher enforcement or more legislation. The American people know we need both. You cannot enforce a loophole. We need legislation to close these loopholes so our authorities can truly and effectively and efficiently enforce the law.

The gun show loophole is just one example. When one-quarter or more of dealers at gun shows are unlicensed and therefore are not subject to the Brady background checks—they do not have to check the background of the purchaser—it does not take a genius to figure out, if a prohibited person seeks to purchase a weapon, where they will go. They will go right to those unlicensed dealers at the gun shows.

Under current law, someone who is a felon, someone who is prohibited from purchasing a firearm under the Brady law, and other laws, could go to an unlicensed dealer at a gun show and purchase as many weapons as he or she wanted without any type of background check, and they would not be effectively screened for the acquisition of a firearm.

Senator LAUTENBERG has many times on this floor pointed to Robyn Anderson—the woman who went to a Colorado gun show with Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris to help them buy 3 of the guns they used to kill 13 people at Columbine High School—who has said that the process was much too easy. In fact, it is reported that Harris and Klebold repeatedly asked dealers at the gun show if they were licensed or unlicensed, eventually finding a private seller, an unlicensed seller, in order to avoid paperwork and background checks.

What could be clearer? What could be more compelling for the need to close this loophole than the demonstration that these two young men were clever enough—and, frankly, the law is so wide open, you do not have to be that clever—to find a way to purchase weapons when they were supposed to be prevented from doing it? And they did.

Robyn Anderson later testified before the Colorado legislature, saying:

> It was too easy. I wish it had been more difficult. I wouldn't have helped them buy the guns if I had faced a background check.

We need to move promptly and swiftly to pass the Lautenberg amendment which was included in the juvenile justice bill to close this loophole and give our authorities the leverage they need to truly enforce the laws. The time has come for action. We have waited for an entire year. That wait is unforgivable. The memories of those students and what happened there linger. We should have done something much sooner than this. But we have a chance.

What is even worse is that Congress is about to go into a recess at the end of this week. So when all of those grieving families in Colorado and across the country come together on April 20 to ask, ''What have we done,'' not only will we say ''nothing,'' but we will be far from the center of Washington where we should have done something. We can pass this legislation.

What kind of message does that send, not only to the people of Columbine but the families of thousands and thousands of people who die each year? Over half of them are not killed in some type of confrontation; over half of them are killed by accidents and suicides.

We have to do something. We can do something. If we had safety locks on weapons, that could help, or we could think about, as some States do, having a waiting period. We used to have a waiting period with the Brady bill, but, again, to get that legislation through the Congress, we had to—as soon as the instant check system was put into place—abandon the waiting period.

There is more we can do.

Finally, I thank those Republican and Democratic Senators who joined last week to pass the Reed amendment, to send a strong signal to the leadership that we have to do something—words are insufficient—to express truly what we should express with respect to the tragedy at Columbine.

We need action. We need legislation. We need laws that will give our enforcement authorities the tools to do the job and do it well. Although the time is dwindling away, I hope we can move quickly so that on April 20 we will not only commemorate a tragedy but celebrate the passage of legislation that will help prevent, I hope, future tragedies.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska is recognized for up to 75 minutes.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. I thank the Chair and wish the occupant of the Chair a good day.

THE FEDERAL FUELS TAX HOLIDAY OF THE YEAR 2000

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, we have started our debate, and later this afternoon we will have a vote on the disposition of the waiver of the gas tax.

Upon arriving on the floor, I had the opportunity to hear the remarks of the Senator from California relative to an issue we have discussed on previous occasions; that is, the export of petroleum, energy products. I think the generalization was that she was concerned with the export from the State of Alaska of some 60,000 barrels a day of oil product.

As I have explained on this floor before, the export of our oil product, which is surplus to the west coast, has been carried on by one company that had that access, British Petroleum. British Petroleum has since acquired the non-Alaska segment of ARCO, which includes a number of refineries. BP did not have refineries on the west coast. I have introduced a letter in the RECORD from BP indicating they will curtail exports of Alaskan oil at the end of this month. I also have a letter from Phillips, which has acquired ARCO Alaska, and it is not their intent to export Alaskan oil.

I hope that addresses and resolves the issue and satisfies the concerns of those who continually bring this up in spite of my explanation.

But I will also submit for the RECORD the list of exports of petroleum products by States of exit for the current month. I note that Alaska is listed on this list at 3.9 million barrels a day; that California, the State of which my friend was speaking, shows exports of 6.2 million barrels a day of energy products; that Texas, for example, has 14 million barrels a day of petroleum, energy products; that Louisiana has 4.4 million.

We are currently exporting about 37 million barrels of energy products. This is a combination of jet fuel, motor gas, crude oil, and so forth. But it simply points out a reality that I think the RECORD should note.

Mr. President, this afternoon the Senate is going to have a chance to vote on whether we can quickly give the American motorists some relief from spiraling gasoline costs. I urge my colleagues to objectively evaluate the responsibility they have in representing the American people on this issue and whether the American people clearly want relief.

The 4.3-cent-per-gallon tax, that was adopted in 1993 after Vice President AL GORE cast the deciding tie-breaking vote, raised the gas tax by 30 percent. It is interesting to go back and look at the issue. I know some of my colleagues will come to the floor because they think it is a mistake to establish a precedent wherein general revenues are used to finance highway construction. Ordinarily I would agree with them, but not in this case.

As the record will show, in 1993, when this was passed, the revenue went to fund the general fund. That is the budget. That is the expenditures of the administration as they see fit. There was a substantial revenue stream that went into the general fund of about $21 billion. That is what was collected in that timeframe between 1993 and 1997, when the Republican majority changed the formula and directed that the 4.3 cent a gallon be put into the highway trust fund. That is a little background to keep in mind, as we address the appropriateness of supporting or rejecting the Federal Fuels Tax Holiday Act, which is before us.

The point I make again is that the administration had the benefit of $21 billion of expenditures from the revenue generated from 1993 until 1997, when the Republican majority changed the funding mechanism and put it in the highway trust fund. I also remind my colleagues that the Vice President broke the tie back in 1993 when the 4.3-cent-a-gallon tax was initiated. I think the Vice President has to bear the responsibility of defending his position on the Gore tax, as it has been fondly referred to by those of us on the Republican side of the aisle.

I find it curious to reflect that not a single penny of that tax was dedicated to highway or bridge construction. All the money was earmarked for the administration's spending.

I think we have an obligation to hear from the American public. What do they think? This is a Gallup poll, March 30 through April 2. It asked the question: Would you favor or oppose a temporary reduction in the Federal gas tax by 4.3 cents per gallon as a way of dealing with the increased price of oil? Notice, it does not ask about the highway trust fund. It does not ask whether we will reimburse the highway trust fund. It is quite specific: Would you favor or oppose a temporary reduction in the Federal gas tax of 4.3 cents per