

That is where we find ourselves right now with regard to the issue of the tax extender legislation. We have a bill that impacts a broad range of Americans; 24 million Americans will be subject to the alternative minimum tax if Congress does not act. We have energy tax extenders that put in jeopardy lots of investment in renewable energy sources such as wind and solar. We have students who are affected because of a student loan provision, teachers who are affected by a teacher deduction that is allowed for expenses. We have the rural schools' fix included. All these things will be impacted if Congress fails to act.

Where we are with regard to that is, the Senate has passed a bill with 93 votes that we have sent to the House. The House is now trying to send that back, broken up in different ways and with different sorts of offsets.

The point is, we have to get it done. We have to look at what the traffic will bear. We have done everything we can in the Senate. When I was a Member of the House, I used to gripe about the Senate and its rules. Why can't we send things over there and get them done in a timely way?

The reality is, to get anything comprehensive done and anything consequential, it takes 60 votes. Already it is clear we will not be able to get 60 votes. We voted on this issue numerous times in the Senate. We voted on it repeatedly, the very provisions the House is trying to get us to adopt, without success.

In fact, last week we voted. We only got 53 votes in the Senate out of the 60 that are necessary. So it seems, to me at least, we are at a point where we flat have to get this done. It is no substitute for a comprehensive energy bill, but it is the least we can do. If the least we can do is the best we can do, we ought to do at least the best we can do, which is to pass these energy tax extenders and get some of this investment in energy technologies that would help us toward our goal of energy independence and reducing carbon emissions.

I urge our colleagues on the House side to accept this bill. It is a signable bill. It is very clear we have done everything we can in the Senate with repeated votes. The proposal the House has put forward is not going to move in the Senate, and we have a very short clock to work with here in order to get something done. It should not be a question of the political winners and losers. It ought to be about the American economy and the American people. We need to do something that is a winner for them, and that ought to be moving this piece of legislation in the House. It has 93 votes in the Senate. It is there. It is awaiting action.

It is absolutely clear the proposal they have sent here cannot secure the necessary votes to move. That bill that is over there will be signed by the President. It moves us in a direction of energy independence and puts some en-

ergy policy in place that is important to the future of this country, as well as all the other tax provisions I mentioned, including preventing 24 million American families from being hit by the alternative minimum tax at the end of the year. So I hope, again, this legislation will pass. I urge my colleagues on the House side to take it up and pass the Senate bill.

Mr. President, I yield back the remainder of my time.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

#### FEDERAL RAILROAD SAFETY IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2007

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the House message to accompany H.R. 2095, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Message from the House of Representatives to accompany H.R. 2095, entitled an Act to amend title 49, United States Code, to prevent railroad fatalities, injuries, and hazardous materials releases, to authorize the Federal Railroad Safety Administration, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Reid amendment No. 5677 (to the motion to concur in the amendment of the House of Representatives to the amendment of the Senate to the bill), to establish the enactment date.

Reid amendment No. 5678 (to amendment No. 5677), of a perfecting nature.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 12:15 will be controlled by the Republican leader, and the time from 12:15 until 12:30 will be controlled by the majority leader.

The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I rise to talk about the rail safety and Amtrak authorization bill. This is a bill that I think will move forward a major alternative option for our passengers and for the mobility of our country—Amtrak.

Most people think of Amtrak as the Northeast corridor, and going from Boston all the way through New York and Washington and on down through Florida. That is a very important route. In fact, that route has more than 2,600 trains operating every day. So it is a major part of our transportation infrastructure in what is called the Northeast corridor.

However, we have a national system for Amtrak as well. It is a national system that goes, of course, down the east coast, as I mentioned, but it also goes down the west coast. It goes all the way up and down the west coast. It has lines that go across the top of our country, across the bottom of our country east to west, and right down the middle, what is called the Texas

Eagle, which goes from Chicago, down through St. Louis, down into Texas, and across to San Antonio, where it meets the Sunset Limited, which goes from California to Florida.

So we have the skeleton of a national system. It is a system we must preserve. It is a system that has become more and more of an option as gasoline prices have increased. We saw how many people went to train use after 9/11, when the aviation industry was shut down. It is something we must support and keep.

Now we are increasing ridership every year. During fiscal year 2007, 25.8 million passengers, representing the fifth straight fiscal year of record ridership, boarded Amtrak. Ridership is up 7 percent more over this time last year, as people have gone to the trains because of the high gasoline prices.

This bill authorizes \$2.6 billion annually over 5 years. It authorizes that amount. In Congress we authorize, and then the appropriations come later on an annual basis. And \$2.6 billion would be the ceiling for the next 5 years for Amtrak. But to put this in perspective, when we are talking about alternatives in our transportation system, we have authorized, in SAFETEA-LU, the highway authorization bill, \$40 billion. The FAA bill, introduced in this Congress, proposes to invest \$17 billion annually in aviation. Last year we passed a Water Resources Development Act authorizing \$23 billion over the next 2 years.

We are talking about \$13 billion over 5 years—\$2.6 billion each year, which is the very least of the authorizations of any of our transportation systems. If included with the number of passengers served by our aviation industry, in 2007, Amtrak would rank eighth in the number of passengers served, with a market share of right at 4 percent. There are nearly twice as many passengers on an Amtrak train as on a domestic airline flight.

So we have crafted a bill—and I have to tell you honestly, this is not my bill. Actually, it started with Trent Lott. Senator LAUTENBERG on the majority side now has continued to be a leader in this field. I support the bill FRANK LAUTENBERG and Trent Lott negotiated because it is right for our country. I have always said, for me, Amtrak is national or nothing.

There was a time in this Congress when nobody ever talked national. They only talked about saving the Northeast corridor. Of course, that is the rail line that is owned by Amtrak. The other rail lines mostly are not separated, although I would like to see that changed. But we are using freight rail, and we are at the behest of the freight rail lines. So it is not as efficient. But it is very important we keep those relationships and work toward having the separate lines on those rail rights of way. Today, we are talking about a national system.

There was a time when we only talked about the Northeast corridor.