

I would like to talk for an hour about ethanol, biodiesel, and other limitless and renewable sources of energy. One of the big oil companies once said that ethanol is no good, that it will not work. I saw it in a quarter-page ad in a daily newspaper, and I thought, well, if the big oil companies say this is not any good, it must be something we ought to take a closer look at: Taking the alcohol from a kernel of corn—you get a drop of alcohol from a kernel of corn—and you still have the protein feedstock left. One can use that alcohol to help contribute to America's energy supply. That makes good sense to me. But taking energy from the wind and running it through a turbine, through blades that turn, and then moving the electricity to the transmission lines, makes eminent good sense.

There is no excuse at all for this Congress to twiddle its thumbs when it ought to extend these production tax credits for wind energy. It ought to be done not next week, not next month, not next year; it ought to be done now. It ought to be done for 5 years. If we get people to come out and say first let's not do it, I say they are not thinking much about America's energy needs.

If they say let's do it for a year, I say it will not matter. It will not mean a thing. That will not provide enough of an incentive for anybody to do anything. Let us give people an opportunity to plan, to do the right thing. Let us give people the opportunity and the incentive to build, to extend America's energy supplies.

I am intending to offer that unanimous consent request either later today or tomorrow and would want to put people on notice of that.

Let me, if I might, read a couple of examples of what has happened because Congress did not do what it should do. Lonestar Transportation of Fort Worth, TX, is losing \$1.5 million in revenue per month due to the delay of this production tax credit. Trinity Industries of Dallas, TX, a builder of wind turbine towers, has furloughed 200 workers and projects a revenue loss of \$7 million a month. MFG, a builder of fiberglass turbine blades located in Gainesville, TX, laid off 138 skilled workers. Georgia and Texas: CAB, Inc. of Oakwood, GA, and also in Texas, that manufactures steel tower components, will see a 50-percent reduction in revenues because of failure to extend this. In Oregon, investment will not be made in a multimillion-dollar wind turbine manufacturing facility for Portland. DMI Industries in my State of North Dakota, a tower manufacturer in West Fargo, will likely see a 25-percent decrease in revenues. The company currently employs 165 people and was planning to hire an additional 50. They will not be able to do that at this point. LM Glasfiber, a wind turbine blade manufacturer in Grand Forks, has furloughed 30 percent of its 100 employees because of failure to extend the tax credit. In Louisiana, Beaird Industries

of Shreveport, LA, a builder of metal towers for wind turbines, furloughed 150 of its 500 employees just before Christmas. Zond Wind Turbines in California near Bakersfield furloughed 85 skilled workers. In West Virginia, Atlantic Renewable Energy Corporation will indefinitely delay a \$65 million investment in its Backbone Mountain site in Tucker County. That is 150 construction jobs. M.A. Mortenson Company of Minneapolis, MN, that designs and builds wind tower projects throughout the United States, will hold off creating 150 direct construction jobs and 450 subcontractor jobs without the extension.

The list goes on. I ask unanimous consent to have this printed in the RECORD.

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

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOREGONE DUE TO DELAY IN EXTENDING THE WIND ENERGY PRODUCTION TAX CREDIT (PTC)

In 2001 the wind industry installed nearly 1,700 megawatts (MW) of new capacity spurring more than \$1.7 billion in direct economic activity.

For this level of economic activity to continue in 2002, Congress must pass a multi-year extension of the wind energy Production Tax Credit (PTC) immediately. Failure to do so would forego billions in economic activity and thousands of jobs such as . . .

Texas: Lonestar Transportation of Ft. Worth, TX is losing \$1.5 million in revenue per month due to the PTC delay. Last year the company earned \$20 million—a full 20 percent of company revenues—by trucking wind turbine towers, blades, and generating units to development sites. Contact: David Ferebee, V.P. of Sales at 1-800-541-8271.

Trinity Industries of Dallas, TX, a builder of wind turbine towers, has furloughed 200 workers and projects a revenue loss of \$7 million per month (or \$84 million over 12 months) until the PTC is extended. Contact: John Miller at 512-322-0299.

MFG, a builder of fiberglass turbine blades located in Gainesville, laid off 138 skilled workers upon notification that Congress had not extended the wind tax credit.

Georgia and Texas: CAB, Inc. of Oakwood, GA and Nacogdoches, TX, a manufacturer of steel tower components will likely see a 50 percent reduction in revenues with workforce reductions of 30-40%. Contact: Ms. Terri Jondahl, Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer, at 888-241-7312, www.cabinc.com.

Oregon: Investment will not be made in a multi-million dollar wind turbine manufacturing facility for Portland that would have provided as many as 1,000 jobs.

North Dakota: DMI Industries, a tower manufacturer in West Fargo, ND, will likely see a 25 percent decrease in revenues (about \$15 million) in 2002 without an early PTC extension. The company currently employs 165 people and planned to hire an additional 50. Contact: Chuck Savageau, Business Development Manager at 701-282-6959, csavageau@dmindustries.com.

LMGlasfiber, a wind turbine blade manufacturer in Grand Forks has furloughed 30 percent of its more than 100 employees because of failure to extend the wind tax credit. Had the tax credit been extended last year, the company would have ramped up to 200 jobs. Contact: Craig Hoiseth, President, LM Glasfiber, 701-780-9910.

Louisiana: Beaird Industries of Shreveport, LA—a builder of metal towers for wind tur-

bines—furloughed 150 of its 500 employees just before Christmas 2001 because failure to extend the wind tax credit resulted in no new orders for towers. Last year the company built 800 steel towers for wind turbines. Contact: Alberto Garcia, VP for Sales at 318-865-6351.

California: Zond wind turbines, manufactured near Bakersfield, CA, have furloughed 85 skilled workers because failure to extend the PTC has caused a halt in orders for new turbines. Contact: Robert "Hap" Boyd at 213-452-5103.

West Virginia: Without an immediate PTC extension Atlantic Renewable Energy Corp. will indefinitely delay a \$65 million investment in its Backbone Mountain site in Tucker County. This project would provide about 150 construction jobs and as many as 6 permanent operations and maintenance jobs. Contact: Sam Enfield of Atlantic Renewable Energy Corporation at 301-407-0424.

Minnesota: M.A. Mortenson Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota a design/build contractor of wind power projects throughout the United States will have to hold off on creating up to 150 direct construction jobs and 450 subcontractor jobs in 2002 without the PTC extension. The loss in revenue to M.A. Mortenson Company will be up to \$70,000,000 in 2002. Contact Jerry Grundtner, General Manager, at 763-387-5513.

Farm Economy: Net farm earnings are expected to drop by 20 percent this year (from \$49.3 billion to \$40.6 billion) according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Extending the PTC expeditiously will pump significant additional income into the farm economy by allowing more farms to host wind turbines. Wind developers provide lease payments to farmers of about \$3,000 per wind turbine, per year for twenty years or more.

Mr. DORGAN. Madam President, I am disappointed we have not been able to get this completed. It is a matter of will. We understand there is wide support here and in the House. Bring it up, pass it on the floor of the Senate and the House, and send it to the President, so projects can go forward beginning tomorrow, next week, and next month. Skilled workers will find they are required by the companies. New jobs will be created. We will extend America's energy supply. It is exactly what we ought to do.

For that reason, I intend to make unanimous consent requests that the Finance Committee be discharged and we bring up and pass S. 94, legislation to provide a 5-year extension of the tax credit for electricity produced from wind. I intend to come to the Chamber and talk about this—until I am more than a minor annoyance—to see if we can get people to understand we have a responsibility to act in the interests of this country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

ENERGY

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I will respond briefly to my good friend, Senator DORGAN. I totally agree with his concept that we should pursue ethanol and wind and all alternative sources of energy. We will need them. There is absolutely no question. We need all the energy we can produce in this country.

The good news is the energy bill has been laid down. I hope we can start on this relatively soon. Clearly, we have to get the pending business resolved. I will discuss the foundation we begin with. It is a departure from the traditions of this body. It is unfortunate the majority leader has seen fit to mandate a procedure that is clearly contrary to the traditions of the process associated with the committees of jurisdiction. I am referring specifically, as former chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and now the ranking member, to the manner in which the majority leader saw fit to circumvent the responsibilities of the committee of jurisdiction.

My good friend, the chairman, Senator BINGAMAN, and I have worked together for some time. We have had a good relationship. Our theory was we would attempt to develop from the committee process a comprehensive energy bill. When I was chairman, we had hearings, we had input, and we introduced a bill. However, as we all are aware, there was a change in June. As a consequence, the Republicans lost control of the Senate and hence lost control of the agenda of the committee process.

Prior to the changeover, we had had several discussions in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee on various issues associated with the proposed energy legislation. This came about as a consequence of our President laying down as one of his prerequisites a mandate that Congress address an energy bill and do it with dispatch. The House has done its job in H.R. 4. So it became the responsibility of the Senate to take up a comprehensive energy bill.

What happened in the process deserves enlightenment. This is what I specifically object to. On the issue of ANWR, we had enough bipartisan votes to report out a bill containing ANWR. The leader knew this. As a consequence, in order to circumvent this process, the terminology I think that was used was to alleviate any differences of opinion in the process. However, that is what this body is all about, differences of opinion in coming together on a consensus. Nonetheless, the leader prevailed and ordered the chairman, Senator BINGAMAN, not to hold any markups on the bill. That precluded the committee from pursuing a process of taking up a bill, proceeding with amendments in the ordinary workings of the committee process, and voting out and bringing to the floor a comprehensive bill.

I can only assume the leader did this as a parliamentary maneuver to ensure we would not get a vote in committee on ANWR, where he clearly knew we had the votes to get it out. I hope every Senator in this body considers the precedent this action sets, particularly those Senators who value the traditions and open debate concept associated with this body. This is a departure. This is almost a dictate from the

majority leader who simply says we are not going to allow the committee of jurisdiction to take up the bill and vote it out and bring it to the floor.

That prevailed, and we have a situation where we are about to start debate on a very complex bill that has not gone through the committee process. What does this mean? This means every Member will be subjected to some very complex issues, those particularly associated with the electricity portion. They are not going to understand the terminology because it didn't go through the committee. There will be a lot of interest on behalf of various lobbyists who have different points of view relative to certain aspects, aspects that have never had a hearing, never had an opportunity for Members to express their views, let alone vote it out.

I am very irate as a consequence of this circumvention of our responsibility, and I think every Senator should be. We should put politics aside and reflect on the traditions of this body which dictate this is not the way this body traditionally does business.

Sure, the majority leader can initiate an action and go around the committee process, but is that the tradition of the Senate? Is that the tradition to circumvent the committees and the amendment process by subjecting this body now to a bill while it has not had hearings on many of the portions that are very complex?

I know how the majority leader feels about ANWR, but I add one more observation. He has indicated if ANWR stays in the bill, he will pull the bill. That means regardless of how the Senate prevails in a democratic process, he will take the initiative to see that it will not happen. He has circumvented the committee process which requires—instead of 51 votes—60 votes, on cloture, which he would, of course, file. Then he says if you get 60 votes, you are going to lose because he is going to pull the bill.

I don't care what the issue is, but I suggest this is a poor way to do business. The Senate should reflect on just what is happening and whether we can support a leader who dictatorially initiates an action of this type. I know it makes many members of the committees feel somewhat at a loss: What are we here for if we are not here to conduct committee business in the course of our responsibility?

As we start to consider this bill, we should continue to reflect on how we got there. We got there without a committee process. We got there as a consequence of the majority leader taking the authority away from the committee. We got a bill before the Senate that has not had a markup, it has not had individual hearings, and many of the portions of the bill, we are told, if we prevail on one, particularly the lightning rod of ANWR, we will lose anyway because he will pull the bill. I just want all parties to know that I object, and I know a number of my colleagues do, to this type of procedure.

I want to refer to a couple of other points that I think are germane to the debate which is going to take place.

For some time now we have been dependent on imported oil from Iraq. As a matter of fact, on September 11 we were importing a little over 1 million barrels a day from that nation. We are enforcing a no-fly zone over that nation. We are putting the lives of our young men and women at risk enforcing that no-fly zone. Yet we are buying oil. It is almost as if we take the oil, put it in our airplanes, and go take out his targets.

What does he do with the money he receives from the United States? He keeps his Republican Guard well fed. That keeps him alive. What else does he do? He develops a missile capability, a delivery capability, biological capability, and perhaps aimed at our ally, Israel.

That is the fact associated with the vulnerability of this country as we increase our dependence on imported oil. We are about 58 percent dependent, and it is increasing. The Department of Energy says it is going to be up to 63 percent or 64 percent in the year 2006. What does that do to the vulnerability of the United States? It means we become more dependent on Iraq.

What about Saudi Arabia? When we look at the terrorist activities in New York, we find most of the passports are from Saudi Arabia. It is a very unstable area, and we are becoming more and more dependent. Is it not in our national interest to reduce our dependence? The answer is clearly yes.

Let me reflect on one more thing. We have not had an inspector in Iraq in several years, under the U.N. agreement. We don't know what Iraq is up to. But as we reflect on the terrors and tragedies that have already occurred in this Nation, we recognize we should have acted sooner. We knew who bin Laden was. We knew about al-Qaida. Yet we did not act, and we know the consequences. The consequences became evident on September 11.

What day of reckoning is going to come when we have to face what Saddam Hussein has been up to? Will it be after the fact or will we mandate that our inspectors go in there and address this threat now? I know what my recommendation would be. It is better sooner than later; sooner to take out the terrorism risks associated with Saddam Hussein.

I know this is something the administration is agonizing about and will be critical if, indeed, there is some action and we will not have taken action.

This is what this issue is all about. It is about the national security of this country and our increased dependence. I do not know how many of my colleagues remember 1973–1974, the Yom Kippur War. Some of us are old enough to remember we had gas lines around the block. The public was outraged, they were inconvenienced.

What was the result of that? We were 37 percent dependent on imported oil at

that time. Now we are 58 percent dependent. You figure it out. It is pretty easy. Our vulnerability has increased. Make no mistake about it, with the unrest in the Mideast we are going to have a crisis. I can tell you, every Member of this body will be standing in line behind me to open up ANWR. They will say we have to increase our domestic production.

What is this bill anyway? Partially, as I have indicated, it is a bill in the national security interests of our country. I ask my colleagues, are they going to stand behind the environmental lobby, that has used this as a cash cow for membership and dollars? There is no evidence to suggest we can't open this area safely. This is my State. We support opening ANWR. We were there when the arguments in the 1960s were prevailing against opening Prudhoe Bay and building an 800-mile pipeline.

Let me tell you what that has done. That has provided this Nation, for several years—it has been operating 27 years—for several years with 25 percent of the total crude oil produced in this country. That was about 2 million barrels a day. Today it is a little over 1 million barrels, a little over 20 percent.

Where was that issue in the 1960s? That issue was before the Senate. It was a tie vote. The Vice President broke the tie, and it passed by one vote. That is how close it was. Where would we have been if we had not done that? Instead of 58 percent, we would probably be somewhere in the area of 68 percent dependent on imported oil.

What were the arguments then? You are going to build an 800-mile pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez. It is going to be like a fence across Alaska, and the caribou and the moose are not going to cross it. It is going to have a terrible effect on the environment. You are putting a hot pipeline in permafrost, and when the hot pipeline melts the permafrost, it is going to break.

It has been there 27 years, one of the construction wonders of the world. All the doomsayers' arguments then are the same arguments now: You can't do it safely; you can't protect the caribou.

They are all false. Go up to Prudhoe Bay and you find the caribou herd is 27,000. It was 3,000 or 4,000 in the late 1960s.

Talk about polar bear habitat—you can't shoot a polar bear in the United States, and Alaska is part of the United States. You can in Russia. You can in Canada.

So as we reflect upon what we are about to embark, I encourage my colleagues and you, Madam President, to reflect on the prevailing arguments that were used 27 years ago and the prevailing arguments that we are using now. As I indicated, the argument then was a hot pipeline through permafrost; it was a fence across Alaska; it was whether or not we could do it safely; it was the caribou herd—all of which history has proven we have been able to do. We have overcome the problems and responsively addressed them.

One can go up to Prudhoe Bay and get off the airplane and walk over to where the pickups are. Do you know what you see under every single pickup? You see a diaper. It is under the pan of the car. It is a big cotton thing to pick up a drop of oil that spills. As you know, in your own driveway you get drops of oil. That is the extent they go to, to try to maintain the maximum environmental oversight.

As we address this ANWR issue, keep in mind the arguments of those opposed to it. They say it is a 6-month supply of oil. We all know that is only if you didn't have any oil produced in this country or any oil imported into this country. To what does it equate? We don't really know, but the latest USGS reports say 5.6 billion to 16 billion barrels. How does that compare with anything you and I can understand? You can compare it with what Prudhoe Bay has produced in 27 years. Prudhoe Bay was supposed to produce 10 billion barrels. It is on its 13 billionth barrel now. If you took half of the range of ANWR, 5.6 and 16, and said it was 10, it would be as big as Prudhoe Bay.

The infrastructure is already in place. You have a pipeline 800 miles long that is only half full. This is not a big issue, in the sense of reality. Yes, it is a significant amount of oil, if it is 10 billion barrels. If it is 16, it is even better. But if it is 3.5, you will not even develop it because you have to have a major discovery in order to develop in the higher Arctic altitudes associated with drilling in that part of the world.

It is either there in abundance—and it has to be to make a difference—or it isn't. They say it will take 10 years. Come on. If President Clinton had not vetoed the bill in 1995, it would be on line now. He vetoed it. Why? Same response: The environmental community pressured. The cash cow generates membership, it generates dollars. And they are milking it for all it is worth, and will continue until we prevail. Then they will go on to another issue.

What about the Porcupine caribou? We have already addressed that with the caribou comparison in Prudhoe Bay, where they have flourished. As I indicated before, it was a short break.

We don't shoot polar bear. You can't take trophy polar bear in Alaska. They are marine mammals, they are protected. If you want to protect the animals, you don't shoot them; you don't take them for food, or subsistence. There are very few taken for subsistence, I might add.

These are some of the arguments we are going to be addressing.

Furthermore, this is a big jobs bill. Find an issue that employs 250,000 people. These are high-paying jobs. That is why the unions support it. It will generate somewhere in the area of \$2.5 billion in Federal lease sales because these are Federal leases that will come back into the Treasury. It won't cost the taxpayers one red cent. Find a better stimulus.

What about the veterans in this country? They are for it because they do not want to fight another war in a foreign country over oil.

I am always reminded of my good friend, Mark Hatfield. He is a pacifist who said before this body time and time again, I will vote for opening this area any day rather than send a young man or woman overseas to fight in a war over oil in a foreign land.

We talk about alternative energy. I indicated that I support it. But let me tell you about a little comparison. I have some graphs that will show this. One of the largest wind farms in the United States is located outside of Palms Springs. It is between Palm Springs and Banning, CA. I think it is called San Jacinto. That farm has hundreds of windmills that move when the wind blows. They do not move all the time. The footprint there is 1,500 acres. You see it and you say: Wow, there are a lot of windmills there.

What is the equivalent of that in oil production? That would be equivalent to 1,350 barrels of oil a day from 1,500 acres. What is ANWR? ANWR is 2,000 acres. The equivalent production is 1 million barrels a day. I support wind power, but if you are looking for relief, you had better put it in an equation that makes sense and that people can understand. From 1,500 acres, the equivalent from that wind farm is 1,350 barrels of oil. ANWR's footprint as authorized in the House bill is 2,000 acres. That is equivalent to 1 million barrels per day.

Let us remember the bottom line—our national security. What could this do for the U.S. steel industry? When we built that 800-mile pipeline, do you know what the U.S. steel industry did? This was the largest order ever in the United States—800 miles of 48-inch pipe. They did absolutely nothing. They said: We don't have the capacity for an order that big. Where did it come from? It came from Korea, it came from Japan, and it came from Italy. If the steel unions and the steel industry want to get their act together, let us go after some domestic business. You will have some more domestic business associated with opening up ANWR.

I encourage my colleagues again to reflect a little bit. I hope everybody's conscience bothers them about the manner in which this was laid down, without a committee process and without the jurisdiction of the Democratic chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. The leadership pulled it out of the committee because he knew we had the votes to get it to the floor and, furthermore, the dictatorial statement that even if we prevail, he is going to pull the bill. Come on. I have been around this place long enough to know what the democratic process is all about, the committee process is all about, and the traditions of the Senate are all about. This is the wrong way to start a bill.

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

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

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended until 4:30 today with Senators allowed to speak for a period not to exceed 10 minutes each.

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

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

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

RECESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until 4:30 this afternoon.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 3:13 p.m., recessed until 4:31 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. NELSON of Florida).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until 5:15 p.m. today.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 4:32 p.m., recessed until 5:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. JOHNSON).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. In my capacity as a Senator from the State of South Dakota, I suggest the absence of a quorum. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EQUAL PROTECTION OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 2001—Continued

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the

Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close the debate on S. 565, the election reform bill:

Christopher Dodd, Harry Reid, Charles Schumer, Ron Wyden, Debbie Stabenow, Patty Murray, Tom Daschle, Jeff Bingaman, Daniel Inouye, Carl Levin, Max Baucus, Joe Biden, Pat Leahy, James M. Jeffords, Barbara Mikulski, Bob Graham, and Edward M. Kennedy.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum with respect to the cloture motion be waived.

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for the information of the Senate, I would like to announce to all Members who have amendments on the finite list of amendments that first-degree amendments must be filed prior to 1 p.m., Thursday, February 28. If Members have already submitted amendments, then it is not necessary to resubmit an amendment.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to commend Senators DODD, MCCONNELL, SCHUMER, and BOND for their dedication and diligence in addressing what I believe to be an issue of critical importance to our country—protecting voting rights and ensuring the integrity of the electoral system in our nation. Especially given the events in the world today, making certain that each citizen's vote is counted and promoting public trust and confidence in our election process is crucial.

The State of Washington has a long and trusted history as a leader in election administration. Through great efforts and cooperation, the state has pioneered such programs as motor voter, provisional balloting, vote by mail, and absentee voting.

I thank Senator DODD, the chairman of the Rules Committee for his support for an amendment that I offered with Senator MURRAY's support that has been adopted. The amendment guarantees that States are able to continue using mail-in voting, while also providing new safeguards to make mail-in voters aware of how to properly fill out their ballots, and how, if needed to obtain a replacement.

Voters in my State are proud of our system that offers voters the option of voting by mail or in the polling place, and they are extremely committed to seeing it continue. The mail-in ballot, in my opinion, offers voters several advantages. First, it allows voters to cast their ballots on their own time and at their own convenience. It also allows voters to make more informed choices, as they are able to consult literature sent by the state and by the campaigns in making their decisions. Because these votes are cast without the pressure of other voters waiting in line, or without the time crunch of being late to work or to pick up the kids, voters are also less likely to make mistakes that will disqualify their ballots.

In addition, the mail-in system is very secure. Each ballot that is cast by

mail requires, that the voter sign the outer envelope. This signature is then checked against the voters signature that is kept on file and only when there is agreement that the signatures match is the ballot counted. Washington State has consistently increased the number of voters choosing to vote by mail and through provisional voting without any allegations that these types of voting have involved fraud or other misconduct. In fact, the procedures in place have consistently ensured the integrity and security of our elections and led to public confidence in our system that is unparalleled anywhere in the country.

It has not always been this way. In the early 1990s, we had several close elections that pointed out the vulnerabilities in our system. These close elections led Washington to become one of the first states to adopt statewide guidelines that ensured that each jurisdiction followed the same rules in determining how ballots are verified and counted. In addition, my State also adopted other requirements for testing and procedural consistency. It is my hope that this legislation will lead other States to follow our example and institute similar guidelines and procedures that will result in more people voting and making sure that all votes are properly cast and counted.

Our challenge, at the federal level, is to ensure that in passing legislation that reduces hurdles to civic participation across in country, we respect the role of the States in selecting types of voting that work well for their citizens and lead to maximum participation. I believe that this bill as amended does that, and I thank the chairman of the Rules Committee for his commitment to this bill and to ensuring that States have the flexibility to keep their systems in place.

This bill, by setting minimum standards and by guaranteeing the Federal Government will provide the funds necessary to purchase new equipment, takes very important steps forward in guaranteeing to every American that not only do they have the right to vote, but that when they cast their vote it will be counted.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to a period of morning business with Senators allowed to speak therein for a period not to exceed 10 minutes.

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

TRIP TO LATIN AMERICA

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I would like to report briefly on a trip to Latin America which I made last month before the Senate went into session in January.

This trip took me to a number of Latin American countries to discuss issues of trade and drug control. The