

message to the American working family that we are on their side.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, may I inquire, what business is the Senate in at this moment?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is in morning business, 90 minutes controlled by the minority leader.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, then I ask unanimous consent to be allowed to continue as in morning business.

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

#### THE NUCLEAR WASTE POLICY ACT OF 1996

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, for all the right reasons our Nation has been a generator of radioactive material for nearly five decades. Most of this material is a byproduct of two principal activities: national defense activities and commercial nuclear powerplants, which generate more than 20 percent of America's electricity.

These two major activities have worked to benefit all Americans. Therefore, I believe managing these radioactive wastes is a national concern and responsibility. We cannot and must not walk away from this responsibility. To not address this responsibility would be unwise, irresponsible, and unsafe.

With specific regard to electrical generation, every American benefits from the richness and diversity of our country's natural resources and their use. Through interconnecting transmission lines that traverse the land, we have one of the world's most reliable and powerful electricity supplies that drives our economy.

Nuclear powerplants are at work in more than 30 States in every region of the country. Supplying more than 20 percent of the Nation's electricity, nuclear energy is part of the foundation for our Nation's high standard of living and economic growth.

For this reason, there is broad consensus and support for ensuring that the Federal Government meet its responsibility to provide a central storage facility for used nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive material from the defense program. Senate bill 1271 allows and directs our Federal Government to meet that responsibility.

As I know many of my colleagues have discovered in meetings, phone calls, and in their mailrooms, support for S. 1271 is coming from all quarters, including State and local government officials, public utility commissioners,

newspaper editorial boards, labor unions, chambers of commerce, national trade associations, and electric utilities, just to name a few groups. I am very pleased to have the bipartisan support of 28 cosponsors for my legislation.

Lawsuits have been filed by 18 States against the Federal Government over inaction of the Government to follow their statutory direction to manage radioactive material. This clearly demonstrates the importance and urgency of fulfilling the Federal Government's obligation to accept spent fuel. That obligation has been directed in law since the 1982 Nuclear Waste Act, and it is reaffirmed by my legislation.

Since the late 1950's, scientists have been studying, testing, and successfully employing storage technologies. And since the early 1970's, the Nevada test site was singled out as one of the nine leading sites to consider for a radioactive waste repository. Hasty decisions are not being made here. S. 1271 is directing action be taken as a result of the science and technology and testing.

Electric customers have committed nearly \$12 billion solely to study, test, and build a radioactive waste management system. Already more than \$4.6 billion has been spent, much of it to assure public safety. Now is the time to act on the Nevada site.

Broad-based national support for the nuclear material waste management program and S. 1271 is based on the fact that this issue is clearly a national concern requiring a national solution. Furthermore, support is buttressed by the positive work that is ongoing at the Nevada test site, which is an isolated, unpopulated, dry desert location that has a long history of uses for some of the most extreme research known to man.

For these reasons, I urge my colleagues to join with the many State and local officials, labor leaders, business leaders, and scientists throughout the country in support of S. 1271. Allow our citizens the comfort of knowing our Government has acted responsible to assure safe, environmentally sound long-term storage and disposal of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive material.

Mr. President, with that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

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

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

#### THE GASOLINE TAX

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I am somewhat at a loss because I have been in the Finance Committee this morning and also have been serving in another capacity for the last few minutes, so I have not heard any of the actual statements on the floor of the U.S.

Senate that have been made this morning. However, it has been brought to my attention that several statements have been made relative to the gasoline tax and the proposal to repeal 4.3-cent-per-gallon of the gasoline tax.

Considering that those statements have been made this morning and having a general idea of probably what those statements were, I would like to not only stand for a moment to respond but also to place in the RECORD some pertinent facts that I think need to be made very clear.

First, in the Finance Committee meeting this morning, which I must say was very spirited, very lively, we had a lot of discussion about whether or not we should repeal the 4.3-cent-per-gallon gas tax enacted in 1993 toward deficit reduction. We had a distinguished panel that represented the truckers, that represented the bus industry, that represented the airline industry. They had a wonderful man there who operates, in Prince Georges County, two service stations. The basic theory was, if we could get the Congress to repeal the 4.3-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax, that immediately 4.3 cents per gallon would be taken off of gasoline at the pump.

Let us look back a little bit to see if this logic will come true. After 1993, the 4.3-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax was collected, after we placed the tax on and allocated this particular new tax, this new fee toward deficit reduction, not only did we start decreasing the deficit, but we did something else. Gasoline prices came down. Gasoline prices came down after we placed the 4.3-cent user fee, in 1993, on gasoline. People do not talk about that very much right now, but that was the case.

There is another concern that I had this morning in today's hearing in the Finance Committee. The people on the panel, who are very good advocates for their constituent groups, for the truckers and the airlines, the service station owners, and all the rest, these individuals came before the Senate Committee on Finance this morning and basically stated that, first, "If you will repeal this gasoline tax, we're going to be able to spur the economy, we're going to be able to lower gasoline prices, we're going to be able to buy diesel for our trucks at 4.3 cents per gallon less."

But what was never stated, even though they were coming and saying, "Give us a break, give us some relief," they never stated—any of them—how we were going to make up this loss of revenue. We collect \$4.8 billion a year in this particular tax of 4.3 cents per gallon. Not one of our witnesses this morning said, "We have a way for you to prevent the deficit from rising dramatically if you repeal this gasoline tax." Not one of them. Not one witness this morning gave us an indication of how we are going to make up this shortfall.

I guess they were saying, "Cut this tax out, let the deficit increase," because they gave us no responsible alternative for making up the difference.