

CONCLUSION OF MORNING  
BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, morning business is closed.

IMMIGRATION CONTROL AND FI-  
NANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT  
OF 1996

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THOMAS). Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume consideration of S. 1664, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1664) to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to increase control over immigration to the United States, by increasing border patrol and investigative personnel and detention facilities, improving the system used by employers to verify citizenship or work-authorized alien status, increasing penalties for alien smuggling and document fraud, and reforming asylum, exclusion, and deportation law and procedures; to reduce the use of welfare by aliens; and for other purposes.

The Senate resumed consideration of the bill.

Pending:

Dole (for Simpson) amendment No. 3743, of a perfecting nature.

Simpson amendment No. 3853 (to amendment No. 3743), relating to pilot projects on systems to verify eligibility for employment in the United States and to verify immigration status for purposes of eligibility for public assistance or certain other government benefits.

Simpson amendment No. 3854 (to amendment No. 3743), to define "regional project" to mean a project conducted in an area which includes more than a single locality but which is smaller than an entire State.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. President, let me just relate where we are, and then I will certainly yield, and we can ask unanimous consent that Senator BAUCUS continue for 7 minutes as in morning business.

We have our order from yesterday, and we are going to go forward with four amendments, perhaps a motion, and we intend to finish this bill today. I know Senator KENNEDY feels the same. He, particularly, so he can get on with his minimum wage issue—no, excuse me, I am sorry. He will eventually get on with that. We do know that. We do know him well.

So I hope Senators will—and I know the Senator shares my view—come to the floor and process these floor amendments so we can move on to the next item of business. We are going to finish this bill. The sooner the better, and we will call for third reading at some appropriate time this morning if the action does not go swiftly. I yield the floor.

Mr. BAUCUS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed as in morning business.

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

REPEAL THE GAS TAX AND  
INCREASE THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I rise to discuss a subject of great importance to Montana, my home State, and also to me personally. That is the subject of the proposal to cut the gas tax by 4.3 cents over the rest of the year.

I am reminded of a comment made by the great Irish conservative thinker, Edmund Burke, in reflections on the revolution of France where he said:

Among an infinite number of acts of violence, of folly, some good may be done. They who destroy everything certainly will remove some grievance. They who make everything new have a chance that they may establish something beneficial.

That is about where we stand today with the 104th Congress. The Congress is approaching its close. The present-day revolutionaries are getting ready to put on their hot tar and feathers and mount up on the rail to be ridden out of town. Behind them will remain a rather weird legacy: Government shutdowns, attempts to repeal the Clean Air Act, weaken protection of our lakes and streams, slash student loan programs and cut school lunches, and radical experiments with \$270 billion Medicare cuts.

But hidden away in this mess are a few good things—a few grievances removed, a small number of beneficial things established. They are hard to find, but over the next 5 months or so, we need to dig them out, pass them and get them up to the President to sign. It is a tough job, but today we have found one of them, and that is repeal of the gas tax.

Folks are hurting at home. Wages are stagnant, cattle prices are down, but the cost of housing and the cost of college and a lot of other necessities are going up, and we should be here to do something about that.

Some of these problems are pretty complex. But we can start with a few simple solutions that will put some more money in an ordinary working man's or woman's pocket. That is what repealing the gas tax will do.

Probably that should be enough reason to repeal it, but fairness and principle also say that a gas tax that is not devoted directly to transportation funding is a bad idea and ought to be repealed.

The price of gas in Montana is up from \$1.29 a gallon in March to \$1.42 today, as reflected by this chart: \$1.29 March 26 and up in just a short period of time, over 1 month, up to \$1.42 a gallon. Who knows where it will be tomorrow, the third line on this chart.

As part of this, Montanans already pay 27 cents a gallon under a gas tax in our State—that is the State gasoline tax—and 14.1 cents a gallon for transportation under the Federal gasoline tax. The rest, 4.3 cents a gallon, is an excise tax that goes to general revenues. Like all single-product excise taxes, this 4.3-cent tax is unfair, it is narrowly based, and it is grossly unfair to the West where we have to drive a

long way to work, to the grocery store, or to the hospital.

That is why I have opposed gas taxes. I opposed the gas tax hike in 1990. I remember back in 1993, the administration proposed a gas tax of 9.3 cents a gallon. I spent nearly a month fighting them down, a tenth of a cent by a tenth of a cent to the present 4.3-cent level.

As I said then, and I will quote, "I will vote for the \$500 billion deficit reduction plan because I don't want to let perfection be the enemy of the good. The deficits we have run up have already laid a \$4 trillion debt on the backs of our children, and fast action on the deficit is the best way to increase business confidence and keep interest rates low so jobs will be created by expanding business and people can refinance their mortgages. But make no mistake about it, the gas tax is a weak point in this package."

The majority leader's proposal is a relatively modest proposal. It does not cure the weak point in the 1993 package completely by repealing the gas tax; instead, it is a temporary 7-month reduction, essentially a limited constructive response to an emergency caused by the sudden increase in gas taxes last month.

There is a little work ahead. We need to balance the budget, so we need to make sure that the gas tax cut is offset and does not widen the deficit. That is critical. The offset needs to be a fair one and does not simply put a new burden on working people, and we need to be sure that oil companies do not simply use the gas tax cut to raise prices again.

With that aside, it is a good idea. As historians mull over the Government shutdowns and otherwise pick through the debris left by the revolutionary Congress, they will be able to say, "At least they got one thing right."

We ought to be able to do this quickly, to take a few cents a gallon off at the pump, and at the same time we ought to be able to raise the minimum wage. I was on the phone yesterday with some minimum wage workers in Bozeman. A raise of 90 cents an hour will let them stay ahead on electric bills and on water bills. It will let a single-working mom give the kids a night at the movies every once in a while, give a donation to a church, maybe buy a couple of books, and that is not asking a lot.

So these are the right things to do. We ought to get the gas tax repealed by Memorial Day, and we ought to get the minimum wage raised by Memorial Day.

I hope people in both parties will take a fair, independent look at these ideas because they are good ideas, and they help ordinary people make ends meet. They deserve the Senate's support. Mr. President, I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.