

sacred institution of marriage and offend our sense of decency and morality, if that is what is going on in the Tax Code, we need to correct it.

We should be encouraging the make-up of the family, not the breakup of the family. We should bring tax relief to married couples today—not tomorrow, not next year, not 6 years down the road, but today. They have waited all these years with this discriminatory tax. We can never make it up to them, so let's start today and make it effective today. We can bring tax relief to these couples by passing my amendment and, if not mine, at least we should get started with the underlying bill. It is better to do it down the road, over the course of 6 years, than not at all. With my amendment, we can do it immediately and save all of this money each year for each of these families.

(Mr. ALLARD assumed the Chair.)

ELIAN GONZALEZ

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, I want to talk on a subject that has been in the news a lot. I will take a few minutes of the Senate's time. I have been involved in a lot of issues. I have debated just about everything known to mankind on the floor of the Senate, as have most of us. I am in my tenth year in the Senate, and I have never been involved in an issue that has gotten to my heart more than the Elian Gonzalez case—never. Last night, on the Geraldo Rivera show, a poll was shown saying 61 percent of the American people said Elian Gonzalez should go back to his father, and 28 percent of them said he should stay here in America.

Here is this little boy who floated in the ocean on an innertube after his mother died trying to bring him to America. So we are now going to conduct policy about what to do about Elian by reading polls. Where is the leadership in this country when we need it? This is not about polls. I don't care what the polls are. I could care less what the polls are. If Lincoln had taken a poll on slavery, we would probably still have slavery because the majority of the people in America at that time supported slavery. But he didn't take a poll or put his finger to the wind. He did what was right.

Again, I plead with my colleagues in the Senate to grant Elian Gonzalez and his family permanent residency status so this issue can be handled by a Florida custody court. This should not be an immigration matter. Elian Gonzalez did not get on a yacht and cruise into Miami Harbor. He and two other people almost drowned while everybody else on the boat—10 or 12 other people—lost their lives. And his mother's dying wish was to "please get my son to American soil."

I have heard a lot about the father's rights. I have nothing against him. He could be the nicest guy in the world. I have met Elian. I didn't get a chance to meet Elian's mother because she didn't

make it. If she had made it, we would not be here talking about this because, under the law, she and Elian would be allowed to stay here. So because she died, Elian has no rights.

Those of you listening to me now who think this is a father-son issue, I want you to listen carefully to what I have to say because it is not a father-son issue. That is a totally bogus argument. There are reports in Miami that Elian is reluctant to travel to Washington to see his father. He is a frightened little boy. Wouldn't you be after you survived that? Has anybody listening to me now ever gone through an experience like that—floating on an innertube on the high seas for 3 days, after you watched your mother die, and everybody else on the boat is gone except two others he didn't know were alive because they were drifting off somewhere else. And then to be sitting in a home in Miami, with people who love him, who have taken care of him, and to wonder if today, right now, tonight, tomorrow morning—he doesn't know when—maybe noon tomorrow, in comes the large, sweeping hand of the Justice Department and Janet Reno, and they yank him from the arms of these people who love him and drag him back to Cuba. That is what he is sitting through now and worrying about now. He is a frightened little boy. When are we going to be concerned about this frightened little boy?

I am tired of hearing about everyone else's rights in this debate. I am sick of it. I am sick of the fact that I can't get a vote on the floor of this Senate because the people do not have the guts to vote. They do not want to be recorded. I am sick of it because this little boy is going to be dragged back to Cuba, and he is going to be used as a pawn in Castro's—God knows what—forsaken land over there. And we have to live with it. We ought to be recorded, and we ought to be on record. We ought to stand up and be counted. I am sick of it. I have been quiet too long. I am not going to be quiet anymore.

He is fearful of returning to that country. I talked to him. He said: Senator SMITH, please help me. Don't send me back to Cuba. I said: Elian, do you love your father? Do you want to go back with your father? He says: Yes. I want to be with my father. I don't want to go back to Cuba.

Mr. Gonzalez, if you are listening to me, why don't you defect? It is a heck of a lot better here.

I am going to tell you that there is one shining example of why it is not about father and son. It is not about father and son. I am sick of it. Listen to me—one shining example of the human rights violation of Fidel Castro.

Where are all the human rights people who care about this? Where is the Catholic Church that sheltered all of these Communists during the Nicaraguan and El Salvador issue? Where are they? Silent.

Let me tell you about Fidel Castro and what little boys such as Elian look

forward to, and what Elian will have to look forward to when he is dragged back to Cuba—for his father. Give me a break, Ms. Reno.

On July 13, 1994, 72 Cuban men, women, and children boarded the *13 de Marzo*, a tugboat, trying to sail for freedom to the United States, just like Elian did. Less than 3 hours later—3 hours later—32 of them would be forced to return to Cuba—they were the lucky ones—while the other 40, 23 children among them, were left by the Cuban authorities, their bodies scattered at sea.

At 3 o'clock in the morning, 22 men and 30 women boarded a recently renovated World War II tugboat in the Bay of Havana. With them were over two dozen children, one an infant, and several others between 5 and 10 years old.

I am going to show you some pictures of the children who boarded that boat who never returned. I want to show you pictures of children who died such as these children right here:

Caridad Leyva Tacoronte, dead, 4 years old;

Angel Rene Abreu Ruiz, dead, 3 years old;

Yousel Eugenio Perez Tacoronte, dead, 11 years old.

Let me tell you how they died with this dictator who tells you that he wants to welcome this little boy back to Cuba so he can be with his father. If Castro had caught him, he would be dead. All of them would have been. He would have killed them. But he didn't catch them. They drowned.

Now Elian has to be told that he has to go back. His father said the other day, "Four months I have been waiting for my son."

Where have you been, Mr. Gonzalez? Nobody is stopping you from coming here, except Castro. We don't have any policy that says you can't come here.

Let me tell you what happened to these kids. This little tugboat was detected, and it was approached by the Cuban coast guard. The government boat did not attempt to stop the *13 de Marzo*, the boat. It didn't try to stop it. Instead, it stalked it for 45 minutes along the coast of Cuba, 7 miles out at sea—stalked it, intimidating it.

The U.S. Coast Guard protects life. The Cuban coast guard exterminates life.

It was then that the government vessel, beyond the sight of any witnesses on land, rammed this defenseless boat. This is 1994. This isn't 1959. This is 1994, 6 years ago. Defenseless people were in a little tugboat which was rammed by the Cuban coast guard.

According to the testimony of several of the survivors, two Cuban government firefighting boats appeared and began to pummel the passengers with high pressure firehoses.

You can imagine how horrible that was.

Although the passengers repeatedly attempted to surrender to the government officials—even women holding their children up on deck, saying,

please, my children; it is my child; don't kill my child. They were begging for their lives, but they were relentless, this wonderful Castro who is so concerned about getting this little boy back to his father in Cuba.

The force from the firehoses you can imagine. One survivor, Mayda Tacoronte Vega, told her sister that she witnessed children sprayed from the arms of their mothers into the ocean waters. Other children were swept over the deck by the firehoses into the sea and drowned. Desperate to protect their own children, the women carried the remaining children down into the boat's hold.

Gerardo Perez Vasconcelos, whose ex-wife and son perished that day, told of how the firehoses were filling the hold with water. The boat sank, and she didn't see anybody coming out of the hold.

With most of its weaker passengers already drowned inside the hold, or in the sea, the tugboat filled with water, cracked in two, and was rammed again just to be sure, and it sank.

Over the course of a few minutes that day, Maria Victoria Garcia lost her husband, her 10-year-old boy, her brother, three uncles, and two cousins. For what? For trying to get out of Cuba, this place that we are going to send Elian back to, maybe tomorrow.

Her poignant testimony revealed what happened to her and her son once they were in the water. "We struggled to stay above water by clinging to a floating body."

I wonder what Fidel would have done if Fidel had found Elian floating in the tube rather than these two fishermen.

"We struggled to stay above the water by clinging to a floating body," this woman said. "I held onto this body because I just didn't have the strength to go on. But people fell on me, and my son slipped from my grasp," just as Elian's mother slipped from his grasp.

The young boy could fight the huge waves created by the Government vessels, and his mother was forced to watch helplessly as her baby drowned only 5 feet away.

Angel Ruiz, 3 years old, Fidel Castro, that wonderful, little child-loving dictator over there, took care of her.

There is Yousel, he is 11.

Nineteen-year-old Janette Hernandez Gutierrez also courageously attempted to save the life of a child just before the boat was fully submerged. "We went to look for the other child. Just as I was about to get off the boat, I felt the child * * * had caught my foot. And when I was about to grab him, my shoe slipped off and down he went. I couldn't reach him. That was horrible * * *"

Hernandez went on to describe the scene of the massacre: "There was a child who was inflated like a toad, inflated with so much water."

The merciless attack left 23 children and 17 adults dead in the Florida Straits.

You say: Oh, well. That was just a bunch of Castro's goons who got a lit-

tle excited; no big deal. This is not about that. Elian's father loves him. He should go back.

Here is what Castro says about Elian, in case you want to know:

"The team is ready," Castro said, referring to when Elian comes back, "to proceed without losing 1 minute with the rehabilitation and readaptation of Elian to his family."

Yes. Absolutely. You talk about psychological trauma. You don't know what psychological trauma is until you deal with what this little boy has to deal. Not one person in the Justice Department has asked Elian one question about what he wants.

I have been there. I have talked to him.

The 32 survivors—maybe they were lucky. Maybe they weren't. They were taken to a prison where they have to endure life separated from their surviving relatives.

Not only did the agents refuse to search for the dead, they mocked the survivors and the relatives of the deceased and laughed at those who asked the state security to reclaim the bodies, said Gerardo Perez in a tearful press conference.

The officials said the drowned were nothing other than counterrevolutionary dogs. Will we send this "counterrevolutionary dog" back to Castro? Is Elian a counterrevolutionary dog? Elian had a taste of freedom. What if he resists the lack of human rights in Cuba? Will we hear about it? I don't think so. We will not hear about it, but Elian will hear about it. What do you think his father will be able to do about it?

I ask some of my critics on the 61 percent, pick up a book about Fidel Castro's Cuba and look up the word "pioneers." Let me tell you about the Pioneers. Elian was a Pioneer before he escaped. What do Pioneers do? They have a little indoctrination school. Here is one of the little drills they do for the children at the age of 3: Hold your hands out—put on a blindfold. Hold your hands out, ask God for some candy, and wait. No candy comes. Close your hands, put them down. Put your hands back up again, ask Fidel Castro for some candy, and watch it pour into your hands.

That is what Elian has to look forward to. It is called brainwashing—nothing complicated about it.

The Union of Communist Pioneers is a compulsory political organization for children and adolescents created by the government for youngsters in kindergarten to 12th grade. It functions as the first step toward joining the Union of Communist Youth. Approximately 98 percent of the children in elementary school are enrolled. It is not presided over by a child or adolescent, as one would expect, but by a high-ranking adult member of the Union of Communist Youth.

Don't give me this stuff about him going back to his father. He is not going back to his father.

What about his mother? Why does she not have rights, too? She had custody. She was taking care of him. The dirty little secret which Mr. Gonzalez will not talk about, because he can't, because of the long arm of Castro—where is he? He is in Bethesda, in a Cuban diplomat's house. He has a lot of free time to talk there. He can speak freely there, can't he? Reno has the nerve to say: We talked out there, we talked alone, and he didn't say anything about defecting.

Come on, give me a break. Attorney General Reno, you could have stopped it 4 months ago, and you can still stop it today. Let it go to a custody court. Get out of it. It is not an immigration matter. He didn't immigrate here in the way we define immigration. Let it go to the custody court in Florida, and let them decide, if they need to. Let the family sit down alone without Fidel Castro, without any government officials, and let them talk about it. If they can't work it as a husband and wife can't work out custody of their children, go to court, and let the court make the determination based on all of the facts.

There is a dirty little secret about Mr. Gonzalez. Yes, there is. Did he know Elian was coming? Sure, he knew. He knew they were leaving. He was called when the child was picked up and went to the hospital. The doctors wanted to know whether he had medical problems or history they needed to know about, so they called him in Cuba while the family was there. He said: Take care of my son; I will be there soon.

We are not hearing about that, are we? We will not hear about that because we don't want to do anything to make Fidel Castro angry at the United States. After all, Bill Clinton wants a legacy of breaking down the barriers between Cuba and the United States. That is what this is about. Let's get real. God knows, he needs something to save his legacy, so we will take it out on Elian Gonzalez. After all, he is an expendable little kid. We don't care about him. That is just one kid. Let him go back to his father.

If your son was lost at sea for 3 days and everybody on the boat drowned and somebody found him, I don't care who it was—it could be a convicted murderer who found him, who cares—if he found him and brought him home, wouldn't you "thank him?" Wouldn't you say "thank you"? Wouldn't you thank those who took care of him, if you loved your son?

Let me state what happened. There was no thank you. When he got off the plane, he said: They were a bunch of kidnapers. I want my kid back. They kidnapped my kid.

Kidnapped my kid? I am not passing judgment on this guy. He could be the greatest father in the world for all I know, but he will not get a chance to be a father because the Cubans have already said this boy is the property of Cuba, not Mr. Gonzalez. Mr. Gonzalez will do what he is told.

I want your kid.

OK; when do you want him? Where do I take him? Where do I drop him off?

As recently as April 2, Fidel Castro called the Miami relatives of Elian Gonzalez, Elian's unpunished kidnapers. Do you think little Elian will go back and tell his classmates and his father and those people in Cuba that these people were kidnapers who took care of him, who saved his life, the fishermen and the family who took care of him? I don't think so. What will happen? We can't afford to have little Elian running around saying bad things about Cuba or good things about America. No. Elian will pay the price.

We don't have the guts to stand on the floor of the Senate as a Senate, all 100 Members, take a vote and say he should go back to Cuba or the case should go to court.

Some say we might lose. Yes, we might. I think the vote count is probably 45—maybe. So what? We could take a walk on a number of issues before this body such as whether or not we should go to war in the Persian Gulf. We could have taken a walk on that and let the President go ahead and do it, but we took a vote. It was a tough vote. We take a lot of tough votes around here, and a lot of people die as a result of votes, especially when we vote to go to war.

The headline in "Granma," the Communist Party newspaper, after the incident was: "Tugboat Stolen by Anti-social Elements Loses Stability and Sinks."

On August 5, 1994, Fidel Castro declared that the roots of the accident were manifested in the conduct of the United States; it was the United States' fault that these kids drowned.

Dr. Marta Milina, a Cuban psychiatrist who escaped Cuba in August of 1999, stated: If Elian Gonzalez is returned to Cuba, he would have severe psychological trauma.

Is that in the best interest of Elian? Is it about Elian? Or is it about his father? The answer is, a custody court would know that because a custody court, if the family could not agree, would listen to the facts. They would make that determination. But they have never spoken, and the Justice Department has never spoken to Elian.

This is one smart little boy. Meet him. And I am sorry the Attorney General does not believe it is important enough to meet him, but I will never forget him. He carried around a little statue of the Virgin Mary in the home where we were. I said: Who is that? He said: Virgin Mary. He said: I saw her while I was on the raft.

Another story that is not recorded, and the fishermen will tell you, when they found him, he was floating in that little tube, asleep. You can substantiate this by talking to the family if you don't believe me. He was in the ocean for 3 days in the bright sunshine, didn't have a sunburn, and he was surrounded by dolphins, and dolphins will ward off sharks.

This little boy is a very special little boy in more ways than one. The fact that we allow him to go back to Cuba under the auspices of uniting a father and a son is the most outrageous decision this country will ever make. Frankly, I do not want that blood on my hands. I know that is tough talk, and I mean every word of it. I don't want it on my hands. I have seen too much of it.

I am not going to read all the names, but they will be printed in the RECORD. The children in that incident, 4 years old, 11 years old, 11 years old, 6 months old fire-hosed out of the arms of her mother, 2 years old, 3 years old, 10 years old, 4 years old, 3 years old, 11 years old, 2 years old—that is the age of the children.

Let me close on a couple of points. Edmund Burke once said:

All that is required for evil to succeed is for good men [and women] to do nothing.

Today we can do something. We can grant Elian Gonzalez and his family permanent residency status, which will send this case to the family court where Mr. Gonzalez can make his case without any Castro influence. We should have done it the day Elian got back, but we did not. We decided to make this a big political issue between the administration and Castro. So Castro starts whining, and suddenly this administration thinks the case has to be in INS's jurisdiction. We could not kowtow to a Communist dictator. What does Castro care about the interests of this little boy? I told you what he thinks of this little boy.

There are no parental rights in Cuba. The children are taken away into these training camps. They are taught all kinds of drills. They are taught how to take an AK-47 apart, blindfolded, at the age of 6.

Luis Fernandez, a Cuban diplomat, said as recently as yesterday:

The boy [Elian] is a possession of the Cuban government.

Cuban children, my colleagues, do not belong to their parents, they belong to Fidel Castro.

Article 39 of the Cuban constitution—it would be nice if some of the 61 percent of the people who say this had the facts. It would be nice if the pollster gave them the facts before they answered the question. Article 39 of the Cuban constitution, adopted in 1976 and revised in 1992, declares:

... the education of children and young people in the spirit of communism is the duty of all society.

Law No. 16 of the "Children and Youth Code," adopted in 1978, says the state's goal is the creation of "Communism's new generation" and requires all adults to help mold a child's "Communist personality." If the parents do not bring up the children to be good Communists, then the neighborhood spy will report them to the authorities and they will be taken away and "reeducated."

Talk to some of the Vietnamese who escaped Vietnam and ask them what a

reeducation camp is. If anybody thinks little Elian Gonzalez will not be put under a severe and thorough Communist indoctrination when he goes back, then they are blind. He is going to suffer. He is going to pay—big time. For what? Surviving a near drowning, surviving a wreck on the open sea. That is why he is being punished, because his mother did not live.

She has rights, too, but we don't know about them. But somebody could represent her in a custody court and put her rights on the record. But not Janet Reno.

Let me give a little idea of what he is going to do some summer when he gets back. He is going to be in a "voluntary" labor or military drill camp. He will learn there is no religion but communism. He was put in a church a few days after he arrived. He had never been in a church before in his life. He didn't know what the inside of a church was.

He will learn that Fidel is God. He will learn the Communist Party is of more value than his father or anybody else in his family. He will be told his Miami relatives who cared for him and loved him, including his surrogate mother, Marielysis, are nothing more than traitors and worms and kidnapers. That is the language they use.

Marielysis Gonzalez, 21 years old, has been hospitalized off and on for the past 2 weeks because this little boy clings to her every day. He will not leave her alone. Every time somebody knocks on the door, every time somebody comes in the yard, every time the phone rings, he wonders if somebody is going to take him away. And he asks her: Marielysis, are they going to take me today?

How would you like to live like that? That is what Janet Reno has put this boy through for 4 months, and I am sick of it. I am not going to defend it. She has put him through it. It is her responsibility and the President's. These people have been vilified, these good people, these decent people in the Cuban-American community in Miami—good, decent people who have shown a lot of self-restraint, frankly, under the circumstances, but especially Lazaro and Marielysis and other members of that family who have taken such good care of this boy. All they care about is the best interests of the boy.

It is funny, I did not hear some of those people saying anything about the rule of law—these same people today who are saying, the rule of law says he must go back with his father. It is funny, though, those same people when their President, the Chief Executive of our country, was impeached for repeatedly breaking our law, not one of them had the courage to step out and say: He broke the law; he lied to me.

It just depends on whose law it is, doesn't it, and whose law you break. That is what matters.

I believe in the rule of law, but can you understand why they do not want

to send Elian back to a totalitarian state? I have talked to the family about this. They love Juan Gonzalez. He is a family member. There is no difficulty between these family members. The reason Mr. Gonzalez did not come here is that he could not come here. The reason Mr. Gonzalez can't defect is that he is afraid to defect because he knows what is going to happen to some of his family who are still back in Cuba. We are playing the game. We are just giving them all the cover.

"I spoke to Mr. Gonzalez, and he didn't indicate to me he wanted to defect."

Do you remember learning about the Fugitive Slave Law of the 1840s and 1850s? It made northerners return escaped slaves back to their masters. Would anyone begrudge abolitionists who opposed that law?

Picture this: A little black child in 1840, Anywhere, U.S.A., in the South, picked up by his mother. His father says, "No, get away, I'll cover for you." She takes the Underground Railroad and makes it to the North and is caught. She dies. Same logic—send him back to the father. Send him back to slavery.

This kid is going back to slavery. He is not going back to his father; he is going back to slavery. So all of you out there, all 61 percent, including many of my colleagues, when you watch him paraded around the streets of Havana as they teach him to become a pretty good little Communist, think about it. Think about how you might have stood up and prevented it.

In 1939, the U.S.S. *St. Louis* arrived from Germany with 937 refugees aboard. Do you know who they were? Jews fleeing from Hitler. The ship was denied entry because the law did not allow it. The refugees went back to Europe and Hitler and to their deaths. Was it right to uphold the law in that case?

The fact is, no law governs this case. Janet Reno is not telling you the truth. She has total discretion. There is no law that is dictating to her that she has to send this boy back. No law. Show it to me. Somebody come to the floor and read to me the law that says the Attorney General must return this boy. There is no such law. There is nothing in the law that says it. There is no age restriction. There is nothing. What it says is that she has discretion. So her discretion is to send him back, but do not tell me it is the law because it is not.

She made the wrong decision. With this simple bill, on which I have been trying to get a vote for a month, Senators can be on record as saying it is wrong to make this an immigration case. He has rights. He is only a 6-year-old boy, but he has rights. His mother had rights. Let's let the family sit down and talk about it without the Justice Department. Let them meet alone. If they cannot work it out, they can go to the Florida custody court and decide what is in the best interest of Elian. That is the way it should be.

Will evil succeed, as Mr. Burke said? That could be Elian. That could have been Elian and might still be Elian. My conscience is clear.

GAS TAXES

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate voted on a cloture motion to end debate on Senator LOTT's proposal to roll back the gasoline excise tax. Senator LOTT's bill is a sincere effort to address the hardships many Americans have been facing given the rising price of gasoline at the pump.

I commend the majority leader for this legislation. But, I do want to clarify my vote on the cloture motion.

I voted for cloture because I believe the majority leader, of all people, deserved an up-or-down vote on the proposal. I also believed that, if we were going to vote to cut or maintain the current gasoline tax, we ought not to confuse the American people about where we stood by deciding this issue on a procedural vote.

Unfortunately, because cloture was not invoked, and there may not be a vote up-or-down on the proposal itself, it seems that Utahns are indeed confused about where I stand on this issue. As it frequently happens, the vote on the procedural motion becomes a proxy for how a senator would have voted on the bill. However, that assumption does not hold true for me in the case of this gas tax proposal. I would have reluctantly voted against it.

While I respect Senator LOTT for his effort at providing relief for truckers, farmers, landscapers, salesmen, and everyone else who depends on his or her vehicle, I have an equal concern for the quality of the highways they drive on.

It is unclear to me that the loss of revenue that would have resulted from passing this legislation could have been immediately made up from other programs, thus necessary highway construction and repair projects in Utah and around the nation could have been delayed.

Moreover, I believe that there are other measures we can find should take to address the issue of high gas prices. In the long-term, we should encourage development of alternative fuels vehicles. Toward this end, Senator JEFFORDS and I will be introducing legislation later this month that will provide strong tax incentives for the development and purchase of such vehicles, along with the alternative fuel they use.

I also believe that there are other tax relief initiatives that will have greater positive impact for American families, and I will continue to press hard for these proposals.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, yesterday, I spoke on S. 2285. I now ask unanimous consent that an ARCO letter concerning gas prices be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

ARCO,

Los Angeles, CA, April 5, 2000.

Hon. DIANNE FEINSTEIN,
*Hart Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC.*

DEAR SENATOR FEINSTEIN: Thank you for your phone call on Friday, March 31, regarding gasoline prices in California. During that conversation, you inquired regarding the status of ARCO's gasoline inventory. I have outlined below some statistics that were not available to me when we talked.

Currently, ARCO's inventory of CARB gasoline is at our operating target. Total industry gasoline inventories on the West Coast appear to be recovering. The last weekly West Coast gasoline inventory report showed an increase of 1.5 million barrels over the previous week, which was the low point of the year.

With respect to the issue of gasoline prices, no one can predict the future. However, crude oil prices have been coming down over the last few weeks as a result of the recent OPEC meeting. Spot prices also appear to have peaked. Barring some unforeseen circumstances, we can assume that retail gasoline prices will follow suit.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Sincerely,

MIKE BOWLIN,
*Chairman and
Chief Executive Officer.*

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, American consumers are feeling the impact of high oil prices. Obviously, the increase is noticeable at the gas pump, but it also is being felt in less visible ways through increases in the cost of goods and services as airline prices and shipping costs escalate. I have stated, in no uncertain terms, that I consider responsibility for the current situation largely to lie at the feet of the Clinton-Gore Administration. Thanks to nearly eight years of their short-sighted policies, we are increasingly dependent on foreign oil. To make matters worse, not only does the Clinton-Gore Administration not have any clear plan to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, they actually appear to be moving in the opposite direction, seeming at every turn making it more difficult to develop domestic energy sources, whether it be gasoline, petroleum products, coal, oil, or hydropower.

As it is largely through the bungling efforts of the current Administration that we are in this situation, I believe it is appropriate that the U.S. Senate counterbalance their efforts with some modest relief. A suspension of the 4.3-cent federal fuel excise tax, imposed in the early days of the Clinton Gore administration, should provide the short term relief consumers deserve.

As Congress addresses these issues, however, we must seek a solution that not only attacks this problem from the perspective of energy supply, but also energy use. A key aspect of any debate on this subject must focus on motor vehicle fuel consumption. The United States currently uses about 17 million barrels of oil per day to run cars and trucks. Thanks to the existence of Corporate Average Fuel Economy, or CAFE, standards, three million barrels of oil are conserved each day. Despite the clear success of CAFE standards,