

should be sensible, it should be one that is not dangerous or risky to the economy, and it should focus the tax assistance to the families who need it the most, those who are in the middle-income category, struggling to pay the bills. The wealthiest of the wealthy will do just fine. We have to focus on families struggling to make ends meet and struggling to realize that American dream.

In addition to that, we can never overlook our obligation with this surplus and with each year's budget to Social Security and to Medicare, to health care, and to education. It would be a sad commentary if, after all we have been through over the last 20 years, we found ourselves once again entertaining the thoughts of a tax cut that this Nation cannot afford, at a level which we cannot sustain, based on promises we cannot prove. That is exactly what we are doing now.

The President's tax cut is music to the ears of many voters, but those who step back and take a look at the situation say to most Members of Congress: Of course I want a tax cut. If you are going to give a tax cut, give it to me and my family. We can figure out how to spend it. If you say to them, Is a tax cut more important to you than eliminating and retiring our national debt once and for all, most Americans say: No, put that debt behind us. If this is a chance to do it, get rid of America's national mortgage.

If you give citizens another choice: Would you prefer a tax cut for your family or would you rather see us invest in education in America, to make sure that our schools are modern, the technology is up to date, and your kids are taught by the very best men and women available to teach in America, that is an easy choice for most families: Put it in education first.

What about health care? Should we focus on a prescription drug benefit under Medicare or a tax cut of \$46,000 a year for the upper 1 percent of American wage earners? That is an easy call for most families: Put it into a prescription drug benefit that is universal and affordable, under Medicare.

When you bring it down to the real choices we face, not just a tax cut or nothing, but a tax cut that is sensible and one that accommodates retiring the national debt, investing in America's families, making sure they can continue to succeed, I think the choice is going to be clear.

We made a mistake in 1980 with the new President Reagan supply side economics, the aptly named Laffer curve. All of the things suggested—if you just kept cutting taxes, America would prosper—didn't work. As a consequence of that bad decision and the beginning of that Presidency with all the euphoria of the Reagan years, we started a chain of deficits which literally crippled America.

Finally, we are out from under that burden. On a bipartisan basis we should learn a lesson. The lesson is this: The

people of this country understand priorities very well. They understand the lyric call of a tax cut may make great music on the nightly news, but there is a lot more to governing America than just being popular and saying popular things.

You have to speak straight to the American people, be sensible with them, tell them that the tax cut President Bush has proposed is, frankly, not good for this country in the long term. We cannot base this tax cut on projections of what America will look like 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 years from now, and be wrong, and find ourselves back in deficits. We cannot push a tax cut which inordinately rewards the wealthiest in this country and ignores some 23 million Americans who receive literally no tax benefit from the President's tax cut proposal. We can't be backing a tax cut that is so large that it raids the Social Security trust fund and endangers the future of Medicare. And we certainly cannot back a tax cut that ends up making certain that we in America are spending more and more money to provide tax relief to the wealthiest among us and ignoring these important priorities such as education, defense, health care coverage, Medicare reform, and Social Security reform.

Alan Greenspan is a man I respect very much. He came to the Hill last week and made a statement about the future of this economy. He has made some good predictions in the past. He suggested we should consider a tax cut. I think he is right. But he also said, if you read his statement very carefully: Don't get carried away; do it in a sensible fashion; do it in a way that will keep America moving forward.

It is now up to this Chamber, and the 99 other men and women who will gather here and debate over the next several weeks, to be honest with the American people. Perhaps not the most popular statements but the most sensible statements will tell us that a tax cut is not the be all and end all, not the goal for everything in America. What is most important is that we create an economy where American families can succeed. I think we have that opportunity. I hope we don't lose it.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SMITH of Oregon). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NATURAL GAS PRICES

Mrs. CARNAHAN. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about an issue that I know is a critical concern for all of my constituents the significant rise in natural gas prices in Missouri. As we are all aware, recent brutal tempera-

tures and energy shortages have contributed to a dramatic rise in home heating bills.

In Missouri, regulators recently approved a 44 percent rate increase for natural gas purchased from one Missouri utility. The increase, from \$6.81 to \$9.82 for a thousand cubic feet of natural gas, is expected to continue into the summer and has posed serious problems for consumers.

Imagine your gas bill doubling almost overnight. People tell me that they are putting off needed purchases because they don't have any extra money—it's all going to pay the gas bill. I am especially worried about the impact of high heating bills on our retirees who already have tight budgets.

My phone lines have been barraged with distraught constituents who don't know how to make ends meet this winter. Just yesterday I heard from James Baldwin, an Army veteran and retired autoworker from Independence, MO. Mr. Baldwin, father of four and grandfather of five, worked at the Ford Assembly Plant in Kansas City for almost 36 years. Like most constituents, Mr. Baldwin has tried to cut down on energy usage by dressing warmer and weatherproofing his home, as he is on a fixed income and doesn't have much room in his budget to accommodate large increases. Mr. Baldwin paid \$99 for his gas bill in December 1999. He was shocked, however, when, one year later, he received his bill and realized that his heating costs had almost tripled to \$269. The skyrocketing increases continued last month as well. He doesn't know what he will do if increases of this size continue. Mr. Baldwin called my office to let me know about the hundreds of neighbors and autoworker retirees he hears from every day about this problem. He worries that many will fall through the cracks.

The Mid-America Assistance Coalition, an agency that coordinates emergency assistance for the Kansas City metro area, where Mr. Baldwin lives, has reported getting 100 to 200 calls per day. Many of the calls are from single moms, the elderly and the "working poor," or those who earn too much to qualify for standard energy assistance but cannot afford to pay their bills. According to the Coalition, this is the first time most of the callers have ever had to ask for assistance with their utility bills.

Another constituent, Mrs. Doris Hill from Albany, Missouri, recently wrote to share her plight. Mrs. Hill is a low-income, 83-year-old widow. She wrote that she cannot afford to call even her own family long-distance. She lives on \$460 a month from Social Security and a small interest income from savings. She struggles month-to-month and cannot afford large increases in her utility bills.

This problem is not just limited to certain geographic areas or segments of our population. One letter I received was from Jeremy Lynn, a Boy Scout

from Sikeston in Southeast Missouri. Jeremy wrote to share his concern about the effect that the high cost of gas is having on his family. Jeremy states that his father and other farmers are struggling to cope with fuel and natural gas price increases at a time when the prices they are being paid for their crops are the lowest they have received in 14 years. He is worried that many farmers will be forced out of business as a result.

These and many other stories I have heard over the last couple of months have touched me deeply. Unfortunately, these stories are much too common in Missouri.

We hear that the cause of these record increases are due to problems associated with supply, demand, industry deregulation and, possibly, price gouging. But this is a complicated issue, and I have yet to meet anyone who has an easy solution. The only thing that is clear right now is that we need to learn what has caused these sharp increases and quickly develop an appropriate response.

This is why I have decided to cosponsor Senator BOXER's amendment that would require the National Academy of Sciences to submit a report to Congress within 60 days on the causes of the recent increases in the price of natural gas, including whether the increases have been caused by problems with natural gas supply or by problems with the natural gas transmission system. The study would identify federal or state policies that may have contributed to the recent spike in prices and determine what federal action would be necessary to improve the reserve supply of natural gas.

We don't know what the results of this study will be, but I am hopeful that they will help us to determine a course of action at the federal level to relieve the current crisis that is harming so many people in so many ways.

NOMINATION OF GALE NORTON

Mr. DODD. Mr President, I would like to briefly explain my recent vote to support the nomination of Gale Norton to be Secretary of Interior. At the outset, let me say that I did so with serious reservations. In fact, I find many of Ms. Norton's past positions, statements and actions most troubling.

Gale Norton has built a successful career advocating for the mining, timber, and oil industries. Her record in this respect has led many to question whether she can strike an appropriate balance between conservation and development. She has argued that several fundamental environmental laws are unconstitutional, including the Endangered Species Act and the Surface Mining Act, two laws that the Secretary of Interior is tasked with enforcing.

She has advocated opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, ANWR, in Alaska to oil drilling. This vital ecosystem supports hundreds of thousands of caribou, bears, wolves and oxen and

160 species of birds. Is it prudent to destroy this pristine land for what the U.S. Geological Survey estimates is a 6-month supply of oil? I believe not.

As Attorney General of Colorado, she was a proponent of the State's self-audit law, which allows polluting companies to escape fines if they report their violations and make efforts to correct the problem. Unfortunately, the Summitville Mine in Colorado was not as vigilant as it should have been and continued to operate even though it still had serious environmental problems. Only when the mine leaked cyanide into a local river did Ms. Norton's office step in. While she worked vigorously to clean up the damage and billed Summitville for the cost, it was the federal government who had to step in and prosecute the offenders. A Secretary of Interior must be vigilant, quick to respond to disaster, and proactive in policy-making. I am troubled by Ms. Norton's slow response at Summitville and her inability to articulate at the confirmation hearing what she might do to reduce the chances of a similar disaster.

Many have urged me and my Senate colleagues to reject this nomination and some have unfairly compared Ms. Norton to former Interior Secretary James Watt. I am one of several current Members of the Senate who was here in 1981 and I remember James Watt. During his confirmation hearing, he remained unyielding in his devotion to development and extractive industries. That intractable stand, coupled with his past statements and actions led me to vote against James Watt for Secretary of Interior. In fact, I am one of six current members of the Senate who cast a vote in opposition to Mr. Watt's nomination.

I did not detect such a divisive tone during Gale Norton's confirmation hearing before the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. I take some comfort from statements she made, under oath, specifically her intention to enforce the laws as written and interpreted by the courts, including the Endangered Species Act. Ms. Norton gave assurances to several committee members that she would uphold the current moratorium that exists on offshore oil and gas leases in California and Florida. She further stated that she was willing to work with other States to achieve similar results regarding offshore oil and gas leases.

I was pleased to hear Gale Norton's strong support for our National Parks, including eradicating maintenance backlogs. I look forward to working with her and members of the Senate to ensure proper funding levels in the fiscal year 2002 appropriations for this and other environmental protection efforts. Finally, I was pleased that Ms. Norton supports fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund. I trust she will work with Congress to achieve that goal and to enact the Conservation and Reinvestment Act, a bill that had broad bipartisan and bicameral

support in the 106th Congress. Land and Water Conservation funds and the matching grant program have been very important to the ability of Connecticut and other States to acquire land and enhance recreation areas and parks.

I am mindful that some of Ms. Norton's testimony reflects a stark change in policy beliefs. Do I think these newly stated positions make her an environmentalist? No, I do not. Do I think positions she has taken in the past could pose harm to our public lands? Yes, I do. However, the entirety of Ms. Norton's record, including testimony given at the hearing, demonstrates a sensitivity and an understanding of the role of the Secretary of Interior.

The Secretary of Interior has enormous responsibility over our Nation's public treasures. That person must be a responsible steward for close to 500 million acres throughout the country, including Weir Farm National Historic Site and the McKinney National Wildlife Refuge in Connecticut. The Secretary must oversee and protect public lands, not plunder them.

In many instances Gale Norton has demonstrated a willingness to advocate Federal interests and be an honest and fair broker. As Associate Solicitor for the Department of Interior, she upheld federal interests including habitat restoration at the Como Lake restoration project and the Endangered Species Act on behalf of the California Condor. While Colorado Attorney General, Ms. Norton ensured that the Rocky Mountain Arsenal was sufficiently cleaned up and urged Congress to establish a wildlife refuge there.

I respect people's strong feelings regarding the nomination of Gale Norton, and in fact, I share some of their deeply rooted concerns. I did not cast this vote lightly or without a heavy degree of concern. I am not ignorant of the fact that Gale Norton is a nominee who represents the views of our President or that any other nominee for Interior Secretary would share those views. Nor do I agree in sending a message by voting against a nominee. This is an individual, a Cabinet nominee, not a piece of legislation. The President is entitled to a degree of deference in assembling his Cabinet, a bipartisan tradition that most members follow.

I have spent a quarter century in Congress fighting for measures to protect our air, drinking water, lakes, rivers and public lands. I prefer sending a message by enacting legislation that will strengthen our quality of life and opposing policy that would weaken or destroy our natural resources. Working together, Democrats and Republicans have enacted such lasting laws as the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and the Clean Water Act.

Gale Norton is undertaking an enormous responsibility, but one that affords an opportunity to bring people together. She has given me and my colleagues her word to uphold and enforce