

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I object to further proceedings on the bill at this time.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The bill will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. GRAMS. Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I see no Senator on the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I realize this is the time that is under the control of the Democrats, but since there is no one here, I ask unanimous consent that I may proceed as in morning business for 6 or 7 minutes.

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

NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, we are going to move, later today and tomorrow, to the Department of Interior appropriations bill which is very important to me and to my State of Wyoming. I wanted to talk just a couple of moments about something that is very important to me and very close to my heart. That is the National Park System.

Wyoming, of course, has two of what I think are the crown jewels of the Park System, the Teton National Park and Yellowstone National Park, as well as several others in our State. Selfishly, they are very important. But more than that, national parks are, I think, a part of our heritage. They are part of our past, they are part of our future, they are part of our economy, and something that I feel very strongly about. Of course, they are funded in the appropriations bill for the Department of Interior.

I spent a considerable amount of time in August in the parks, both Yellowstone and Teton. Part of the problem we talked about while I was there is a financial one. It is big business. Yellowstone National Park has an operating budget of somewhere over \$20 million, and with other income, more than a \$40 million budget. It is a large activity.

We will be talking in this appropriations bill about priorities. Mr. President, over time, the idea of priorities, the idea of funding, will become even more difficult. We will have to set those priorities. We will have to set priorities among land management agencies, Yellowstone Park and the Park System, the forest and the wilderness, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the BLM. All of these competed, frankly, for funding. So we have to talk about priorities.

Certainly my highest priority in that process is the National Park System. Part of it is my own personal history. I grew up just outside of Yellowstone Park between Cody and Yellowstone. So it has been part of my life.

The question, of course, is how we manage these parks. Frankly, we have some problems.

We have some problems short term and we have some problems, in my judgment, long term. A part of the short-term problem, of course, we will be facing today and tomorrow. But part of the longer term issues, I think, will be discussed over a period of time, and properly so, because there needs to be some fairly significant changes. Specifically, there is funding for Park Service operations, and in the Senate bill is \$1.1 billion. The House is somewhat less than that. This will be about a \$75 million increase over last year for the operations of the park. I support that. I hope that we maintain, when the bill is finally passed, the additional funds that the Senate has put in. This is a good first step to deal with some of the problems that we have. But it is a short term solution.

What are some of the other solutions? One of them is what was done last year in this appropriations bill, and done again this year, in terms of extending a pilot fee program. One of the ways that, obviously, we can deal with funding for parks is to do something about the fees. Yellowstone Park, I believe, is \$10 per car per week. Compared to other recreational activities in this country, that is a very low price, one that has not been changed for a very long time, and one that we ought to take a look at.

We have an opportunity to do that now in the pilot fee program that was passed by the Congress, which allows the parks to take a look at their fees, to temporarily extend and increase these fees, if they want to, on a pilot basis, and to keep in the park some 80 percent of the increase. This has been one of the problems for parks like Yellowstone. Much of the revenue that comes in there doesn't stay there. It goes into the pot and is redistributed among all of the parks. So this gives an opportunity, on a pilot basis, to raise the fees, if that seems appropriate, and then to maintain these fees where they are collected—80 percent of them—in that particular park.

I think it is an excellent opportunity to do this as a pilot program. The problem is, they have had an opportunity—the Park Service—to do this now since early last winter and haven't done it yet. They haven't moved on this program yet. I am disappointed in that. It is not a function of the local parks. First of all, originally, 50 of them were designated to participate in this pilot program. Now the Senate has increased it to a hundred. None has been designated by the Park Service. On the other hand, the Forest Service and, I think, BLM both have already moved on this program and are making some

progress with it. When we go to Yellowstone and talk about their needs, the park superintendent there is for it. I called the Director of the Park Service. He is for it, too, but it hasn't happened; it hasn't happened because the Secretary of the Interior hasn't authorized it. That is too bad because that is part of a demonstration, a short-term solution to this issue.

Now, I don't think that it's the long-term solution. There needs to be some other things done, some fairly major things. We have talked about them for some time. One of the problems, as you can imagine, is the continuing authorization of more and more Federal parks. Without a definition of what a Federal park really is, I have to suggest that I think a number of the parks that have been authorized in recent times have been parks that, under most circumstances, could just as well be State parks or local parks or community parks, but Members of this body and others want them to be national parks so they are paid for by the Federal Government. So now we have a \$4 billion backlog in the service of taking care of facilities that need to be brought up current, but we continue to authorize more and more parks, without being able to fund the parks we have.

So that is one of the things that needs to be done, it seems to me—at least to develop a criterion as to what really qualifies as a national park, what characteristics ought to be involved to qualify as a national park.

Another is concession reform. For a long time, we have been seeking to do something about concessions. Now, the concessions are not there to fund the parks, necessarily; they are there to provide services for visitors. But it is true, I think, that we need to revise that. First of all, the concession contracts cannot be removed because we haven't passed a bill that does it. They are operating on a short-term basis. Second, there are instances in which the park should be receiving more money than they are from the concessions. Third, those concession funds probably ought to stay in those parks. That is another thing that we need to talk about and need to change.

Many of these changes are acceptable to the people who manage the park, but the Department hasn't moved, and indeed the Congress hasn't moved. There also, of course, needs to be some management changes, as well. GAO has done a study. One of the notable things was that the money that has gone to parks has not gone to the resources that the parks themselves say are the highest priority. That is one of the management problems that needs to be changed. When you set priorities in planning, then it seems to me the funding ought to coincide with those priorities. So there needs to be a lot of things done.

I am here to support national parks. I think they are a very, very important thing. I think they have a great future.

I think we, as citizens, are willing to pay some more, particularly if we are certain that the fees we pay in the particular park stay in that park to enhance the resources of the park that we like to see.

The other is that management, of course, is expected to be good. I think they should implement programs that give it the opportunity to do it, like the pilot program. We are going to need, over time, to continue to set priorities. I have argued from time to time that there is a difference in the public lands. Some of them, like parks and forests, have been withdrawn by the Federal Government for a purpose. There were unique characteristics, and they were withdrawn from the public domain because they are and were unique. Lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management were simply residual lands. Wyoming is 50 percent owned by the Federal Government. The State of the Senator from Idaho is more than that. Nevada is 87 percent owned by the Federal Government. Many of those lands were never withdrawn for a particular purpose. The parks were, the forests were, the wildernesses were. So we will have to set some priorities, over time, on that.

So, Mr. President, I appreciate the opportunity to talk just a little bit about something I think is very important, and to encourage that the funding for operations of parks, which is in this bill we will be considering, ought to be maintained, despite the fact that the House is somewhat lower. I think that is a move toward the short-term resolution, and then I hope that my associates and I can work toward resolving some of the longer-term solutions over the next 2, 3 years, so that we can make these national parks, cultural institutions, fiscally sound.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. CRAIG addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho is recognized.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, what is the business of the Senate at this moment?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are currently in morning business, under the control of Senator DASCHLE until 1 o'clock, and under the control of the Republicans until 2 o'clock.

Mr. CRAIG. I ask unanimous consent to speak for 5 minutes in morning business.

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

A MESSAGE FROM THE WEST

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, with my colleague from Wyoming just having spoken, one would think it is "Western day" on the floor of the U.S. Senate, especially when I choose to come to the floor this morning also to speak about Western public lands issues.

Certainly, the issue of national parks, in which the Senator from Wyoming is so knowledgeable, is not just a Western issue; it is clearly a national

issue, with national parks spanning the length and breath of our country.

I come to visit about an issue that has been in the skies of the West all summer. It doesn't happen to be there at this moment. As I flew out of Idaho this weekend after a rainstorm, the sky was clear. But for well over 2 months this summer, up until this weekend, Western skies have not been clear. They have been filled with smoke.

If you had flown over Idaho or nearly any part of the West as I have many times this summer, you would have been convinced that the West truly was on fire. In many instances, that was true. Our Western forests and rangelands have burned again at an unprecedented rate this summer. Smoke from extensive wildfires invaded our cities. It damaged tourism, it caused health problems, and homes adjacent to the public lands were in jeopardy and many burned as a result of the high incident of wildfires.

I know that you and others have seen this on television, it was talked about oftentimes on national television and in the newspapers through the course of the summer. Wildfires were regular occurrences on nightly news shows in the West in States like Oregon or Idaho or California or Arizona or New Mexico or Montana or Wyoming or in places in Utah.

Tragically, what we heard this summer has become a regular occurrence which we in the West have had to endure. Nearly every 2 years, it seems, since 1988, the frequency and intensity of fire has gone well beyond the historic norm. Its genesis is the increasingly poor health of our public forests and the fuel buildup from millions of acres of dead and dying trees and unforaged, or in other words, non-grazed, grasslands of the West. It is a problem that we could do something about in this Congress and as Americans if we chose to do so.

These fires are destroying our resources, trying our patience and exhausting our financial ability to suppress them. This year another record will be set with more than 6 million acres burned, in excess of the record set only 2 years ago, and before that, in 1988. In fact, this is the largest amount of acres burned in a single year since 1967.

Firefighting forces started the year with over \$400 million of debt, and the deficit continues to pile up as more and more Federal personnel and equipment are thrown into this battle against wildfire.

The Knutson-Vandenburg, known as the KV, fund has been the handy source from which we have borrowed hundreds of millions of dollars to pay for emergency firefighting costs, and it is now broke. There is no money in the fund. KV moneys are collected from timber sale revenues specifically to replant and regenerate public forests with new seedlings. Because the borrowed money has not been replaced, the tree planting programs are now in jeopardy.

In other words, what we are doing is we are borrowing all of the money to fight fires, but we are not putting the money back, so there is no money to replant the forests.

Tragically enough, there are some folks out there who say, "Oh, well, this is Mother Nature; let it be." I am one of those who cannot agree with that, and I think most of our colleagues cannot, and certainly the citizens of the West cannot.

My question to my colleagues is simple: How long can we ignore what is happening in our western forests? If that smoke were blowing through the urban canyons of the eastern cities, how long would the public put up with it before demanding action from their Representatives in Congress?

I have offered a long-term, broad-based solution with my legislation to restore forest health. We have a chance to pass that legislation. It is S. 391, which was approved by the Energy and Natural Resources Committee in June; but it has been hung up in politics, politics, and environmental politics that have no basis in science and no understanding of the tragedy that our western national forests are experiencing today. It is simply the politics of politics that has stopped efforts to deal with forest health, and I ask that you help me to change that, because we should be addressing the crisis that exists, and will continue to exist, in the western forests.

I have stood in this Chamber to sustain the temporary emergency salvage law which is critical to our short-term needs from the 1994 fires. And, yes, I have heard some people claim that there is no emergency.

If that is true, they were not listening to the nightly news this summer, or they were not listening in Idaho or Oregon or Washington or Montana or Wyoming or Utah or Arizona or California or New Mexico. They are simply ignoring the fact, or they are being lulled to sleep by the symphony of environmental voices that would only argue that this is Mother Nature at her finest.

There is an emergency. A critical emergency. But in most people's minds it is not an emergency until the fire starts and is roaring up the mountain-side and threatening their own town. Then it becomes an emergency overnight, and all of the resources of the State and Federal Government, including the Army and the Marines, are brought into the fight. Oregon's Governor, in fact, this year declared a state of emergency because of the fires roaring across the State of Oregon.

Would it not make more sense to take preventive actions before the crisis starts? Of course that makes sense, but then again it is not politically correct right now to make sense about the idea of managing our forests if man is involved in that management. It makes better sense for some to argue that you simply lock them up and let Mother Nature do her thing. Well, Mother Nature was doing her thing this summer,