

veterans. We agreed on raising the minimum wage against the objections of most of our friends on the other side.

The budget is passed. It is a consensus in a peculiar way. It is not a consensus arrived at necessarily by Democrats and Republicans, but here I have to commend Senator DOMENICI. He has a rare touch. He knows his business. He understands the budget thoroughly. There isn't anybody I know here who would say he isn't a good, decent guy.

He deals with the differences of view that perhaps are the result of being in the majority. People want to make sure their views are taken care of.

The minority finds it a little easier to unite, perhaps, because we unite behind issues we think are important, that we realize will not be typically dealt with in the fashion we would like. We are not in the majority.

By structure of the branches of Government, we have a President. The President can only lay down his recommendations; he cannot necessarily get them through. There is no veto right in this process. So it makes it a different structure.

The public may be scratching their heads as they look at this and saying: What do they agree on? Senator DOMENICI said something that is so true: much of what we did will not have ultimately the effect of becoming law. Why did we do it? We did it because each Member of this body has a right to express themselves about issues. We are concerned about the relevance of a lot of the resolutions that were presented.

I hope we will do something about organizing the process, though I will not be here to do it, for the public interest. Before this budget resolution has the effect of turning into appropriations bills that will fund these programs, there is a fairly long way to go. For me, it is the last time I will have a role in passing a budget resolution. I arrive at this point with some wistfulness and anticipation that in years ahead I will be arriving at this time of the year with a degree of nostalgia.

It is hard to imagine one could miss this kind of exercise after witnessing the process we just completed. But I must confess, the challenge of arriving at the resolution, as I see it, produces a debate that does raise a conscientious review of the issues, even though we disagree on the paths to get to places we want to be. But each of us, again, has the right to express himself or herself as this process evolves.

I am certain the public views some of the antics we have gone through here as curious, to say the least. We heard Senator BYRD, the distinguished Senator among Members, say he was disappointed in some things. I hope, therefore, a review of the process will take place so we can have a more concise, more orderly program for getting to a budget resolution.

In the process, however, of this year 2001 budget resolution, I have to say

thank you to Senator DOMENICI, to his chief of staff, now loaded down with the product of his work, Bill Hoagland. I thank Bill, who worked arduously to make sure we had the information we needed, even though we disagreed on some of the process to get to the end of the game.

I am grateful to HARRY REID, the Democratic whip, for the role he played in getting this year's budget resolution passed. He was part of a support team for me and left me with time to do some of the things for which I am responsible. He did a wonderful job as a friend and as a leader on the Democratic side, helping us get done.

I thank Leader DASCHLE for his faith and support of me throughout the budget resolution negotiations.

I thank my colleagues on the Budget Committee, the Republicans, but I am particularly obliged to my Democratic friends and colleagues because of the unity we had through the process.

I cannot conclude my remarks without saying the staff support was really special.

No. 1 on my team is Bruce King, who is the chief of staff of the Budget Committee, the Democratic staff on the Budget Committee. Sue Nelson is an expert on so many areas, particularly in the health area, on whom lots of the Senators called; Lisa Konwinski and Mitch Warren, who used to work on my personal staff as well; Marty Morris, Nisha Antony, Claudia Arko, Frederic Baron, Gabrielle Batkin, Steve Benson, Maggie Bierwirth, Pat Bogenberger, Rok Chung, and Jim Esquea.

I want to thank Randy DeValk, who is part of Senator DASCHLE's team, the person who works on budget for Senator DASCHLE. He was very helpful throughout.

I thank our floor staff. They were diligent and always there for information and for support, defining the process so we did not step on too many toes. I think I might have stepped on a couple along the way, but it was not cataclysmic. The process takes a long time to learn. Senator DOMENICI has been doing it for a long time. He is one of the best experts we have.

So I thank everyone for their work, some of our Republican friends who voted with us on occasion, and even those Senators with whom I had disagreements on occasion.

I want to say—maybe as part of a swan song because come next January I will be doing other things—that even those with whom I most ardently disagreed still earned my respect as Senators, though I could vehemently disagree with their point of view. These are people who are sent here by a constituency we have to recognize. The majority is what it is because the American people sent them here to be a majority. I wish it were otherwise, make no mistake about that. I wish we were in the majority and I had my last year as chairman of the committee. But next best to the chairman on the other side is to be the ranking member

and work with a good and decent manager.

With that, I say, this is a conclusion of part No. 1 of FRANK LAUTENBERG's retirement from the Senate, an experience which I shall treasure and remember fondly, forever.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, let me acknowledge the remarks of the Senator from New Jersey. I suspect this time next year the Senator from New Jersey will be looking fondly at us from the ski slopes of Utah, wishing us well but being very happy with his fondness for skiing.

INSTITUTING A FEDERAL FUEL TAX HOLIDAY

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, given the cloture vote taken last week on the motion to proceed to the gas tax bill, and with the overwhelming result of an 86-11 vote, I now ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to S. 2285 regarding the Federal fuels tax.

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

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2285) instituting a Federal fuels tax holiday.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask consent that only gas-tax-related amendments be in order to the pending bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. LAUTENBERG. We object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MURKOWSKI. In light of the objection, and in order to keep the Senate on the subject matter of the gasoline tax that is affecting virtually every American who fills up his or her automobile at the gas pump, I now send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Calendar No. 473, S. 2285, a bill instituting a Federal fuels tax holiday:

Trent Lott, Judd Gregg, Connie Mack, Kay Bailey Hutchison, James Inhofe, Frank H. Murkowski, Paul Coverdell, Michael Crapo, Thad Cochran, Charles Grassley, Jim Bunning, Gordon Smith, Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Larry E. Craig, Bob Smith, Don Nickles.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. This cloture vote will occur on Tuesday. I ask unanimous consent the cloture vote occur at 2:25 p.m. on Tuesday, and there be 10 minutes equally divided prior to the vote, and the mandatory quorum be waived.

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

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I hope much of Monday and Tuesday morning will be designated for debate on the gas tax issue.

With that in mind, I announce the next rollcall vote will occur at 2:15 on Tuesday.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MURKOWSKI. I now ask consent there be a period for the transaction of morning business, with Members permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

STRAIGHT TALK ON SOCIAL SECURITY ACT

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to once again remind my colleagues of the very precarious financial condition of the entire Social Security system and the urgent need for a serious, bipartisan effort to reform and revitalize this cornerstone of many Americans' retirement planning.

The only way to achieve real reform of the Social Security system is to work together in a bipartisan manner. It's time to abandon the irresponsible game of playing partisan politics with Social Security. Democrats will have to stop using the issue to scare seniors into voting against Republicans. Republicans will have to resist using Social Security revenues to finance tax cuts. And both parties must stop raiding the Trust Funds to waste retirement dollars on more government spending. We must face up to our responsibilities, not as Republicans or Democrats, but as elected representatives of the American people with a common obligation to protect their interests.

We have an obligation to ensure that Social Security benefits are paid as promised, without putting an unfair burden on today's workers.

We also have an obligation to talk straight with working Americans about the true financial status of the Social Security program. This means providing each worker with honest information about the financial status of the Social Security program including the real value of their personal retirement benefits.

Under the current system, hard working Americans—young and old—are not receiving straight, honest information regarding the actual financial status of the Social Security program including how much it is receiving in payroll taxes and how much is needed to give promised benefits to seniors. This includes clearly telling Americans exactly when the program will no longer have sufficient funds for paying full benefits.

Furthermore, we must begin providing working Americans with accu-

rate, easy to understand information regarding the average rate of return they can expect to receive from Social Security as compared to the amount of taxes an individual pays into the program. It is only fair to be straight with everyone and let them know the true facts about how much they will pay in payroll taxes and what the limited return will be on their contributions.

It is time for us to talk straight to Americans about Social Security and begin working together in a bipartisan fashion to make the necessary changes to strengthen and save the nation's retirement program for the seniors of today and tomorrow.

DEMOCRACY IN TAIWAN

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, on March 18th the people of Taiwan elected Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) leaders Chen Shui-bian, former mayor of Taipei, to be President, and Annette Lu to be Vice-President of Taiwan.

This was an historic vote, representing the first recorded, peaceful transfer of power in any Chinese political system in 5,000 years. A free and fair vote by 80 percent of the electorate occurred without violence with a military that remained in the barracks.

It was a vote with implications not only for the people on Taiwan but also for China and the United States.

First, the vote represented a rejection by a majority of the voters of the traditional ruling Kuomintang Party (KMT) and a vote in favor of political reform and change in Taiwan. There was a clear desire by the people to cleanse the political system that they viewed as corrupt. That the DPP could win a national election after having only been formed in 1986 indicates the maturity of the political system, as well as the deep desire for change.

The first steps by President-elect Chen Shui-bian indicate the political sophistication of Taiwan's future leaders. He made conciliatory statements towards China, stating that he would avoid declaring independence and emphasizing that "the people's top priority is peaceful cross-strait relations" while declaring his willingness to "negotiate cross-strait air travel, trade and investment, peace agreements, and military conference-building measures with the mainland." He has offered to meet with China's leaders, even to travel to Beijing. His party is now considering dropping its pro-independence policy in its party platform.

He has nominated the current Kuomintang Defense Minister, Tang Fei, to be his Premier. General Tang was born in China. And in another step towards reform both major parties have reached an agreement to reduce the powers of the National Assembly and to strengthen those of the Legislative Yuan, the nation's parliament.

The breath of fresh air blowing through Taiwan has not been matched in Beijing. In the run-up to the election the only wind out of China was the

fierce breath of threats. Central Military Commission Vice-Chairman General Zhang and Vice Premier Qian Qichen both declared that "Taiwan independence means war." A People's Liberation Army publication stated that "the PLA is determined to liberate Taiwan. If they meet hard resistance, then they can choose to use weapons of mass destruction, like neutron bombs."

Since the election, there has been some diminishment of the intensity of the attacks but Beijing remains consistent in its criticism and insistence on Taiwanese concessions. Last week, at a conference on Taiwan in Washington organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, PLA Senior Colonel Luo Yuan observed that "if you no longer acknowledge you are Chinese and sell off Chinese national interests, the Chinese government will definitely punish this national traitor. [. . .] Once the Taiwan independence provokes an impasse, then we have no choice but the use of blood to uphold the authority." China's official Xinhua News Agency has commented that "Lee Teng-hui's ignominious fate proves that all those who engage in 'Taiwan independence' and splittism and try resorting to trickery to hoodwink the world will come to no good end. The wages of sin is death." Vice Premier Qian has insisted that there can be no negotiations with Chen or his envoys unless he accepts the principle that Taiwan is part of China and commits to negotiating only over the modalities of reunification.

The quandary China finds itself now in is typified by the Beijing waiter, quoted in a recent Washington Post article, who commented as he watched news of the Taiwan elections, "their lives are better than ours, economically and politically. They have more freedom. They can elect their leaders."

One of the first actions by the Taiwanese political parties was to reform its political structure by reducing the role of the National Assembly sending another powerful signal to the Mainland where its hand-picked, 2,978 strong, National People's Congress delegate just met for stage-managed debates.

China's leaders have been struggling to earn the degree of legitimacy through economic reform alone and through the continued use of force to suppress dissent that Taiwan's leaders have earned at the ballot box through the exercise of free speech and free trade. No longer can China's leaders look across the Straits and see a mirror of themselves in Taiwan's former exiled rulers.

Instead they see an example of a political system which evolved in a few short years from totalitarian rule to a democracy. Martial law rule ended in Taiwan in 1987. A new legislature was elected in 1992. There were presidential elections in 1996, local elections in 1997 and 1998, and a second presidential election in 2000.