

In the Great Plains, it is now nesting season, and if cattle are allowed on the land, ducks and grassland songbirds are going to get trampled.

Grass is growing where it has not grown in years and species that were once threatened are making a comeback. Unfortunately, President Clinton's action probably has negated all that progress this year.

I am also disappointed that the Clinton administration made this decision without consulting the environmental and sportsmen communities. The conservation community, the Agriculture Department, even the environmentalist were surprised, and, frankly, I am surprised.

I keep asking myself how can someone who calls himself an environmentalist justify opening up some of our most fragile and protected areas to cattle grazing?

I believe that President Clinton's actions directly contradicts the belief that the Clinton administration truly cares about the environment.

This situation demonstrates that, once again, the interests of sportsmen, conservationists, and the public still rank far below those of subsidized commodity agriculture.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the Washington Post article to which I earlier referred.

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

POLITICS, PRICES

(By Richard Cohen)

What's the most dangerous place in the world? Bosnia? Liberia? Chechnya? Anywhere in Montana? No. The answer is any place between Bill Clinton and reelection. It is a no-man's land where principle is sacrificed to politics and consistency is given scant regard. That explains why the administration moved this week to sell federal oil reserves and open restricted lands to cattle grazing. It wants to lower the price of gas and raise the price of beef.

The average voter, which is to say me, is confused. If I drive a little less but eat more meat, will that balance out? If I drive a lot less and eat more steak, will that be better for the country? If I drive down to see Alan Greenspan, will I get even richer? After all, I sense a pattern: First the oil reserves, then the conservation reserves and next—maybe—the Federal Reserve. Will Uncle Sam be giving away money?

Silly me, it already has. The federal government paid an average of \$27 a barrel for the 587 million barrels of oil now in storage. Since Alaskan crude, the oil that most approximates what Uncle Sam has in the cellar, is now selling at about \$20 a barrel, you don't have to be a regular Laura D'Andrea Tyson to figure out that you would be taking a \$7 loss on each barrel. Since the government plans to sell 12 million barrels, that amounts to an anti-profit (I thought I'd coin yet another stupid economic term) of \$84 million. I'd say offhand that the per-capita cost to the average American is anyone's guess.

But it is not anyone's guess that Clinton is pursuing a political, not economic, agenda. The price of gas became a problem only when the networks started reporting on the story and Bob Dole recommended repealing a 4.3-

cent gas tax increase that Clinton pushed through Congress in 1993. With that, the White House rolled out its Big Bertha fax machines and bombarded Washington with press releases noting that Dole, in his reckless youth, had at one time supported a gas tax increase. Next, the president announced he would sell federal oil to drive down the price at the pump. But check the pump. Nothing's happened.

And nothing much will. Despite some Capitol Hill sound bites to the contrary, the price of gas has increased for sound economic reasons. The conspiracy to which some politicians allude happens to include consumers who are driving faster in heavier cars, a brutal winter and a miscalculation on the availability of Iraqi oil. Prices will go down eventually—but not, probably, before they go up some more.

In a sense, Clinton's response to Dole has been truly impressive. As an exercise in cynical politics, it's a masterpiece—a regular Mona Lisa or, if you will, a Jackie Kennedy bauble. Opening up restricted grazing land is a different story altogether. This is an appalling tale in which, for a few votes, a conservation program has been endangered without much thought at all.

The program in question pays ranchers to take ecologically fragile land out of grazing. In this way, some 36 million acres (about the size of Iowa) has become a sort of nature preserve. But the Great Plains are parched, and good grazing land is hard to come by. As a result, the price of feed is up and the price of cattle is down. (Ranchers have been selling off their herds.) Understandably, ranchers have been eyeing the acres in the Conservation Reserve Program. The grass there is tall—yummy for cattle.

But that land is also good for birds, and ducks. Now is the nesting season, and if cattle are allowed on the land, a lot of eggs and ducklings are going to get trampled. The program is hardly perfect—too much acreage in some areas, not enough in others—nor is it cheap. (Over a 10-year period, the average payment has been a total of \$52,800 for 97 acres.) But grass is now growing where it has not grown in years.

Maybe, after due deliberation, opening the land was the best way to go. But there was no deliberation, due or otherwise. The conservation community, even Department of Agriculture officials, was taken by surprise at how fast this decision was made. Clinton would barbecue Smokey the Bear to win reelection.

The administration is at odds with itself. If everything works as planned, you could drive to McDonald's for less—and pay more for a burger when you get there. The one consistency is the fervid White House desire to put politics above everything else. In that area, it has shown true leadership.

Mr. ROTH. I yield the floor.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ABRAHAM). The Chair recognizes the Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. I thank the Presiding Officer.

NEWBORNS' AND MOTHERS' HEALTH PROTECTION ACT OF 1996

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I want to follow on the comments that were made by Senator BRADLEY with respect to the Newborns' and Mothers' Health Protection Act of 1996. I think it is an absolutely classic example of what it is the American people do ex-

pect us to do in Congress and what they would like us to take on. It is a very real problem. As he indicated, they are very real families, very real people and they are in this situation, very helpless.

I also join Senator BRADLEY in urging the majority leader, Senator DOLE, to bring this bill to the floor as soon as possible. It did pass Labor and Human Resources by 14 to 2. That is not a close vote. That is virtually a unanimous vote. We are approaching Mother's Day. It would be nice to have this bill debated at that time.

The legislation is absolutely vital in the turmoil which is now our health care system. It shifts the decision-making power of when a mother and her baby would be leaving a hospital, discharged home, so to speak, from an insurance company or an HMO, which has interesting missions in all of this, and then send it back to the doctor and to the patient. That is, the decision when to leave. That is why I signed on to this bill and became a cosponsor very, very early.

Many large insurers are refusing to pay for more than 24 hours of maternity care. I do not know where managed care is going to take this country. I can tell you this, I am extremely worried about it, and I am even more worried about for-profit HMOs and managed care. Some HMOs even require discharge within 8 hours of delivery. I cannot imagine such a thing. I am sure that can happen from time to time, but I just cannot imagine that happening very often.

These quick discharge practices can, in fact, enormously endanger the life of the mother and endanger greatly the life of the child. Newborns are prone to problems such as dehydration. They are prone to problems like jaundice that are not even detectable until they have been alive for 24 hours. So, by definition, how are doctors going to be able to determine infants' condition if they are already at home?

New mothers are themselves very susceptible to pelvic infections, to breast infections. A new mom may be, probably is in most cases, too fatigued, just too tired, has been through too much in the delivery to properly care for an infant 24 hours after a normal but nonetheless exhausting delivery problem or experience.

Quick discharges can result in devastating medical consequences, in devastating human consequences and, yes, they can result, and have resulted, in death, because new mothers and fathers are sometimes unable to detect these early symptoms of potentially life-threatening conditions. This is not ideological talk, this is medical talk.

Right now, insurance companies start the 24-hour clock, or even the 8-hour clock or the 12-hour clock ticking the minute the child is born. The minute the child emerges, the minute of the first cry, the clock begins.

The insurance companies do not distinguish between those mothers who

have had a 2-hour birth and a mother who has been through 12 hours or 18 hours and had an extremely painful, exhausting, debilitating birth. They make no distinction whatsoever between the two; just out of here in 24 hours.

Their rules do not distinguish between an experienced mother, a mother perhaps having her third or fourth child with a father or a grandmother at home ready to help, ready to help the mother, ready to help the child, on the one hand, and then on the other hand, a 16-year-old teenage mother with an exhausting birth process who is discharged after virtually no time. A teenage mother, who is terrified at the prospect and has no idea of how to care for a healthy baby, much less a baby showing some kinds of symptoms which that 16-year-old teenage mother cannot understand. It makes no difference to the insurance company. The circumstances make no difference: 24 hours, they must all be discharged from the hospital, period.

How do we get here? I mean, this is the great debate. The Clinton health care bill did not pass, I understand that. It tried to bite off too much, I understand that. The free market is working, I understand that, but there are some very dangerous things going on. Some of the most unhappy people in America right now, and the ones most worried about quality of care, are physicians.

Judith Bowman is a first-time mom from Fairmont, WV. She recently experienced one of these speedy discharges. She wrote to me:

"I was surprised by the almost drive-thru like approach put on bringing a precious new life into the world. The information concerning the baby and personal follow up care comes fast."

"I was," she said, "exhausted. I couldn't understand it all. It was new to me. I couldn't take it all in. I was still recovering from the birth experience."

"The total length of my stay after delivery was approximately 20 hours."

Mr. President, in concluding, I say that one would hope that the Congress would not need to legislate on this kind of matter. I mean, to be quite honest with you, I think it is rather shocking. It is the kind of thing that you think that the private sector would pick up immediately at the first sense of difficulties and simply stop. But, no—insurance companies are motivated by other things.

I would think that we could trust insurance companies to do the right thing on an individual case-by-case basis. What is so strange about that? What is so radical about that? To let doctors make patient-care decisions without concern of financial or other penalties being imposed on them.

Of course, what I am saying is, if doctors who belong to HMOs want to keep the mother more than 24 hours, they may be threatened, saying, "You either start discharging after 24 hours or

you're off our payroll." Do not think for a moment that is not happening. It is scary. It is scary.

So this bill would require insurers to pay for a 48-hour stay following an uncomplicated vaginal delivery and 96 hours for an uncomplicated Caesarean section. The bill permits, as Senator BRADLEY said, shorter stays. But, again, it puts the decision in the hands of the physician of the mother to decide if that is appropriate. That is who should make this critical decision, not an insurance company driven by other considerations, including those of their stockholders.

Mr. President, I conclude my remarks simply by thanking Senator BRADLEY and Senator KASSEBAUM for leading this effort. I again hope we will be able to take this matter up somewhere around Mother's Day. I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

Mr. PELL addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

GAS TAX REPEAL

Mr. PELL. Mr. President, I believe that we should not have a roll-back of the 4.3-cent-a-gallon gasoline tax. Actually, retention of this tax is the sensible, national interest course to follow as we struggle to reduce the deficit. I fear that, like Sisyphus in Hades, we are doomed forever to roll the heavy stone of the deficit uphill, only to have it always roll down again, weighted down by yet another quick-fix tax cut.

In our effort to reduce the deficit, we grapple daily with the stark reality that funds for education, the environment, Medicare, and the earned income tax credit, are all being scaled back. And now, a clarion call to lower the gas tax is being heard. Repealing the gas tax is projected to save the average motorist the grand total of about \$27 a year in taxes. Note too, there is no certainty that the oil companies will actually pass this rebate on to the consumer. The effect of this gesture is to reduce revenues by \$4.8 billion, thereby making it all the more difficult to reduce the Federal deficit.

While I recognize that higher gas prices effectively reduce the take home pay of commuters and those whose daily livelihood depends upon the availability of low priced fuel, gasoline in the United States has become one of the "great bargains of the Western world" to quote Daniel Yergin in today's New York Times. Over the last few years, prices, adjusted for inflation, have been as low as at any time since World War II. The price of about \$1.30 a gallon is exquisitely cheap when compared with the almost \$5 a gallon paid in France.

Rather than providing a potentially illusory benefit of \$27 per motorist, I suggest we concentrate on those issues having a far more profound impact on the lives of working Americans. We have yet to satisfactorily grapple with proposals to increase the minimum

wage, the projected shortfall in Medicare funds in 2001, and the fact that our education programs are such that the mathematics scores of some of our students, particularly in the Southeast region, continue to be lamentably low. Repealing the gasoline tax is the last thing we should think of doing—and we should quickly reject the idea.

WELCOMING U.S. DECISION TO PARTICIPATE IN EXPO '98 IN LISBON

Mr. PELL. Mr. President, on another matter, last month, the White House announced that it has accepted an invitation from the Portuguese Government to participate in the international exposition to be held in Lisbon in 1998. This is good news indeed. I commend President Clinton for this decision.

I have long encouraged the administration to take this step. Last year, I sponsored a resolution calling for U.S. participation in Expo '98. In March of this year, I visited the site of the expo while in Lisbon for President Sampaio's inauguration. During my visit, I took the opportunity to learn in detail the goals and themes of the expo from Antonio Cardoso Cunha, commissioner-general and chairman of Expo '98.

Earlier this week, we welcomed Portuguese Foreign Minister Jaime Gama to Washington. Accordingly, I believe it is a particular appropriate time to bring Expo '98 to the attention of my colleagues and to express my enthusiasm for working with our Portuguese allies on this important project.

The theme of Expo '98 appropriately, will be "The Oceans, a Heritage for the Future" and will focus on environmental topics. As the resident of a coastal State which shares with Portugal a rich maritime tradition, I cannot imagine a more appropriate or more unifying theme. The U.N. General Assembly has declared 1998 as the International Year of the Ocean in an effort to alert the world to the need to improve the physical and cultural assets of the world's oceans. A fundamental goal of Expo '98 will be to focus on the growing importance of the world's oceans and to foster a debate on the sustainable use of marine resources and environmental protection. The United States, of course, has a vested interest in being part of this debate.

Our participation in this exposition, which marks the 500th anniversary of the historic voyage from Europe to India of the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, should be a source of pride for those of Portuguese heritage, as well as a source of great interest for all those with a concern for the oceans and a sense of history. Portugal, of course, has a great history of sea exploration, and in fact, helped to create important trade links between the peoples of Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Lisbon, the capital of Portugal since the 12th century, is a vibrant cultural