

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business until 4 p.m. with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from North Carolina.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business for up to 40 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATURAL GAS IN AMERICA

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I thank the majority leader for his leadership on an amendment to the Transportation bill, the Menendez-Reid-Burr amendment. For short title purposes, it is called the NAT GAS bill. This is not a new bill. It is not a difficult bill to understand. It is a game changer as it relates to our energy policy in this country and, more importantly, the economic security of our country.

I wish to take these 40 minutes to walk through the bill. But before I do that, it is essential to say to my colleagues and to their staffs and to the American people: If for some reason you believe that in the next 18 months in America we are going to have massive tax reform—lower rates, no deductions, no credits, no subsidies—then I want you to do me a favor. Turn off your TV. Leave the gallery. I will never convince you this is the right move. In fact, if I believed we were going to do comprehensive tax reform, I would not be on this floor. I would not be offering this amendment. But the truth is, there is nobody in America who believes that is going to happen.

Let me say this to all of my colleagues, their staffs, and to the American people: If you believe some miraculous thing is going to happen and there is going to be peace in the Middle East—no civil wars, no nuclear advancements, no threats—then turn off your TV. Leave the gallery. I will never convince you nor would I be here today if I thought that was going to happen.

The truth is that as policymakers we are charged with doing things based upon the landscape and the framework we have in front of us. Today, in the absence of this body acting—the Congress of the United States—the American people will get exactly what they have gotten: escalation of energy costs; that is, to fill their cars, to fill their trucks, to heat their houses. It is felt through the increased costs of the busi-

nesses for which they work. This is about personal security. This is about the livelihood of every American.

Let me just say now, if you are still with me—if you haven't turned off the tube or left the gallery—the single most important reason we should do this is our national security. Our national security is vital to this country.

Let me just stop and pose a question to my colleagues: Who controls today our access to and our cost of energy? It is not us. In many cases it is people around the world who don't even like us who control whether we are going to have access to oil or what the cost is going to be. Today 70 percent of our oil is imported. So we have 30 percent that we have some ability to control and to access, but for 70 percent of it we are at the whims of other people. We are at the whims of the market. They don't like us, and they don't care what we pay. And, I might say, many of those countries use the dollars we send them to fund terrorism—to fund the very people we run into on the battlefield in Afghanistan, Iraq, and around the world. They aren't concerned with our economy. They aren't concerned with the future of our country or the future of our children. It is not a very comforting situation to rely on for our energy, especially with 70 percent reliance on what they have.

Let me suggest this requires U.S. dollars to be spent and U.S. lives to be put on the line to make sure that day in and day out this country has access to that 70 percent reliance on black gold. Look at the gulf: ships, sailors, marines, aircraft, all in the gulf to make sure somebody doesn't shut down the Strait of Hormuz; to make sure we have access to that oil. It certainly doesn't cap what we pay at the pump or the taxes we pay to assure that when we need it, it is going to be there.

Some claim speculators are the whole problem with the oil industry. I will admit I think around the edges—a couple of cents a gallon—it is speculation; futures traders probably do have a little bit of impact. But it is not significant, and speculators don't control our access to it. Our reliance on foreign oil is what judges whether we have access to it or not. We must admit our access today is a national security threat.

No. 2: Economic security. The Presiding Officer and I know a word that is called LIHEAP, which is the low-income heating program for seniors across this country and for individuals who can't afford home heating oil. We will spend \$5.1 billion this year to subsidize home heating fuel. This entire NAT GAS bill—which is a game changer relative to the cost of not just home heating fuel but diesel and gasoline—costs a little over \$3 billion, and the taxpayers aren't on the hook for one penny of it. I will get to that a little bit later.

The U.S. economy is starting to recover. We have seen signs not in every community and not in every sector of

our economy, but we see signs that it is moving in the right direction. But there is one common thread that all economists agree on: If energy costs go up, we stand the chance of cutting off that recovery. We stand the chance of freezing or increasing unemployment at above the rates they are today. How quickly we recover, how quickly Americans are hired, how quickly unemployment goes down, how this affects our balance of trade—we haven't even talked about the individual family budget.

Think of what a typical family is faced with today—the cost on a weekly basis to fill up that vehicle. Many families have accepted jobs not close to where they live but where jobs are available. They drive from one community to another. Some drive from one State to another because that is where the job is. We have had no increase in wages, we all know that, but we have seen food prices and gas prices and energy prices go up. Here is an opportunity for us to have a real impact on the family budget in America without charging the American people one penny to have us do it.

In my opinion, we should have started new exploration decades ago. Had we explored for oil and natural gas—onshore, offshore—had we built pipelines, we might not have this problem right now. For those who say we shouldn't do it now because it will be 10 years down the road before we feel the effects, we had this same debate 10 years ago, and we had it 18 years ago when I got to the House of Representatives. Today we are still talking about the same thing. The only thing that has changed is the price of energy in America.

I believe we ought to focus on America and North America, and we ought to tap those resources in a safe and environmentally friendly way, which is, in fact, where technology allows us to go today.

My third goal of this bill is energy security. This year we voted against pipelines. They would have provided some security. We have reduced some foreign demand, not much. Today we are reducing exploration; we are not increasing exploration at home. Who pays the bill? The American people. It is real simple. It is just passing through and pretty soon we get used to \$3.76, which is the national average. In some places in the country it is over \$4. But 3 years ago the price of gas was \$1.86.

I was rated as the seventh most conservative Member of the Senate. This year I bought a hybrid. I bought a hybrid because I was tired of paying people money who hate us. I was tired of paying an exorbitant amount for gasoline. I would personally do anything I could to make sure I reduced my consumption and my cost. But the only way I can affect every American family is to come to this floor and to change the policies we have in this country in a way that nobody is slighted, nobody is cheated, nobody loses.

Somebody said this bill picks winners and losers. Well, I have to admit it does. The winners are the American people and the losers are everybody internationally who produces oil. I think that is a pretty good pick. Let me suggest to my colleagues this must stop. It must stop, and my suggestion is it should stop tomorrow when we vote on this amendment.

We need an energy plan. We should explore. We should build pipelines. If we did, down the road we would benefit. One might think, well, all of this is an accurate depiction of where we are. What would a natural gas bill do to change our situation?

Well, let me suggest it is about our most abundant, clean, flexible fuel. And guess what. It is American. It is found right here at home. Why wouldn't we use as much as possible? Oh, by the way, did I say it is cheap? If we look at natural gas as an equivalent to a gallon of gasoline, natural gas ranges somewhere between \$1.60 and \$2.10 at today's rates. Imagine where diesel is. Imagine where home heating oil is. Why? Because technology has allowed us to reach reserves that we could never reach before. It has allowed us to do it in an environmentally friendly way. It has allowed us to do it at a pretty attractive production cost.

As a matter of fact, the word in the world is the United States is the Saudi Arabia of natural gas. But nobody looks at us and says: You are controlling our access because we can't even figure out what our policy is going to be. Let me suggest—and I think the Presiding Officer knows this—if we produce more than we consume, then we will aggressively build an infrastructure to ship it all around the world. But if we consume what we produce, there will be an effort to produce more and to produce more and to produce more. When that happens typically the price goes down.

So I guess the question in front of this body is, are we going to use it for the benefit of the American people or are we going to ship it to the rest of the world? Some in Congress will say that shifting natural gas usage through Federal legislation shouldn't be done. Let me be clear. I agree 100 percent.

The Federal Government is not the one that should be legislating how markets go. But when I consider the Federal Government, we are speaking for the American taxpayer because usually they are the ones who are the backup funder of everything we pass. This bill does not do it. This bill is a 5-year bill, and it sunsets. It goes away. It funds the roughly \$3.4 billion with a user fee on the exact people who are benefited by it—those natural gas users. You see, the American taxpayer has no skin in this game.

They also say the American taxpayers should not fund new credits or subsidies. I agree. These are the two criticisms this bill has received. I agree with them totally. Read the bill. That is not what we do. We fund it from the

people who benefit from the credits and from the subsidies.

Now, you might ask, where do we disagree? Policy can, and I think it should, accelerate the usage of natural gas. Some have said there is no need to do this; it is happening all by itself. I agree; another point of agreement. It is happening every day in communities across this country. Ten years from now we might look back on it, and we might have made a little bit of progress. We have an opportunity right now, without taxpayer funding, to accelerate this move in 18-wheel vehicles, in fleet vehicles, in municipal trucks and automobiles. So I think we can, and I think we should, accelerate it.

Again, natural gas is the only flexible mobile fuel we have. It is not like there are other options out there we can accomplish this with. I believe if credits or subsidies are paid by the users—those who benefit—this a good result, and it is good policy.

Think about it for a moment. If you took all of our 18-wheel vehicles in America and put them on natural gas, you would reduce consumption of foreign oil by one-third. Do you want to know how to bring down the price of gasoline and diesel? There it is. Take one-third of the demand and shift it over to natural gas.

Fleet vehicle companies—FedEx, UPS; I can sort of name all of them, the in-and-out-every-day companies—they go out in the morning, come back in the afternoon, they have one fueling station, and they are running to go to natural gas. They do not need the incentive. But look how fast they could change their entire fleet if it was there—again, without one penny of taxpayer money.

Municipalities. There is not a municipality in America today that is not challenged from the standpoint of their annual budget. They have cut parks and recreation. They are trying to figure out how to do education. Every community is faced with the same thing, decreasing property values; therefore, the flow of revenues is less than they were last year and the year before.

Where is the game changer for municipalities in a natural gas bill? It is very simple. There are 500,000 buses in America, and there are 26 million kids who get on a bus every day. If we can reduce by one-third or more the cost by switching to natural gas, we should be doing everything we can to get every school system in America to have a natural gas engine in their schoolbus so the one-third they save goes back into the classroom to educate our children; where nobody is faced with trying to decide whether they are going to buy textbooks or have a teacher's aide; where every classroom is designed not based upon how much money we have available but what the educational requirements are for that next generation.

For those who suggest this bill does not do anything, I will tell you one

point alone is enough to get up and vote yes when it comes up. It is a game changer. It is a game changer to local budgets. More importantly, municipalities get to devote the money to the right places.

Why is a credit needed? It is very simple. It costs money to switch an engine. A typical natural gas engine is going to cost somewhere between \$25,000 and \$40,000 more than the equivalent diesel engine in an 18-wheel vehicle today. But as more and more and more get built, what we are going to find is that the diesel engine is more expensive, and the natural gas engine is cheaper. Wouldn't we accelerate this as fast as we could so we could get the benefits of that production shift?

Everybody is geared to do it today. As a matter of fact, it is so compelling a reason that Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors have all announced in their light-duty pickups they are going to come from the factory with natural gas. But for a consumer to fuel their vehicle with natural gas, they are going to have a little compressor at home, for compressed natural gas, hooked right up to their natural gas line. For an 18-wheel vehicle going from North Carolina to California, it is not that easy. It means we have to have the infrastructure across the country that enables that to be a feasible business decision for a company.

What does part of the NAT GAS bill do? It creates a credit, a subsidy, so the infrastructure that is needed is out there. Oh, by the way, we still have the credit in place for individual consumers who want to have fueling stations.

We are not recreating the solar or wind subsidies or credits. We are not recreating an ethanol subsidy for gasoline that Americans have just had a huge distaste for. We are taking not a technology of the future and investing in it, we are taking a technology that is here today and saying let's create the incentive for this to explode, for this to be a game changer in the global balance of trade.

Why don't some want this? Some do not want this because they use natural gas and they do not want the price to go up. We are sitting on a 100-year supply of natural gas right now if we do not drill another well. We have companies that are in the business today that—because of where the price point is and because of where the demand is—are thinking about plugging, shutting in natural gas wells because they cannot move it out of the country and they cannot sell it here. Yet we are on the cusp of being able to create an incentive that is paid for by the users that not only keeps those wells open but gives the reason for those companies to actually produce more.

America has always proven: If we will buy it, they will build it. Look at the automobile industry. We would buy them, and today we are going everywhere in the world to find the gasoline it takes to put in them. Well, my belief

is, if we accelerate the use of natural gas in trucks, fleets, and municipalities, what we are going to have is another explosion of natural gas finds. We are going to increase supply. If anything, we may see prices drop even further. But without the demand, I can assure you, the future is very predictable.

We have this fuel at home. It is on land. There is some offshore, but the majority of the finds are on land. More importantly, this has happened exactly where we need it: Pennsylvania, Ohio, North Dakota, Oklahoma—and, yes, probably North Carolina and Virginia. The fact is, none of us know today because some areas geologically have never been explored.

What are the realities? Well, if we can outproduce what we consume, one of two things will happen. One, we will build an infrastructure to sell it all around the world or, two, we will slow the exploration. In both cases the price will go up. Isn't that why people are against this bill, because they are scared the price will go up? In fact, this bill is the only thing that will keep natural gas prices at a historically low cost. Anything less than this would cause devastation throughout the marketplace.

Many say let the markets drive what happens. That is what I am doing. It is exactly what I am doing. This legislation says: Produce as much as possible. Shift as much from petroleum as technology will allow us. It is sort of like saying: Let's give the Federal Government a 5-hour energy drink. Let's put this policy on steroids to shift as much as we technologically can from gasoline and diesel and home heating oil over to natural gas.

What is the impact on the American people if we do not do this? It would be higher gas and diesel prices. It would be higher costs for all the goods we buy. Sometimes we do not think about the fact that when that trucker pays \$4.20 a gallon for diesel—and they have seen their price double in the last 12 months—it is not too long before we feel it in the cost of groceries or in other consumer goods or in everything we purchase in the United States. If the energy costs go up for the warehouse that product is stored in, we get it there. If the cost to produce it goes up because the manufacturing process costs a little bit more, it goes up there. This is how inflation happens.

Here is a great opportunity for us to get our teeth into inflation and cut the primary driver of inflation. I think the byproduct of it would be that we would have almost a magnet in America of capital attraction to fuel job creation and to put Americans back to work. See, there is a lot more to an energy policy bill than whether there are winners and losers.

What else would the American people be impacted by if we do not do this? Higher property taxes. There is no way around it. There is absolutely no way around it if, in fact, we want the next

generation to be educated. We have an opportunity to take one-third of that transportation cost to a municipality and to pump it back into the budget.

Well, let me suggest there is another loser. I think the Acting President pro tempore knows this. If we fail to use this as a flexible mobile fuel, most of it is going to be used to generate electricity. They are going to take the easy way out—\$50 million to build a natural gas generation facility. It is cleaner burning. That makes it very attractive to them. The only problem is, we are going to get 30 years down the road, when most of us are going to be looking back—if we are still here—at our children, saying: I cannot believe we made this mistake. I cannot believe we locked you in to one fuel for the generation of all of America's electricity.

One of the beauties of America is that we have a mix, and we are constantly changing that mix between coal and natural gas and nuclear. Well, we would make a huge mistake if we just left it to today's economics to say: Let's do it all in natural gas. If we did that, we would not have a bridge fuel, we would not have the flexible mobile fuel that natural gas provides us. We would be locked in to betting that technology would allow us to run it on solar or something else in the future. I am not sure I can bet on that for my children and my grandchildren. I am not sure we are there. I am not sure we are smart enough.

I am going to pose a question to the Senate. What if I am wrong? I have been wrong before. What if I am wrong? What if this does not happen? What if there is not an explosion of transition from gas and diesel over to natural gas? It is real simple: The user fee goes away. But we tried something. There is no downside. It is not as if we are locked into something that cost the American people money. If we do not need as much, then we do not need the user fee. It has not impacted, up or down, fuel costs if, in fact, we have not pushed things over from where we are today. No damages; no downside.

What if I am right? What if I am right and this is a game changer? Well, we continue to grow our production of gas. That creates tens of thousands of jobs all across the country. We reduce our need for foreign petroleum—game changer in the security of this country. We stabilize or reduce the current price of gas, diesel, home heating fuel.

The more natural gas we leverage, the more dollars we have in our pockets as Americans. The environmental impact is significantly better than diesel or gasoline. Our economy grows because fuel costs are predictable and more investments are made hiring more Americans. Communities and companies can budget. They can budget better because we, not somebody who hates us, have control of our future costs.

Prices come down because fuel costs are less and do not go up. The less of

the family budget goes to fuel, less community budgets go to buses, more goes to our children. I realize this is bold. And, boy, has America become risk averse. This is not something I stumbled on yesterday. I have been promoting this for 3 years. This is the first chance to come to the Senate floor and have a vote. You know what. It probably is not going to pass. That is the disappointing part of it. It will probably fail tomorrow unless my colleagues or their staff, who stayed after my first two comments and listened to this, understand that there is not a downside to doing this.

Why in the world would we not take this bill and implement it in hopes that for the first time we have a piece of energy policy in America? I said at the beginning that if this was done by pulling the money from taxpayers in America, I would never be up here offering this bill. But this is the time. It is now. Look at the global landscape. Look at the cost of energy. There has never been a more important time for a piece of legislation that drastically changes the future of this country.

I too have been disgusted with government investing our dollars and picking winners and losers—mostly losers—in technologies that have not proven to be effective. This is not that. This is using dollars we collect from user fees to accelerate technology that is there today. It is just accelerating its use. It is making sure that the future is radically different. It is using existing technology to be a game changer. It affects the lives and the livelihood of every American, the communities we live in, and, more importantly, our children.

Maybe this is too simple. Maybe Members of Congress can only get difficult things now. This is easy. It is easy to understand. It is easy to see the picture of what it affects. It is easy to understand the impact on the American people. And it is all positive. If you implement it, it has no downside. Why would we not try it and see what happens?

If passing this amendment might accomplish what I have described, why would we not do it? We represent the American people. It may be that their voice needs to be heard before tomorrow when votes happen. This requires vision. I have to admit, it is something that Congress has shown very little of of late. This legislation benefits only one thing—only one thing—the future of this country, the United States of America, the opportunities of our children, the prosperity of the greatest country in the world.

If that is important to you, then you ought to support this bill. It is important to me, and that is why I am here on a day when the Senate has no business, has no votes, because it was the one time I could come here uninterrupted, without the distractions of all the visitors and all the claims, to set

the record straight about this legislation. It is simple. It is easy to understand. It impacts everybody in America. It does pick winners and losers. It says: America is going to win, and the people who are not our friends are going to lose.

I am not sure you can say it any clearer than that. It does not cost the taxpayers a dime. The beneficiaries are the ones who pay the tab. If it does not work, there is no downside. If it does work, it is a game changer from the standpoint of our energy policy and, more importantly, our future.

The bill sunsets after 5 years. We have a 100-year supply of natural gas today if we did not drill another well. We import 70 percent of our petroleum, and that costs \$25 billion a month that we send there. Imagine what that \$25 billion could create in jobs here if, in fact, we made this simple policy change.

I thank you, Mr. President, for your attention and your patience and the patience of my colleagues since I ran over a little bit. But I will conclude with this. A bill that roughly costs \$3.4 to \$3.8 billion and is funded by user fees is not a big bill in Washington. But the potential impact of this legislation will not only be big in America, it will change the landscape of the world. It will put us back in control of our national security, of our economic security, and, more importantly, of our energy security. This will be a day that Congress will either be proud or disgusted at the outcome of a policy such as this.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator JOHNSON from Wisconsin and I be able to conduct a colloquy.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, it has not been that long since the President's health care proposal has been passed. If we recall, it was passed on Christmas Eve, after a long battle. We were told: Don't worry what is in it; we will have to pass it first to find out what is in it. I remember Senator BROWN was running in the State of Massachusetts, a liberal State. He said, If you elect me—and he was running in the special election—I will vote against

it and provide the vote that kills it. But the matter was delayed—his appointment and confirmation, after he won his election. It was put off and the interim Senator cast a vote for the bill and it passed by a single vote and the result was 60 to 40. I think it was a dangerous step for America.

I am the ranking Republican on the Budget Committee and the Senator from Wisconsin is a member of that committee. We have serious concerns about what is in this bill now that we are beginning to read it and beginning to apply it and see what might happen. Senator JOHNSON is a successful businessman who ran for the Senate and joined us just a little over 1 year ago. He came here to do something. I have been exceedingly impressed with his approach to business. He had looked at these numbers and challenged the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Secretary Sebelius, on some numbers last week. The situation was quite troubling.

Maybe Senator JOHNSON can tell us about his concern and what he raised last week—the economic impact of what happened with jobs, the American economy, and the debt of our country. Maybe we can begin our discussion with where he is coming from and what he observed from his exchange last week.

Mr. JOHNSON of Wisconsin. First of all, I thank the Senator for his kind comments. He mentioned that Speaker PELOSI famously stated we needed to pass this bill in order to figure out what is in it. I know the Senator from Alabama and I are dedicated to making sure the Obama administration doesn't make sure this law is fully implemented before we understand the true cost of the bill. We simply cannot afford to have the American people and Members of Congress not understand the true cost of the health care law.

I remind everybody that, back in 1965, when they passed the Medicare bill, first of all, the entire bill was less than 300 pages. That is interesting. The provision that applied to Medicare alone was about 124 pages. That compares, of course, with the 2,600- or 2,700-page bill that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was. There are 10,000 pages of regulations just to try to implement this bill.

When they passed Medicare, they estimated it out 25 years and said that in 1990, Medicare would cost \$12 billion. In fact, in 1990, Medicare cost \$110 billion, which is more than nine times the original cost estimate.

I am new here, but I have been watching this town pretty carefully over the last few decades. I don't believe Washington has gotten any better at projecting and estimating figures—particularly on new entitlements that people want around here. They always tend to underestimate spending in order to pass legislation, particularly a bill such as the health care bill, which was done in partisan fashion, without any kind of support and input from our side.

The point of my question to Secretary Sebelius last week was to try to lay out the broken promises that are occurring, when we have only begun to implement the law. The first broken promise I asked her about was the very famous guarantee of President Obama, who said: If you pass this health care law, every single family in America will see their annual insurance premium go down by \$2,500 by the end of his first term. The Kaiser Family Foundation has already conducted a study and has said that, on average, premiums have gone up about \$2,200 per year. That is a \$4,700 difference in the first 3 years of his administration or only 2 years after it was originally passed.

Mr. SESSIONS. The Senator has been in the real world, having to make a payroll and manage a company. If he, as a CEO, made a representation that this was going to reduce the cost of insurance for your employees by \$2,500, and it increases by 2,200, that would be a stunning event, would it not? Does it bother the Senator, as a person from the real world—and this is the first time he has been in elected office—to have people walking around with numbers that are so divergent, promising to reduce health care costs, and they actually are driving costs up?

Mr. JOHNSON of Wisconsin. Had I made that guarantee to my shareholders and management—and that is basically what the President did; he made that guarantee to the shareholders of America—I would not want to face the appropriations committee meeting, where I would have to explain that away. Secretary Sebelius was in a very unenviable position to have to explain how the President promised a \$2,500 reduction and there was an increase.

Mr. SESSIONS. The Senator is right. I was here. There was a promise made to achieve passage of the bill. A lot of Americans didn't believe these promises and thought they were inflated to begin with, and this promise—a fundamental promise—has already been proven to be wildly inaccurate. And thank you for raising that.

Mr. JOHNSON of Wisconsin. Of course, that is only the first promise. I have a couple more.

The administration also famously said this health care law would not add one dime to the deficit. In fact, the original projections were that it would save \$143 billion in the first 10 years. Well, thankfully, the administration has recognized that the CLASS Act was, as Budget Committee chairman KENT CONRAD said, a Ponzi scheme. It was simply not financially workable. So they are not implementing it. Because they are not implementing it, they are not going to get \$86 billion worth of revenue, so that will eat away at that \$143 billion of deficit reduction.

Of course, a couple of weeks ago when President Obama presented his fiscal year 2013 budget, included in that budget was a \$111 billion request—or I