

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.