

on cooperatively with our staffs over the last several months. We think we have an excellent agreement that will reform the foster care system of our country, stop us from warehousing children, move them into adoption, and grant them an opportunity for a permanent and loving home. We hope that can move before we adjourn this 1st session of the 105th Congress.

Mr. President, with all of the other considerations, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUTCHINSON). 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREE- MENT—CONFERENCE REPORT AC- COMPANYING H.R. 2264

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 1 p.m. today, the Senate begin consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2264, the Labor-HHS appropriations bill. I further ask unanimous consent that there be 90 minutes for debate, equally divided between the chairman and the ranking member. Finally, I ask unanimous consent that at the expiration or yielding back of time, the Senate proceed to vote on the adoption of the conference report, with no intervening action or debate.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business not to extend beyond the hour of 1 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I would like to speak in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

NATIONAL PARKS

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I want to take the time that we have available this morning while we are waiting for these important closing activities—I hope closing activities—to talk a little bit about an issue that I feel very strongly about and that I think most people do, and that is our national parks and our national parks plan.

I am chairman of the Subcommittee on National Parks, and we have spent almost this entire year working on a program to help strengthen the parks. Certainly, the National Park System is truly one of our treasures.

The Park System is the custodian of some of America's most important nat-

ural and cultural resources and provides, of course, a legacy for our children and our grandchildren.

The Park System today consists of about 374 units which are visited annually by millions of people. They stretch all the way from Acadia in Maine to American Samoa in the Pacific islands and provide a unique opportunity.

I, of course, am particularly selfishly interested in parks because I come from Wyoming. We have the first national park which recently celebrated its 125th anniversary—Yellowstone. We also of course have Teton Park. But the whole country has a park system that we are extremely proud of.

Unfortunately, that System is and has been under considerable stress. At the time that we have showed unusual interest in it as Americans, and have increased our visitations, the park has had increasing difficulties. We are believed to have somewhere near \$8 billion in unfunded and unrealized infrastructure repairs of various kinds. That is a great deal of money.

We also have had some stress in terms of management in many of those things. So we worked this year and intend, as a matter of fact, to have some field hearings in November; particularly we have one set for Denver and one for San Francisco, and we hope then to have one later in Florida near the Everglades, to try and bring in as much information as we can get on the issues and how they affect people.

The issues are broken down, as you might imagine, into several categories. One of them is finance. That is one of the basic ones, of course. As I mentioned, we have an overwhelming amount of unfunded programs: \$2.2 billion in road and bridge repair; \$1.5 billion in buildings and maintenance; \$800 million in natural resource management kinds of things. They are the kinds of things that are very difficult to manage in an annual budget.

So we are looking for some ways to do this a little bit differently. We are looking at a number of things. One would be to extend the temporary program for fees, where fees have been raised in a number of the parks, about 100 I think out of the 375 parks. They have been very low. And it has been \$10 a car at Yellowstone for a whole carload of people for a week. I think it has now gone to \$20. And, frankly, we found very little resistance to that, particularly if people believe the money they are spending going to that park will be used to make that park a better place to visit.

In addition to fees, of course, it will be our responsibility, Mr. President, as Members of Congress, to keep the appropriations growing some for that. We had an increase in appropriations this year. We need to continue to do that.

In addition to entrance fees, we are looking at ways for people to contribute, private individuals to contribute to parks. Many want to do that. There are park foundations in individual parks. We need to find some

ways for Americans who chose to, to be able to contribute more to the maintenance of parks.

We are also looking at a way for corporate investment as well, without commercializing parks. We do not want "Pepsi-Cola" painted up on the wall of Yosemite. But there isn't any reason why there cannot be corporate donations made. For example, one of the corporations made a donation to build the walkway around Old Faithful. It is a wonderful addition. And there is a very small and unobtrusive sign there that indicates the sponsors of that. I think that is a good idea. I think we can continue to do that.

One of the things we are looking at is a way for bonding. Interestingly enough, the larger parks, like Yosemite, like Yellowstone are basically small cities. They have to have sewers, they have to have streets, they have to have housing, the kinds of things that take long-term investment. And it is very difficult to do it, as I mentioned a moment ago, out of annual appropriations.

So we are trying to find a way that the park could do some bonding in the private sector. I do not know whether these can be Government bonds, I do not know whether they can be tax-free bonds or taxable bonds. But in order to do that, we have a couple of problems I hope we can overcome.

One is the scoring system here in the budget of the United States. As you know, we do not have a capital budget. And so if you issue 300 million dollars' worth of bonds, that would all go into the annual budget. That is a difficult thing. We will have to try and overcome that. We hope that there are some ways to do it.

The other thing, of course, that is necessary to do bonding is to have a dependable and steady stream of revenue to pay off the bonds. We think we can do that. So those are a couple of the ways that we are seeking to do some things that would be good for parks.

In addition, many of the larger parks, as you know, the services—let me go back and say, I think most people would agree that the main purpose of a park is to maintain the resources, whether it be cultural or whether it be natural resources.

But the second and equally important part of it is to have a pleasant visit for Americans, who own those parks. To do that, by and large, we have had concessions that have been run by the private sector. I certainly support that idea. I think that is the way to do it. We have, unfortunately, kind of gotten out of sync in terms of doing the sort of contracting that is necessary.

We went through a while, a big debate a couple years ago as to whether the Government ought to own the facilities. I think we have overcome that and decided that is not what we want to do. So we need to go back to longer term contracts for some very large facilities.

I think there is about \$700 million in gross revenue that comes from concessions in the whole Park System, which is a very sizable amount.

On the other hand, parks are not all big-profit operations because Glacier Park, for example, in Montana is only opened a portion of the year. And the season is rather shortened. So we have to deal with questions like: How long should the contract be for sizable investments? Should there be the right of renewal? Should there be some sort of proprietary ownership in these facilities at the time the contract exchange comes? So we are working with those things. I am positive that we can find some solutions.

I also want you to know that one of, I think, the key issues we are talking about with concessions—I mentioned to you this is a large commercial business. It is a commercial business. We think we ought to take a look at the idea of contracting with an asset manager out of the private sector who is a professional at managing hospitality things to do this. That is not really the role of a park ranger in terms of training and background.

As you know, Mr. President, I have been working as hard as I can to see if we can't move these commercial functions of the Government over into the private sector, at least give them an opportunity to bid on it. So that is one of the things that we are seeking to do.

I do not think that we are going to solve the financial problem out of the concessions by any means. But we ought to be able to do two things. We ought to be able to have good facilities that are kept up; and we ought to be able to have a small stream of revenue come to the parks. We think that might be one of the possibilities for doing something with the bonding revenue.

We are looking at improved management. The Park Service, after all, is a large agency. I think, with some of the most dedicated employees of any agency in the country. The people you talk to that work for the Park Service are really, really dedicated to doing what they do. They like to preserve the parks. They like to work in the parks. But they did not always have the opportunity, for instance, to be trained.

We are going to look at some university exchanges where folks could get some additional training and help them do their jobs. But I think more than anything it has become a large agency, and what we need is a strategic plan.

Any business of that size, any operation of that size needs a strategic plan that has some forward ideas as to how to solve problems. Frankly, that is kind of why we are where we are. There has not been any plans presented to the Congress. And the Congress has not taken the initiative to prepare plans to accommodate these problems that we now have, and problems of increased visitation. The highways, for example, in Yellowstone Park are way behind in preparation and care. So we need a strategic plan in the agency.

Probably at least as important then is each park, and each park manager, needs to have a strategic plan that contributes to the overall plan and one with measurable objectives and measurable goals so that you do not just have a plan that everybody thinks is wonderful but you have one that at the end of the year you can take a look at the plan and say you accomplished what you were going to or you did not. If you did not, there ought to be a reason why you did not. So we think we can do some good there.

Let me tell you that we are working very closely with the Park Service. And a new park director is now in place, Bob Stanton. His background as a career park official has been that he was the head of the parks here in this area. It was the first time, by the way, that the park director has been approved by the Senate. That was just changed so it is an appointment that has to be approved. So we are working with him. The Secretary of the Interior has talked favorably about some of the changes that need to be made.

Finally, one of the things we are doing is trying to take a look at the criteria for new parks. I think it is fairly well defined in terms of setting aside things that are important either historically or culturally or from a natural resource standpoint.

But, unfortunately—I think unfortunately—we have continued to add more parks that do not necessarily fit that criteria. They are often recommended by Members of Congress who have an equivalent of a State or a county park in their area that they would like to have the Federal Government pay for. So they move it into the Park Service when it could just as well be a State park. And we find ourselves short of money to handle the 375 parks we have now, and continuing to increase with parks that may or may not fit the criteria.

So we are not as concerned about the criteria. I believe it exists there. But we are concerned and hopefully will change the process in which the criteria moves through the Congress so that there is an opportunity to do that.

So, Mr. President, these are the things that we are doing. We have purposely worked on it all this session. We did not intend to bring a bill this session, but we do intend to have one prepared for January. I think it is one of the things that most Americans are supportive of. Not everybody is going to be supportive of every proposal we have to do it, but I think there is general support for strengthening parks. There needs to be.

Certainly we have more and more people wanting to participate in them. So you have to recognize that as caring. So we will be moving forward on that. I think it is something that Congress ought to undertake, and be very proud to undertake.

There is great controversy over many of the environmental issues that go around. But there is not much con-

troversy over this one. If we talk about what are the needs, are we going to try and fulfill those needs, most everybody says yes. Now, when you get to how you do it, obviously, there will be differences of view and debate. That is why we are here.

But, Mr. President, I am excited about this opportunity. We call our plan "Vision 2020," so that we can take a look at parks so that our kids, 20 years from now, and others, will be able to enjoy them with the same intensity that we have been able to.

We look forward to having our proposition ready by January. I hope many of the Members of the Senate will join with us in seeking to resolve this important question and problem.

Mr. President, I thank you for the time and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. WYDEN. I ask unanimous consent I be allowed to proceed for up to 15 minutes in morning business.

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

SENATE HOLDS

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I rise today to take a few minutes to discuss the effort here in the Senate to eliminate the secrecy with which the Senate so often conducts business. Through a procedure that certainly isn't known to most Americans, it is possible for one U.S. Senator to unilaterally block this Senate from considering a piece of legislation or a nomination. This process is known as a hold. Certainly as we have seen in the last few days, a hold is an extraordinary power in the last few hours of a session in the U.S. Senate. In fact, it is fair to say in the last few hours of a session, a hold is essentially unbeatable.

Now, originally a hold was intended as a courtesy to a Senator. If the Senator couldn't be present at a particular time—there was an illness in the family, this sort of thing—they could put a hold on a measure or nomination, and that way, as a courtesy, the Senate would make sure it was brought up shortly thereafter when that Senator could be there.

But what has happened over the years is that the hold has been abused. At one point here fairly recently there were more than 40 holds on individuals, nominees, pieces of legislation, and it was all done in secret—all of it. At a time when the American people are so skeptical of the way business is done in Washington, DC, and so often understandably skeptical, the secret hold, the unilateral power of one Senator to block a bill or nomination and do it all