Unfortunately, I guess our President has overlooked it or was kidding because if you look at the administration's proposal for the stateside funding for the Land and Water Conservation Act which would address the critical needs in State and local facilities, there is a large zero.

Secretary Babbitt, in May 1996, in an interview with the San Jose Mercury News, is credited with stating that he is working on a proposal to take the Land and Water Conservation Fund off budget, so a full $1 billion a year can be spent on the parks. Reportedly, the Secretary said that the effort would not occur until the next year, meaning that it would be contingent on President Clinton's reelection. Well, it is now next year. President Clinton has been reelected. The administration, however, has been silent vis-a-vis the proposal for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

We have instead a proposal to use $315 million of the $700 million contained in the budget agreement for the purchase of the Headwaters Forest in California and a mine in Montana. We do not know an awful lot about the Headwaters Forest acquisition. We do know that the Headwaters Forest is 40 air miles from the nearest national forest. We know that access to the Headwaters Forest is extremely limited. We know that the agreement with the current landowner of the Headwaters Forest is contingent on a favorable ruling by the Internal Revenue Service. Getting a favorable ruling from the Internal Revenue Service is a herculean effort, and I am not sure that the IRS knows how to basically spell the word ''favorable,'' but that is a subject for a statement for another day. The bottom line is that these projects have never ever been authorized by the appropriate committees of jurisdiction. No hearings, none whatsoever. No hearings have been held and no legislation has been introduced. This is from an administration that prides itself in the public process. Public process suggests legislation, suggests hearings, and action by the appropriate House and Senate committees. Neither of these have been proposed in the case of the acquisition of the area known as the Headwaters Forest in California or the area proposed for the mine purchase in Montana.

This is very much like the recent land grab in the State of Utah. There was a process ongoing where the committees were discussing the merits of withdrawing 1.6 million acres of public land in Utah and putting that land in wilderness. While these discussions were occurring, the administration saw fit to invoke the Antiquities Act and, overnight, basically put this 1.6 million acres in Utah into wilderness over the objections of the Utah congressional delegation and Utah's Governor. The President's action occurred without any hearings, without any public process. And, ironically, the announcement came not in Utah but in front of the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

Well, the media saw fit to not make an issue of it so not too many people in the United States reflected on the inconsistency between the President's promises and his actions.

But, again, this is what is proposed in the budget agreement: the purchase of the Headwaters Forest in California and a mine in Montana—no hearings, no public participation in the process, simply an outright purchase. This is not the purpose of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

We do not know just what is their objection, relative to the procedure, but as the Senator who is chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the fact that the administration is circumventing the public process is certainly, in my opinion, inappropriate.

What we do know is that the benefits derived from funding the stateside Land and Water Conservation Fund program are great. That is why we should take the $315 million and invest it in the State matching grant program because it will return over $630 million in benefits.

Roger Kennedy, former Director of the National Park Service, perhaps put it best when he said,

> Without a doubt, the Land and Water Conservation Fund ranks highest among the most successful and significant conservation/recreation movements ever experienced in these United States. This State-driven program has resulted in much needed and highly beneficial public outdoor recreation opportunities for the benefits of all the people. More accessible park and recreation facilities have become a reality.

and continue to become even a greater use and benefit to the Nation.

Mr. President, it is very difficult to compare the relative value of expanding a wildlife refuge, say, in the Florida Keys, with the addition of acreage to a unique urban park such as the Presidio in San Francisco. It is difficult to compare the value of supplementing Federal holdings in Glacier National Park with a purchase of land, say, next to Gettysburg National Battlefield. But those are the types of decisions that are faced day-in and day-out by the Congress in determining priorities for funding under the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

I, therefore, urge my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee and those in the Senate to provide funding for the stateside Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant Program. In the absence of these grants, I fear local park and recreation services will fail to meet the ever-growing demands of the American public and the Federal Government will be asked to fill the void. It is a role the Federal Government cannot and should not play. The answer to this dilemma is simply the stateside matching grant of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Mr. President, I have already noted the action taken by the mayors of the Conference of Mayors in San Francisco relative to support of this program because it is so significant relative to community involvement and community responsibility. I urge my colleagues to reflect on that, as well as, again, on the statement from the Western Governors Council in support of this program.

There is one other item I want to bring to the attention of my colleagues relative to action before this body. I ask unanimous consent, since no other Senator is seeking recognition, that I may speak for another 5 minutes on chemical weapons disposal.

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

CHEMICAL WEAPONS DISPOSAL

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I intended to offer an amendment to the defense appropriations bill that would have stricken the language that made it impossible for the Department to study alternatives to the methods we currently employ for disposing of chemical weapons. During the consideration of the Defense authorization bill last week, I offered an amendment to provide for a study. This amendment was readily accepted by the floor managers and was included in the final bill which the Senate passed overwhelmingly last Friday. Depending on the conclusions of the study, the taxpayers of this country could save somewhere between $3 and $5 billion. This is real money. Perhaps they could save much more in the cost of disposing of these chemical weapons.

This was just a study. It did not mandate changes in the program at this time. It merely provided Congress with an opportunity to responsibly evaluate alternatives in the future. I think it is clear we need to take a fresh look at this program so we can responsibly evaluate whether safer and cheaper alternatives to the present system exist.

In 1985, the Congress directed the Army to destroy our stockpile of obsolete chemical weapons. These are the nerve gases and the various other agents that are so deadly. The Senate took action and reiterated this commitment by ratifying the Chemical Weapons Treaty earlier this year, and we are in the process of disposing of those weapons. But the present system, I suggest, is not working the way it should. The present system is increasingly expensive, and a timeline for completion of the program is increasingly uncertain.

If we look at the figures, according to the GAO, the program faces dramatically increasing costs. I am going to describe where these weapons are in a moment. The stockpile disposal program went from an initial estimate of $1.7 billion as the cost of disposing of these chemical weapons in 1985 to a current estimate of about $12.4 billion. So, as we begin to look at the cost of disposing of these weapons, why, the cost just simply goes out of sight. The nonstockpile program could cost an additional $15.1 billion and it is estimated now to take 40 years to complete.

We have these weapons stored in various locations around the country. Clearly, we want to dispose of the weapons. But now they are telling us it is going to take 40 years to dispose of them. It is a hole out there we are going to pour money into for 40 years. The estimate is a minimum cost of over $27.5 billion. But, remember, that is up from what the original estimate was in 1985 of $1.7 billion. So we go from $1.7 to $12.4 to $15.1 to $27.5. And now we are talking about 40 years.

These stockpiled munitions are, obviously, highly deadly. Their long-term viability is questionable. We simply cannot continue to postpone our responsibility to act on this program at this time. We have stockpiled munitions at nine sites, and here they are, Mr. President, with disposal facilities up and running at only two. The only two we have running are one out in the Hawaiian Islands, Johnston Atoll, out there, about 600 miles south of Hawaii, and recently, Tooele in Utah is up and running. These facilities are costing well over $1 billion in Tooele, and the Johnston Island site is somewhere around $1.3 billion or thereabouts.

It is interesting to note where we are. We are in Alabama, we are in Arkansas, we are in Colorado, we are in Maryland, we are in Kentucky, we are up here in Indiana, and, of course, we are in Umatilla, OR. Every State is sensitive, including the State of my friend, the Senator from Oregon. The reality is they want this removed from these various States where they exist. So the Department of Defense and the Pentagon and the appropriate committees have determined the best way to get rid of it is to build individual sites at each of the seven or eight—or actually potentially nine—sites, at a cost of over $1 billion, and, once the material is disposed of, that terminates the facility because it is not beneficial for anything else.

However, it is interesting to note a couple of facts. In the Johnston Atoll, most of the material that is being incinerated there and disposed of came from NATO. It came from Europe. It was shipped across the ocean. Some of it came from Guam. That facility is functioning. It is underway. There is a prohibition about it taking any more. I can understand the sensitivity of the delegation from Hawaii, but, again, as we look at this catch-22 that we are in, I am just wondering, is it necessary that we build six new plants? Or, can we somehow look at some other alternatives? Is there a way to incinerate this at sea? We have built incinerating barges and facilities before quite successfully. Is there an advanced technology? What the Senator from Alaska has proposed is a study, a study to see if there is another and more beneficial return for the taxpayers of this country for the disposal of this weaponry.

In Oregon we have the adjacent coastline. In Aberdeen—in several of these areas we are not too far from the water. But each is very concerned about shipping this material across another State to get it to a place where you can dispose of it. So we are in this round-robin here. Nobody wants the stuff. Everybody wants to get rid of it. Nobody wants it to cross their State line. Nobody wants to take any more. Nobody wants to accumulate it and reduce the cost. So we simply sit here and watch the costs go up to $27 billion, we watch the time extended to up to 40 years, and we are being irresponsible by not allowing a study.

That is what my amendment would have done. It would have been to allow a study. However, because there is a prohibition even against a study, the conference and/or the committee itself is refusing to accept my amendment, which I can understand, given the sensitivity. I can understand how the process works around here. But I think we need to highlight how irresponsible we are in just ducking this issue and hoping that it will be resolved on somebody else's watch.

We have stockpiled these munitions at nine sites. We cannot, by laws that we passed, transport these munitions. So, you know, the alternative is to build these sites at more than $1 billion each at the same time we continue to face permitting problems at every Federal site, every local level at the other seven sites, and a start date for construction seems to be extended on and on and on. The logic of the present disposal system really escapes me, and, as a consequence, I offered the amendment so we could take a rational look at what we are trying to accomplish with regard to this problem.

This again, Mr. President, is just a study. But in order to take a rational look at the program, it is imperative that all aspects of the program be considered so we can best evaluate how to proceed.

I hope the conferees on this bill will consider their responsibility and reconsider the Senate language which permits us an opportunity to take a second look. It does not demand that we do anything. It is not that we ship anything, not that we do not build these, it simply says, ''Is there another, a better, a more efficient, cost-savings way?'' I think there is. To suggest we are going to eliminate even the ability to take a look at this program, I think is terribly irresponsible on the part of those who bear the responsibility of addressing this, because this is just a study. What is the harm in looking at the problem?

I had proposed striking the prohibition against the study. We could always ask the inspector general for a study, and probably will. But I did want to take an opportunity to present before the Members the reality. This is something we cannot hide. We cannot overlook this. We have a responsibility to address it. We are spending huge amounts of money, and the public should recognize just what our alternatives are and face up to the fact that this was created as a consequence of decisions made in the national defense interests of our Nation. We created this terrible nerve gas. I have seen the canisters it is in. I have seen how they dispose of it at Johnston Island and the manner in which it is taken into chambers where the explosive charge is removed, the gas is incinerated in one chamber in a closed cycle and the explosive material is taken in another chamber and incinerated. This was the development prototype.

But, here we are today faced with the inability to even look at a better way of disposal because of the sensitivity of this issue and the concern, if you do a study and you find a better way, it might suggest you might have to move it, and, therefore, you would have to move it across another State, and they don't want that to happen. So leave it where it is, simply build the plants and get on with it and spend God knows how many billions of dollars in the process.

So, you might say the Senator from Alaska is a little sensitive to the prohibition to even allow a study and an evaluation of a better way to meet our obligations to dispose of our chemical weapons.

You might say, ''What in the world is the Senator from Alaska doing in this area?'' Under the responsibility as chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I have spent an awful lot of time on the merits of moving high-level nuclear waste across the United States at various sites over an extended period of time. Hundreds and hundreds of shipments have moved safely without incident. I am suggesting that we have the technology to move this lethal material to a place to dispose of it that is appropriate, even perhaps in a self-contained facility offshore that could contain the physical process of disposal at a much less cost.

With that, Mr. President, I simply make an appeal to my colleagues to recognize the extent of our responsibility to successfully dispose of our chemical weapons that have accumulated over a long period of time in a manner that is most responsible to the taxpayers, as well as safe, by using American ingenuity and technology.

Seeing no other Member on the floor, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a member of my staff, Dan Senor, be granted floor privileges as I make the brief remarks I am about to embark on.

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