

I urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle—and I see the minority assistant leader is here. I hope we can try to break through on this small business bill this afternoon and find a way to reach some kind of compromise so those 63 colleagues could have their interests met.

I thank the Chair. I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:30 p.m.

Thereupon, at 1:06 p.m., the Senate recessed until 2:31 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. CARPER).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant majority leader.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

The assistant majority leader.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. For the information of all Senators, we have two Senators who are on their way to the Chamber. The Democratic conference has taken longer than was anticipated. They should be here momentarily. I ask unanimous consent that, pending their coming to the Chamber, Senator SMITH be recognized as in morning business for up to 6 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Chair hears none, and it is so ordered.

The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized.

MTBE

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, we are moving into the season of festivities. Hopefully, we will get an opportunity to celebrate the holidays. Unfortunately, for many in my State of New Hampshire and in other States across the country, this is a holiday season filled with the anxiety that comes with knowing their water is contaminated.

This contamination is caused by a Federal mandate that I believe is wrong. Another year has gone by and Congress has still done nothing to right that wrong.

Over the past few years, a good deal of the Nation has learned firsthand of the damage that MTBE has done to our drinking water supply. That certainly is true of many communities in New Hampshire where it has become a crisis where people cannot even drink their water or shower with it.

I have been fighting for the past 2 years to get the Senate to vote on a bill that will solve this problem. I am pleased that last week the majority leader made a commitment to me that the Senate would at least vote on this issue before the end of next February. I am grateful for that. Until that day arrives, though, I plan to come to this Chamber on a regular basis, while we are in session, to remind Senators of the terrible impact that MTBE is having on our Nation and on so many thousands of people and to remind them that it is very important that we act now.

For the past 2 years, I have met with a number of small businesses and families across New Hampshire who have been devastated by this problem. They cannot sell their homes. They cannot drink their water. They cannot shower with water. They have filters in their basements to get the MTBE out of the water.

According to the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, there may be up to 40,000 private wells with MTBE contamination. Of those, 8,000 may have MTBE contamination of above State health standards.

This is a crisis. We have to deal with this. I know it is nice to say we can make money by replacing MTBE with ethanol and all that. That is fine. Make all the money you want. But we need to get this issue resolved.

In many instances, the State has had to provide bottled water to my constituents. They are installing and maintaining extremely expensive treatment equipment. These costs are high. Particularly hard hit have been communities in the southern tier of my State: Arlington Lake in Salem, Frost Road in Derry, Green Hills Estates in Raymond, and so many more. But I want to briefly tell you a story about one particular site in Richmond, NH. It is in the southwestern part of the State. It is a beautiful area, and the type of beauty for which New Hampshire is so well known.

In August, I visited the Four Corners Store and several surrounding homes in the town of Richmond. It is called the Four Corners Store because it is at a rural crossroad, like so many in America, and takes up one of the four corners. Common sense is very pervasive in New Hampshire.

Mr. and Mrs. Stickles are the store's proprietors. When they purchased that country store a few years ago, they believed the MTBE contamination problem had been solved. They do have new underground storage tanks and are completely in compliance with the law.

Unfortunately, the MTBE plume from years ago still persists. A number of the nearby homes are having their wells polluted. It has contaminated a number of homes near the Four Corners Store.

I met with the owners of the store and visited those homes. The Goulas and the Frampton families were kind enough to invite me into their homes.

They showed me the treatment systems that had been installed by the State. They shared their concerns about their health and their children's health. At one of the homes lives a young couple with small children.

First and foremost, they are worried about the long-term health impacts on their children. They told me about the daily inconveniences of having to deal with this contamination in their wells. They were told the water was safe for showers; however, showers should only be with cold water, limited to 10 minutes, and well ventilated. That is what they were told. So take a cold shower and make sure it is well ventilated.

It is outrageous that we would stand by and allow this to continue in our country while the debate rages about replacing the MTBE additive with ethanol. Let's get real. We need to deal with this problem now. I intend to fight for these constituents throughout the rest of this session and also early into next year until we get this legislation passed. It is not right. Sometimes you just have to speak out when things are not right—that somebody should make a profit at the expense of somebody else getting sick and not being able to use their water.

Making a profit is wonderful. That is the American way. I am all for it. But we do not need a guaranteed MTBE market. We do not need a guaranteed ethanol market. We do not need a guaranteed anything.

Let the market play, but we have to be able to replace MTBE with something, and we cannot mandate that it be ethanol. It is not right for those of you in ethanol States to make the people in my State have to suffer.

It seems to me the passage of this bill should be easy. I tried for weeks and months and years to reach an accommodation. I have debated every Senator who deals with ethanol privately and publicly, behind the scenes and in committee, but we cannot seem to get agreement.

I urge my colleagues from all States to join with me to pass this legislation now so we can get the MTBE out of the wells in New Hampshire and many other wells and water supplies throughout the country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator from New Hampshire has expired.

The Senator from Iowa.

AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION, AND RURAL ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2001—Continued

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, parliamentary inquiry: What is the order before the Senate right now?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The pending business is the amendment No. 2608 offered by the Senator from Montana to the substitute.

Mr. HARKIN. We are on the farm bill and the pending business is an amendment offered by the Senator from Montana, Senator BURNS; is that correct?