compliment the chairman of the committee, Senator GRAMM, and also Senator CONRAD BURNS, for their leadership. They worked on this legislation for a long time. I compliment them on passing a good bill and passing it overwhelmingly.

GAS TAX REPEAL ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED

The Senate resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, today's fuel prices are a daily reminder that America is now at the mercy of foreign oil producing nations. However, before you blame your neighbor's SUV, your local fuel distributors, the oil companies, the automakers, or any of the other usual scapegoats, consider this fact—America is one of the leading energy producing countries in the world. This country has the technology, alternative resources and enough oil to be much more self-sufficient. America does not have to revert back to the practices of the 1970s.

This country is faced with a very serious problem. Our nation's farmers and truckers are being hit the hardest—simply because of this Administration's lack of energy policy. In fact, Secretary Richardson recently admitted that this Administration was caught napping when energy prices began to rise. As a result, U.S. crude oil production is down 17 percent since 1993, and consumption is up 14%. America now imports 56% of the oil consumed—compared to 36% imported at the time of the 1973 Arab oil embargo. At this rate the DOE predicts America will be at least 65% dependent on foreign oil by 2020.

This Administration has close ties to radical environmentalists—environmentalists whose strong rhetoric and drastic actions appear more like a new-age religion than a clarion call for good stewardship. It appears that the White House has spent eight years trying to slowly kill our oil, coal, natural gas and even our hydroelectric industries.

The Administration began this process in 1993 with an effort to impose a $73 billion five-year energy tax to force the American people away from the use of automobiles and American industries away from their primary energy sources. The Clinton/Gore EPA is still attempting to shut down coal-fired electric generating plants in the South and Midwest. Meanwhile, the Administration is providing no offsets to this. In fact, they have done nothing to increase the availability of domestic natural gas, which is the clean alternative for coal in electric plants. Federal land out West is expected to contain as much as 137 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, but the Administration refuses to allow drilling. Similarly, the Administration will not allow exploration on federal land in Alaska, which is estimated to contain 16 billion barrels of domestic crude oil.

None of these facts should be surprising. Vice President GORE has vowed to prohibit future exploration for oil or natural gas on our outer-continental-shelf. He has bluntly stated that the internal combustion engine—the very mechanism which drove America's industrial development and led to the creation of our middle class—is a threat. Maybe that's why he embraces the Kyoto Protocol which would impose staggering consumption restrictions on our economy, while exempting other countries. This treaty is so bad that my colleagues from GORE's own party joined the Senate leadership in voting against it 95 to zero. AL GORE may not depend on the internal combustion engine for his livelihood, but a lot of folks beyond the Washington beltway do.

There has to be a solution to this problem. Even without tapping all of America's resources, this country still produces almost half of her fuel needs—far more than most industrial countries. In the long run, a national energy policy that looks at all realistic alternative sources of energy must be developed. Congress must also provide incentives for independent producers to keep their wells pumping. Tax credits for marginal wells will restore our link to existing oil resources, including many in Mississippi. These solutions will be needed someday soon.

In the short term, Congress can reduce or temporarily suspend federal fuel taxes, which, along with state excise taxes, account for an average of 40 cents per gallon of gasoline. This would include the ''Gore Fuel Tax'' ramrodded by the President back in 1993 in a decision so close that AL GORE headed to Capitol Hill to cast the tie-breaking vote. Yes, the Vice-President is the very reason the 4.3 cent gas tax was implemented. Now, as the Administration continues to do nothing to remedy this crisis, the Congress can make a difference. Repealing the Gore Gas Tax immediately, and providing a complete federal fuels tax holiday if prices reach a nationwide average of $2.00, will provide real relief for American consumers at the pump. This can be done for the remainder of this year without touching one cent of the Highway Trust Fund, Social Security, or Medicare. This is a real solution to a very real problem.

This reflects the leadership of a number of our colleagues on this important issue. One provision to suspend the diesel fuel tax has been championed by the senior Senator from Colorado, BEN NIGHTHORSE CAMPBELL. A trucker himself, Senator CAMPBELL has led the way on ways to assist truckers and their families who are suffering from the rising price of diesel fuel. He has met with the truckers who have traveled great distances to Washington to make their voices heard. Senator CAMPBELL's unique insights and personal experiences have been helpful to the leadership in crafting this comprehensive gas tax bill.

This is not the 1970s. America has better technology, more efficient and cleaner automobiles as well as more energy options. The question is: how long will we hold these options and be held hostage to nations abroad or radical environmentalists at home? America can solve her energy problems but Congress must act in the interests of our entire nation, rather than a select few.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I want to explain the procedural situation we are in with regard to the motion to proceed on the so-called gas tax repeal. I could not be more strongly in opposition to the repeal of the gas tax because of its potential to devastate our highway and transit programs.

Nevertheless, I intend to support the motion to proceed this afternoon and I urge my colleagues on this side to do so for a couple of reasons.

First of all, it seems to me this ought to be a debate that we have early next week. I think there are a lot of very important questions that ought to be raised about the advisability of the repeal of the gas tax. I think Governors and those from industries that are involved in the construction of our infrastructure this year ought to have the opportunity to be heard.

I will read for my colleagues some of the comments made by my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle with regard to the gas tax. I think they ought to be heard, as well.

Let me quote from Speaker DENNIS HASTERT, who on March 26, said:

> But the problem is that this doesn't solve the problem. . .that's just a little tick in what the cost of gas is. We need to solve the real problems out there.

So said the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The House Transportation Committee chairman, BUD SHUSTER said:

> Repeal of the fuel tax is the wrong way to go. [It's] counterproductive because reducing a portion of the price without reducing the underlying cost of crude oil makes it easier for OPEC countries to keep prices high.

So says the chairman, the Republican chairman of the House Transportation Committee.

Here is what the House majority leader, DICK ARMEY said:

> Let's not get bogged down on only one dimension of the problem—a short-term dimension that offers scant relief. Even if we repealed, that it would give little relief to consumers.

Here is what my colleague, the very respected and distinguished chairman of the Armed Services Committee, JOHN WARNER said:

> Repealing the 4.3 cents will have little or no impact on the price of fuel. It will, however, severely limit all of our States' abilities to make needed surface transportation improvements.

Here is what our colleague, Senator GEORGE VOINOVICH, said on March 24:

> Even with this repeal, there is no guarantee it is going to bring down the cost at the pump. It defies common sense.

Here is what the GOP conference chair, J.C. WATTS, said in the House of Representatives on March 19:

I don't know if the tax has any affect on fuel tax. Supply and demand is driving price right now.

Finally, here is what Congressman DON YOUNG said. He gets the award for the bluntest assessment of the advisability of this particular legislation.

Absolutely the dumbest thing ever thought of.

This ought to be debated. We ought to have a good discussion about its advisability. This is one of those rare occasions when I happen to be on the same side as the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the majority leader on the House of Representatives, the conference chair on the House of Representatives, Congressman YOUNG from the House of Representatives, and some of my distinguished colleagues here in the Senate.

We ought to debate it. It ought to be amended. We don't oftentimes have a vehicle that could be offered that will allow an opportunity to debate energy and tax policy such as this. I am hoping we can offer amendments to this bill and we would expect we would have the opportunity to do so. This is one of those rare occasions when many of our colleagues share the view expressed so powerfully and eloquently by our Republican colleagues.

I am not giving the credit they deserve to my Democratic colleagues on the House side. I could come up with at least as long a list on that side.

We look forward to this debate. We are certainly not going to object at all to having the motion to proceed presented to us this afternoon.

We just want to get to the bill and have this debate. That is my reason for supporting the motion to proceed, to have a good debate, to ensure the American people know what the implications of this particular vote will be and the unusual coalition that has already been created in opposition to this repeal. I yield the floor.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, it is not often that so many of my colleagues come to the Senate floor in opposition to lowering a tax. They do so and I join them today for good reason. The legislation to repeal the 4.3 cent per gallon excise tax on gasoline is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

In fact, several members on the other side of the aisle from House Majority Leader DICK ARMEY and Ways and Means Chairman BILL ARCHER, to House Transportation Chairman SHUSTER are opposed to this measure. The National Governors Association has voiced its adamant opposition, as well.

The proposal, S. 2285, is fiscally irresponsible and will not lead to lower gasoline prices for consumers. This measure could cause the state of Connecticut to lose more than $280 million to highway funds for FY 2002 and 2003, in addition to hundreds of lost jobs as highway projects are put on hold or shelved indefinitely. Congress made a commitment to help states like Connecticut repair and maintain our highways and it should not break that commitment.

Supporters of this legislation say they would tap the non-Social Security surplus to replace the lost tax revenues created by their proposal. That is a mistake. We should be directing the surplus to debt reduction, ensuring the solvency of Social Security, prescription drugs, targeted tax cuts and investments in education and the environment.

The likelihood that any reduction in the Federal gasoline tax will reach consumers is unlikely. The tax is not imposed at the pump, but rather shortly after the gasoline leaves the refinery. The gasoline could pass through several other entities before it reaches the pump and none of the middlemen would have to pass on the savings. The legislation contains only a Sense of Congress that any benefits of the tax be passed on to consumers. Past experience in Connecticut has shown that decreases in a fuel tax have not been passed on to motorists. In 1997, gas prices shot up 11 cents in August despite a 3-cent cut in the state gasoline tax that took effect on July 1.

Finally, it is worth noting that several states, including Arkansas, Nevada, Oklahoma, California, and Tennessee, have laws that mandate an increase in state gasoline taxes if the Federal rate decreases. Obviously, a state's legislature can act to change its laws. But these laws only underscore the complexity of gas pricing which the bill before us does not.

The cut could be another 18.3 cents per gallon for gasoline and more for other oil-based fuels. The gasoline tax is dedicated revenue that we use to maintain our highways. The loss of funds for highway improvements and mass transit, the loss of jobs and the uncertainty—if not unlikelihood—that a gas tax reduction would result in lower gas prices—make this bill unsound and unwise.

We all want to bring down the price of gasoline. Let's take responsible steps to move in that direction. I commend the administration for getting a commitment from the OPEC nations to increase production. In addition, the administration has also proposed tax credits for energy-efficient homes and energy-efficient cars, funding for the development of clean and renewable energy and the enactment of tax proposals to promote the use of alternative energy sources.

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the motion to proceed to invoke cloture on S. 2285, the Federal Fuels Tax Holiday Act of 2000, a bill introduced by Senator LOTT which I have been pleased to cosponsor.

This legislation will repeal, until the end of this year, the 4.3 cent-per-gallon increase to the federal excise tax on gasoline, diesel, kerosene, and aviation fuel added by the Clinton Administration in 1993.

Also, our legislation is set up so that should the national average for regular unleaded gasoline prices breach the $2 mark, it would also repeal, until the end of the year, the 18.3 cent-per-gallon federal gasoline tax; the 24.3 cent-per-gallon excise tax on highway diesel fuel and kerosene; the 4.3 cents per-gallon railroad diesel fuel; the 24.3 cent-per-gallon excise tax on inland waterway fuel; the 19.3 cent-per-gallon for noncommercial aviation gasoline; the 21.8 cent-per-gallon for noncommercial jet fuel; and 4.3 cents-per-gallon for commercial aviation fuel.

This will provide the nation with a vital ''circuit breaker'' in the midst of the very real possibility of skyrocketing fuel costs as America takes to the road this summer—and the legislation ensures that any savings will truly be passed on to consumers and not pocketed before customers can benefit from the savings at the pump.

Some of my colleagues say this will not amount to enough savings for the consumers to even care about. Well, I guess my constituents in Maine are more thrifty than others, especially after a winter of paying the highest prices in decades for both home heating oil and high gas prices at the pump.

At the same time, it allows reimbursement of the Highway Trust Fund, which is financed by the gasoline tax, and the Airport and Airways Trust Fund, financed by the aviation fuel tax. Both these funds are held completely harmless, with any lost revenues to be replaced from the budget surplus. No one should have any concerns about the impact this bill would have on the progress of important highway and airport projects because the impact would be zero.

This legislation takes a concrete step toward more reasonable fuel prices, helping to serve as a buffer for consumers who are already reeling from the high cost of gasoline and other fuels. Of course, I hope the provisions for temporary repeal of the full tax will not be necessary. But if they are, they will provide immediate relief to taxpayers and ensure that, if prices are skyrocketing, any savings in fuel costs will be passed on to consumers.

The retail price we pay for refined petroleum products for gasoline, diesel fuel, and home heating oil, for instance, substantially depends upon the cost of crude oil to refiners. We have seen a barrel of crude oil climb to over $35.00 recently from a price of $10.50 in February of 1999. That is a 145 percent increase. And while OPEC agreed this week to only very modest increases in crude oil production, White House officials say that the cost of gasoline at the pump will now decline in the coming months, even though their own Economic Advisor Gene Sperling was quoted in the Washington Post on March 29, as warning that ''there is still significant and inherent uncertainty in the oil market, particularly with such low inventories, and we will continue to monitor the situation very closely''.

Mr. President, while the Administration has ''monitored'' the situation, crude oil prices have gone up and up, and our inventories went down. As a matter of fact, the Administration admits that it was ''caught napping'' after OPEC decided to decrease production in March of 1999—and while they napped through a long winter's sleep, prices for crude climbed as temperatures plummeted.

The effect on gasoline, diesel and home heating oil was predictable, and in fact was predicted. Last October—a half a year ago—the Department of Energy, in its 1999–2000 Winter Fuels Outlook, projected a 44 percent increase in home heating oil bills. In a severe winter, the agency estimated, an additional 28 percent increase in costs could be felt for residential customers.

In other words, the Department of Energy itself predicted an increase of over 70 percent, but did nothing. In actuality, home heating oil costs jumped from a fairly consistent national of 86 cents per gallon in the winter of 1998–99 to as high as $2.08 per gallon in Maine early last month—an increase of well over 100 percent. And, in that same time frame, conventional gasoline prices have risen 70 percent or higher.

So now the Administration tells us that gasoline prices will most likely go down by this summer because of the small production increases agreed to by OPEC. Well, even with an increase in OPEC quotas, there will still be a shortfall in meeting worldwide demand for crude oil. Approximately 76.3 million barrels per day are needed to meet demand, but the anticipated new OPEC production is estimated to be only 75.3 million barrels per day. So you'll have to excuse me if I'm a little hesitant accepting estimates from an Administration that seems to make predictions by gazing into a crystal ball. I want to at least make sure that Americans have in their pockets what they would have otherwise paid in fuel taxes if the Administration underestimates prices once again and gasoline hits $2.00 a gallon.

Beyond the pump, consumers are getting hit with extra costs directly attributable to high fuel costs. If you've paid to send an overnight package lately, you probably noted that you were charged a fuel fee, because their cost of diesel fuel has increased by about 60 percent over the past year. And with a 150 percent increase in jet fuel, that airline ticket you buy today will probably include something you've never seen before—a fuel charge of $20.00. How long will it be before costs of other products will also be passed on the consumer?

And, consider the impacts to the nations' farmers. The New York Times reported just this past Wednesday that a farmer paying 40 cents a gallon more this year to fuel his diesel tractors and combines is adding as much as $240 a day to his harvesting costs. In my home state of Maine, we are at the peak season for moving last year's potato crop out of storage and to the large Eastern markets. But the industry can't get truckers to come into the State to move the potatoes because they are discouraged by the particularly high price of diesel in Maine.

The only help the potato industry has had recently in getting their product to market has certainly not been due to the energy policy of this Administration, but to local truckers who have turned to hauling potatoes because the recent wet weather has kept them away from taking timber out of the Maine woods.

Soon, we will enter the summer months, when tourism is particularly important to the economy of New England and to Maine in particular. With gas prices climbing even higher, we need relief now, and that's what this bill provides.

Mr. President, the choices are clear—do nothing for the taxpayers who are being gouged by failed energy policies, or do something by supporting legislation that acts as a circuit breaker that gives citizens a break at the gas pump, protects the Trust Funds that build our highways and airports, I urge my colleagues to support this bill and I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to the Gas Tax Repeal Act, S. 2285:

Trent Lott, Frank H. Murkowski, Paul Coverdell, Conrad Burns, Larry E. Craig, Mike Crapo, Judd Gregg, Orrin Hatch, Rod Grams, Susan Collins, Robert F. Bennett, Chuck Grassley, Mike Inhofe, Don Nickles, Sam Brownback, and Richard G. Lugar.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to the Gas Tax Repeal Act, S. 2285, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are required under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. NICKLES. I announce that the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. DOMENICI) and the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE) are necessarily absent.

Mr. REID. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber who desire to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 86, nays 11, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 51 Leg.]

YEAS—86

Abraham	Allard	Bayh
Akaka	Ashcroft	Bennett
Biden	Gramm	McConnell
Bingaman	Grams	Mikulski
Breaux	Grassley	Moynihan
Brownback	Gregg	Murkowski
Bryan	Hagel	Murray
Bunning	Hatch	Nickles
Burns	Helms	Reed
Campbell	Hollings	Reid
Chafee, L.	Hutchinson	Rockefeller
Cleland	Hutchison	Roth
Cochran	Inouye	Santorum
Collins	Jeffords	Sarbanes
Conrad	Johnson	Schumer
Coverdell	Kennedy	Sessions
Craig	Kerrey	Shelby
Crapo	Kerry	Smith (NH)
Daschle	Kohl	Smith (OR)
DeWine	Kyl	Snowe
Dodd	Landrieu	Specter
Dorgan	Lautenberg	Stevens
Durbin	Leahy	Thompson
Edwards	Levin	Thurmond
Feingold	Lieberman	Torricelli
Fitzgerald	Lott	Voinovich
Frist	Lugar	Wellstone
Gorton	Mack	Wyden
Graham	McCain	

NAYS—11

Baucus	Feinstein	Roberts
Bond	Harkin	Thomas
Byrd	Lincoln	Warner
Enzi	Robb	

NOT VOTING—3

Boxer	Domenici	Inhofe

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 86, the nays are 11. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

The Senator from Oklahoma.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

LARRY HARRISON

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, sadly this week the Senate has lost another member of our family. On Monday, Larry Harrison, a retired Senate staffer, passed away in Washington, DC. Before his retirement in June of 1997, Larry had over 36 years of Federal service.

Most of my colleagues will remember Larry's hard work as a Chamber attendant. His dedication to the upkeep of the Chamber and the surrounding rooms will be remembered. On Tuesday evening, former Senator Bob Dole fondly remembered Larry during the Leader's Lecture Series.

Like many of the support staff who work for this institution, Larry arrived at work long before the Senate convened and frequently left the Chamber long after adjournment.

Many Senators will recall Larry's passion for golf. I certainly do. As a matter of fact, Larry was one of the founders of the ''Cloakroom Open.'' This golf tournament was organized by Larry to enable many of the Senate staff who work around the Senate Chamber an opportunity to play a round of golf together. It was a chance for a little camaraderie without the discussion of party or politics.