

[From the Wall Street Journal, Sept. 9, 1999]

NUKES FOR SALE

(By Brett Wagner)

Strangely absent from the debate over how to spend Washington's projected \$1 trillion surplus has been any discussion of Russia's longstanding offer to sell its stockpiles of excess weapon-grade uranium. The time has come to take Russia up on this offer.

Russia has never developed a reliable system for protecting the enormous stockpiles of weapon-grade uranium and plutonium it inherited from the Soviet Union. These stockpiles are often stored in makeshift warehouses, some protected only by \$5 combination locks and soldiers who occasionally desert their posts in search of food. Small caches of these nuclear materials have already begun leaking out of Russia. It would only take 20 or 30 pounds of highly enriched uranium to arm a device capable of leveling a city the size of lower Manhattan.

In February 1993 Presidents Clinton and Boris Yeltsin signed an agreement for Russia to sell the U.S. highly enriched uranium extracted from its dismantled nuclear warheads in exchange for hard currency. Russia is currently dismantling thousands of warheads. Unfortunately, this unprecedented opportunity to advance U.S. and international security has fallen behind schedule at nearly every turn, primarily because Washington is constantly distracted by less important issues. So far Russia has shipped only 50.5 tons of highly enriched uranium—almost 30 tons short of the agreement's stated goal by this point.

One major holdup has been the U.S. enrichment Corp., a recently privatized company selected by the U.S. government to implement the American side of the accord. It has resisted accepting delivery of Russia's enriched uranium because, among other reasons, it claims that the materials are not pure enough for U.S. nuclear plants. But the corporation has a fundamental conflict of interest. Since it also produces enriched uranium, it wants to limit Russian competition in the international market.

The question is: How long do we have before we run out of luck? How long before some of Russia's uranium winds up in the hands of terrorists like Osama bin Laden or regimes like Saddam Hussein's?

Washington should switch the power of executive agent from the U.S. Enrichment Corp. to the Department of Energy. Given that most of the delays in implementing the agreement have stemmed from America's insistence that the highly enriched uranium be blended down into nuclear fuel in Russia, Washington should reverse this policy and accept Moscow's offer to ship its undiluted uranium directly to the U.S.

As soon as the agreement gets back on track, Washington should ask Moscow to expand it to include all of Russia's excess weapon-grade uranium, not to mention its excess plutonium. It makes no sense to purchase one stockpile of unsecured fissile material while leaving others in jeopardy.

The pricetag for such a deal would be remarkably low. The cost of purchasing 500 tons of Russia's highly enriched uranium, the quantity covered in the agreement, is approximately \$8 billion. Beyond what the agreement covers, Moscow has some 700 tons of additional weapons-grade uranium it has deemed "excess." That would increase the price to around \$19 billion. And for an additional \$1 billion or \$2 billion, Moscow would probably throw in its excess weapon-grade plutonium, which it has also been trying to sell for use as nuclear fuel.

With Russian parliamentary elections scheduled for later this year and a presidential election next June—which may well

bring in a government less friendly to the West than Mr. Yeltsin's—the time to act is now rather than later. •

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MURKOWSKI. I ask consent that there be a period for the transaction of routine morning business, with any Senator permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes.

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

NATIONAL SALVAGE MOTOR VEHICLE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I am proud to add the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the California DMV to the long list of organizations that support S. 655, the National Salvage Motor Vehicle Consumer Protection Act that I introduced during this session to protect consumers from title fraud.

Other supporters of my title branding legislation include the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA), state DMV directors around the country, the Michigan Secretary of State and other Secretaries of State, the International Union of Police Associations AFL-CIO, International Association of Auto Theft Investigators, National Odometer and Title Fraud Enforcement Association, American Automobile Manufacturers Association, Association of International Automobile Manufacturers, National Automobile Dealers Association, National Association of Minority Automobile Dealers, National Independent Automobile Dealers Association, Honda North America, Nissan North America, Carfax, CarMax, American Service Industry Association, American Automotive Leasing Association, American Car Rental Association, American Salvage Pool Association, Automotive Engine Rebuilders Association, Automotive Parts and Accessories Association, Automotive Parts Rebuilders Association, National Association of Fleet Resale Dealers, National Auto Auction Association, and State Farm Insurance.

I also think it is worth recognizing 23 of our colleagues who have actively signaled their intention to protect motorists in their state and throughout the nation by formally supporting S. 655. Senators MCCAIN, BREAU, STEVENS, CONRAD, BURNS, HUTCHISON, FRIST, ABRAHAM, MACK, WARNER, BENNETT, SESSIONS, MURKOWSKI, SHELBY, INHOFE, GRAMS, THOMAS, ROBERTS, HATCH, THOMPSON, ENZI, KYL, and HUTCHINSON are to be commended for cosponsoring this important consumer protection measure.

The American Automobile Association represents over 40 million drivers. It is a nonpartisan organization that champions the interests of the driving public in virtually every city, county, and state across this great land. AAA

supports S. 655 because it shares my belief that national standards for titling salvage, rebuilt salvage, non-repairable and flood damaged vehicles will help prevent the fraudulent sale of damaged vehicles and protect consumers from unknowingly purchasing them. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to print AAA's letter of support for S. 655 in the RECORD.

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

AAA WASHINGTON OFFICE,
Washington, DC, November 17, 1999.

Hon. TRENT LOTT,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR LOTT: As a representative of 42 million motorists, AAA appreciates your effort to establish more uniformity in the titling and registration of salvage and other damaged vehicles.

AAA shares your concern about the practice of unscrupulous individuals buying damaged vehicles at low cost, rebuilding them, and then retitling them in another state with less or no protections. A "washed" title does not disclose previous damage to a vehicle and therefore, subsequent purchasers have no knowledge of the damage. Unwitting consumers are the victims of such fraudulent practices.

In an effort to help AAA members avoid the pitfalls of buying damaged or rebuilt vehicles, AAA provides tips on ways to identify damaged or flood vehicles. AAA also recommends that consumers have used cars checked for safety and reliability by a reputable auto technician before they purchase the vehicle.

Minimum standards for titling salvage, rebuilt salvage, non-repairable and flood-damaged vehicles will help present the fraudulent sale of damaged vehicles and protect consumers from unknowingly purchasing them. However, because states often have unique and various problems relating specifically to salvage vehicles, AAA believes states should be provided flexibility to enact stricter standards that address individual state concerns as your bill allows.

S. 655 represents an important step toward addressing the problem, while recognizing the legitimate role states have in motor vehicle licensing and titling laws. AAA commends your leadership in working with all parties to craft a workable solution and is pleased to support your bill.

Sincerely,

SUSAN G. PIKRALLIDAS,
Interim Vice President,
Public & Government Relations.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, my goal from the outset has been to protect used car buyers from title fraud. The solution I proposed was simple, straightforward, and modeled after the recommendations of the Motor Vehicle Titling, Registration, and Salvage Advisory Committee. S. 655 merely establishes model uniform definitions and disclosure requirements for four basic terms: salvage; rebuilt salvage; flood; and nonrepairable vehicles. Under the legislation reported out by the Senate Commerce Committee, states would be free to utilize additional terms and to provide additional disclosures beyond those provided for in this bill. States that choose to adopt the four uniform terms and related provisions would be eligible for incentive grants. No state