At 7 o'clock, there was Vince Gill who ended his hour-long session with a piece of jazz music. The Grand Ole Opry is getting more diversified. There was Keith Bilbrey backstage interviewing people. He was explaining what Charlie McCoy, the great harmonicist, once said about the four stages of being a country music star which sound a lot like being a politician. Stage No. 1 is, Who is Charlie McCoy? Stage No. 2 is, Get me Charlie McCoy. Stage No. 3 is, Get me somebody who sounds like Charlie McCoy. And stage No. 4 is, Who is Charlie McCoy?

The Opry was started so that the National Life and Accident Insurance Company could sell debit insurance. They got a big tower in Nashville. I think it is 50,000 watts. So all the people who were on little radio stations came to Nashville so they could be on the big radio station.

That is when Roy Acuff and Chet Atkins and Archie Grandpappy Campbell and Dolly Parton all moved from east Tennessee to Nashville. If you understand how important the Alamo is to Texas, you will understand how important the Grand Ole Opry is to Tennesseans, not just Tennesseans but many Americans, the 3,400 who every Friday and Saturday night have gone to thousands and thousands of these radio shows.

No one represented the Opry in its spirit better than Minnie Pearl. There is a photograph of Minnie in dressing room No. 1 backstage, which was Roy Acuff's dressing room until he died, which was the dressing room that Vince Gill was using on the night I was there as the guest announcer. There on the wall was a picture of a young Minnie Pearl in the early 1940s with this hat or a hat similar to this one.

Where did this $1.98 price tag come from? I heard the story that night for the first time. Minnie was performing on the Opry. She pinned a garland of flowers to her hat. And during her performance, this price tag wiggled down and started dangling from her hat. She left it there for the next 40 years as a reminder that anybody can make a mistake and it is all right to make one.

Minnie Pearl was a talented woman who wanted to be Katharine Hepburn. As she said, that was already taken. She set a standard of conduct and style for the Grand Ole Opry that lasts and persists until today, and that style was simply that she was just a very nice person. She would sign the last autograph; she would say hello to anyone; she would pay a call on a Grand Ole Opry family member who was sick; she would see the last fan who had waited for 2 hours after the show.

Minnie Pearl told me one time: I have gotten to the point in life where I have decided if people are not nice, they are not so hot in my book no matter how big they are.

So in the spirit of Minnie Pearl and all of the thousands of Americans who have created and enjoyed the Grand Ole Opry, happy 80th birthday, Grand Ole Opry.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADERSHIP TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VITTER). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 30 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee and the second half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee.

The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

SAVING OUR TAXPAYERS' DOLLARS

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, let me recognize that Minnie Pearl is a tough act to follow. Nonetheless, we must move on. Today, I am going to announce a one-sentence initiative that I will try to put on the Labor-HHS appropriations bill. I won't be successful because there are some procedural reasons. It would take a supermajority. But at least we will get a vote down so we will have an idea about who in this Chamber is really serious about doing something about the deficit.

I had to oppose my dear friend and junior Senator from Oklahoma last week because of the unintended consequences of interfering with local self-determination, and I caution any effort that would substitute or preempt States' sovereignty in favor of centralized control in the Federal bureaucracy unless substantial cuts in spending are accomplished.

The Framers of the Constitution feared one thing above all else, and that was a tyrannical central Government made up of unaccountable Federal bureaucrats would someday be able to supersede States' rights in decisionmaking by locally elected representatives. There is nothing more conservative than this very principle of preserving local control against the centralized Government.

As the author of the Transportation reauthorization bill, I was very pleased at the way we drafted the legislation. We took a formula so that we could allocate funds to the States but then didn't tell the States what to do with them and said: You determine what your priorities should be at the State level. I believe it is a very good process. I was proud to be a part of that process.

There is a mentality in Washington, DC, that if a decision isn't made in Washington, it is not a good decision. The controversial Ketchikan to Gravina Island bridge in Alaska has become a rallying point about boondoggles, and maybe it is a boondoggle, but the people in Alaska didn't think so. They have 100 projects. All States do it differently. But in Alaska, they list 100 projects that are the projects they want to have someday. That particular bridge is ranked in the top 4 of those 100. I think also that we have to recognize that we in Washington do not really know what is the best thing for them.

The other thing that is very important is that most of the money, had this amendment passed, is in accordance with the formula. So if we directed them not to build their bridge, that money could still be spent in Alaska on other projects. We would just be saying that you have to spend the dollars in a way that we in Washington say is best for you.

I will support future amendments that will save taxpayers' dollars. In the meantime, there is something we can do: support the one-sentence amendment that I will introduce.

> Beginning with fiscal year 2007 and thereafter nondefense, nontrust fund discretionary spending shall not exceed previous years without a two-thirds vote.

That is very simple, very straightforward, and something that will work. I recognize that we are only talking in this case about 20 percent of the budget because we have so many entitlements and, of course, the defense spending. But those entitlements are being addressed right now in the budget reconciliation. We need to wait and see how that washes out.

I had this as kind of a mission for a lot of years. I introduced the first amendment in 1987, the first year that I was here over in the other body at that time. But it goes all the way back to 1969 when then Senator Carl Curtis from Nebraska came up with the idea. He was the one who always wanted to the pass the amendment as an amendment to the Constitution. So he said, Why don't you out in Oklahoma preratify a constitutional amendment, so if we get enough States to do it, that would give us the power needed to try to pass a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution.

It never worked. I think the idea was right. I think this very simple solution is one we can address today. It will be something that will take care of these problems in a much simpler way and will maintain the authority out in the States where I believe it belongs. I have served as a mayor of a city, I have served in the State legislature, and I have served here. It has been my experience that the closer you get to home, the better the decisions, and that is consistent with what I am asking for today.

I thank the Chair. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina is recognized.

Mr. DEMINT. I thank the Chair.

BUDGET RECONCILIATION

Mr. DEMINT. Mr. President, these are serious and difficult times for our

country and for many Americans. These are times that demand bold and immediate action. The American people do not want any more excuses. They do not want to hear Congressmen and Senators arguing about who is to blame, and they are not impressed by those who constantly criticize the proposals of others but never make any proposals of their own.

Energy prices are too high, and we have heard enough excuses about why America cannot develop our own oil and gas reserves, build more refineries, and develop more alternative fuels to make us more independent of Middle East oil.

Health care and health insurance are too expensive, and we have heard enough excuses about why individuals cannot buy health insurance from anywhere in the country and get the same tax breaks as businesses.

Illegal immigration is out of control, and we have heard enough excuses about why we cannot control our borders.

Social Security is going broke, and we have heard enough excuses why Congress should continue to spend trillions of dollars of Social Security taxes on other Government programs.

We need action now, but we cannot solve these difficult problems that face us if we do not have a strong economy and a more efficient Government. House and Senate Republicans are developing budget reconciliation legislation now that will accomplish these goals to strengthen our economy, create jobs, and cut the cost of the Federal Government.

This package has two parts. The first part is to stop the scheduled tax increases that will soon add new burdens to our citizens and the businesses that pay their salaries. We must not allow new tax increases to steal our jobs and weaken our country at a time when we need all of our economic strength to solve the problems of today and to create new opportunities for the future.

The 2003 jobs and growth plan passed by Congress and signed by the President lowered taxes for capital gains and dividends, and it resulted in greater economic growth. Our economy has grown more than 4 percent a year since 2003, much faster than in the prior 2 years. Over 4 million jobs have been created since 2003, and 7 million seniors saved an average of over $1200 on their 2004 taxes. And while tax rates have fallen, tax revenues have been increasing. In fact, as a result of a growing economy, Federal tax receipts grew this year by over $270 billion—$100 billion more than the Congressional Budget Office estimated earlier this year. If Congress does not pass this important budget reconciliation legislation this year, taxes will go up and economic growth will go down.

During uncertain times, Americans want stability. And that is why Congress must act now to bring certainty to America's families and stop the scheduled tax increases.

The second part of the Republican budget reconciliation package is to cut Government waste and reduce Federal spending. There are many wasteful practices of Government. We have all heard the stories like the dentist who overbilled Medicaid, claiming to perform as many as 991 procedures a day during a 12-month period.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time under the control of the majority for morning business has expired.

Mr. LEAHY addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. DEMINT. Could I ask unanimous consent?

Mr. LEAHY. Does the Senator want to ask for further time?

Mr. DEMINT. Yes, if I could have a couple more minutes. I ask unanimous consent for 2 more minutes.

Mr. LEAHY. Provided it will not come out of our time, I have no objection.

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

Mr. DEMINT. I thank the Senator. I thank the Chair.

Examples like the Medicaid one I just mentioned are maddening. We must stop this wasteful spending, and we also must slow the growth of new spending. If we slow the growth of new spending only, we can save much of the money we need to help our States recover from this year's devastating hurricanes. There is no problem too big for America to solve if we have the commitment and the strength to do it. Mr. President, the time for criticism, excuses, and obstruction is over. I am here this morning to appeal to every Senator to support our budget reconciliation package that will stop new tax increases and help cut the cost of Government so we have all the strength we need to secure the future for every American.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, what is the parliamentary situation?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority controls 15 minutes which is beginning now.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that we make that 21 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? The Chair hears none, and it is so ordered.

IRAQ

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, 3 years ago when the Congress and the country debated the resolution to give President Bush the authority to launch a preemptive war against Iraq, reference was often made to the lessons of Vietnam.

There are many lessons, both of that war and of the efforts to end it. But one that made a deep impression on me came from former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. He was, after all, the architect of that war. He said our greatest mistake was not understanding our enemy.

Vietnam was a relatively simple country. It had changed little in the preceding 3,000 years. It was for the most part racially, ethnically, linguistically, and even religiously homogeneous. One would have thought it would be easy for American military and political leaders to understand.

Apparently it was not. The White House and the Pentagon, convinced that no country, particularly a tiny impoverished land of rice farmers, could withstand the military might of the United States, never bothered to study and understand the history or culture of Vietnam, and they made tragic miscalculations. They lacked the most basic knowledge of the motivation and the capabilities and resolve of the people they were fighting.

At the start of the Iraq war, those who drew some analogies to Vietnam were ridiculed by the Pentagon and the White House. Iraq is not a Vietnam, they insisted. Our troops would be greeted as liberators. Troop strength was not a concern. Our mission would be quickly accomplished. Democracy would spread throughout the Middle East. Freedom was on the march.

It is true that Vietnam and Iraq are vastly different societies, but the point was not that they are similar but that some of the same lessons apply.

We did not understand Vietnam, a simple country, and we paid a huge price for our ignorance and our arrogance. Iraq, a complex country comprised of rival clans, tribes, and ethnic and religious factions who have fought each other for centuries, we understand even less.

If this were not apparent to many at the start of this ill-conceived and politically motivated war, a war I opposed from the beginning, it should be obvious today. Yet to listen to the Secretary of Defense or to the President or the Vice President, one would never know it.

We know today that President Bush decided to invade Iraq without evidence to support the use of force and well before Congress passed a resolution giving him the authority to do so—actually, authority he did not even believe he needed—despite our great Constitution which invests in the Congress the power to declare war.

Twenty-three Senators voted against that resolution, and I will always be proud to have been one of them.

We know today that the motivation for a plan to attack Iraq, hatched by a handful of political operatives, had taken hold within in the White House even before 9/11 and without any connection to the war on terrorism that came later.

We know that the key public justifications for the war—to stop Saddam Hussein from developing nuclear weapons and supporting al-Qaida—were based on faulty intelligence and outright distortions, and they have been