

CONCLUSION OF MORNING
BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM DESIGNATION ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 440.

The Senate resumed consideration of the motion to proceed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I thank the Chair. Mr. President, I might say to my colleague from Rhode Island, I had some remarks prepared, and intend to speak for awhile, but I wondered, if he wanted to start off, he can.

Mr. CHAFEE. No. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished Senator from Minnesota. I am here to listen to the persuasiveness of his argument. I will say that this bill is important. As we all know, unless we pass this legislation by the end of September of this year, our States will be deprived of some \$6.5 billion of highway funds, which we need. So I think it is unfortunate we are involved in this filibuster, but that is obviously the choice of those on the other side. I am perfectly prepared to hear the remarks of the Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ABRAHAM). The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Given the few remarks of my colleague from Rhode Island, it probably would be important for me to clarify the situation.

Mr. President, I agree that the underlying bill, this highway bill, is extremely important to the country. The debate is really not about the underlying bill. The debate is about Federal prevailing wage standards under the Davis-Bacon law, and an effort to repeal Davis-Bacon, at least in relation to the highway construction work that is done.

What is attached to this bill is an amendment to repeal the Davis-Bacon law in relation to highway construction work. That is what is unfortunate. So those of us who are taking on this issue in this debate are not doing it, if you will, Mr. President, of our own choosing. That is to say, we are more than willing to have a full-scale debate about the importance of the Davis-Bacon legislation first passed in 1931. We do not believe that this debate should be taking place right now. We do not think this amendment to repeal Davis-Bacon should be a part of this piece of legislation. That is really the debate. The debate is not about the underlying bill at all. My colleague from Rhode Island will certainly find me to be very supportive of much of his work

on the underlying bill. But in a letter of May 2, I and other colleagues indicated that we intended to engage in extended debate on this bill if this Davis-Bacon repeal amendment was adopted, so no one should be surprised by our presence here today.

I would like to talk first about the Davis-Bacon piece of legislation, just to summarize it for those who are watching this debate, and then talk about what I consider to be the larger question, the larger issue that is before the Senate, and therefore before the country.

First, on Davis-Bacon, Mr. President, back in the early thirties, this piece of legislation was passed and the basic idea was as follows: Where the Federal Government is involved in construction contracts, we want to make sure that wages that are paid to those workers are consistent with the prevailing wage of the community. In other words, the Federal Government is the big player here, and it is kind of right out of Florence Reese's song "Which Side Are You On?" Either the Federal Government is involved on the side of the contractor in paying wages below the prevailing level of the community or the Federal Government—being a Government that cares not just about the largest multinational corporations in the world, not just about the people who have the financial wherewithal, but a Government that cares about wage earners, cares about working families, and says we will make sure that our involvement is to assure that the wages paid to working people—in this particular case we are talking about highway construction workers—is consistent with the prevailing wage.

Mr. President, I would just simply tell you that proposition is based upon a standard of fairness in which I think the vast majority of the people of the United States of America believe.

Second, Mr. President, the importance of Davis-Bacon, which is why this piece of legislation has been with us for well over a half a century, is that by making sure you have some kind of prevailing wage standard you also have higher quality labor and higher quality work that is done. And when it comes to the highways and to the bridges and to our physical infrastructure, it is pretty darned important to the people of Minnesota and Michigan and Rhode Island and Virginia and elsewhere that the highest quality work is done. That is part of how we measure benefit and how we measure cost.

So, Mr. President, what is at issue is not the underlying bill. What is at issue is that within this piece of legislation is this one provision which would repeal Davis-Bacon as it relates to highway construction work, which I understand is about 40 percent of the work covered by Davis-Bacon. This is no small issue. This is no small issue to working people; this is no small issue when it comes to wages; this is no small issue when it comes to fair work-

ing conditions; this is no small issue for the Senate; and it is no small issue for people in this country. I have to tell you, Mr. President, that the larger issue, what is really at stake I think can be shown rather graphically by this chart.

If you look at historical trends in real family income—and the source of this is the Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce—if you look at real family income, what you get between 1950 and 1978 is something like this. For the bottom 20 percent of people in our country, real family income in 1993 dollars went up 138 percent.

Now, in our country I think people say that is the way it should be. The bottom 20 percent, their family income goes up 138 percent. The second 20 percent goes up 98 percent. The middle 20 percent, family income goes up 106 percent. The fourth 20 percent—now we are getting toward the top—111 percent, and then the top 20 percent, real family income goes up 90 percent, between the years 1950 to 1978.

That is sort of the American dream, Mr. President. That is what people care about, that is real growth in family income. And during this period, we see a trend that is very consistent, with the kind of standard of fairness that people in the country believe in.

Now, Mr. President, we look at 1979 to 1993, and what we see is a country growing apart.

As a matter of fact, more recent reports that have come out have shown that we have the greatest gap in income in wealth than we have ever had since we started measuring these things.

So, Mr. President, we see that between 1979 and 1993, for the bottom 20 percent, real family income goes down by 17 percent; the second 20 percent real family income goes down by 8 percent; the middle 20 percent real family income goes down by 3 percent; the fourth 20 percent real family income rises by 5 percent; and for the top 20 percent, real family income goes up by 18 percent.

So, Mr. President, what is really going on here is a debate about where the Federal Government fits in and what kind of public policy throughout the country is responsive to working families. This is the squeeze that people feel within the country, and I say to my colleague, and I say to people who are watching this debate, at the very time that real family income is going down, at the very time that the bottom 80 percent of the population feels this squeeze, what are we doing? Some are trying to overturn a piece of legislation that has served this country well and served working families well. We are now trying to bring down wages in our communities, and we have a Congress which, up to date, has been unwilling to even raise the minimum wage. So this debate is all about fairness. This debate is all about what matters to people in the country more