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(54) **CAPACITOR RELIABILITY FOR
MULTIPLE-VOLTAGE POWER SUPPLY
SYSTEMS**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 49 days.

A capacitor circuit having improved reliability includes at least first and second capacitors, a first terminal of the first capacitor connecting to a first source providing a first voltage, a first terminal of the second capacitor connecting to a second source providing a second voltage, the first voltage being greater than the second voltage. The capacitor further includes a voltage comparator having a first input for receiving a voltage representative of the first voltage, a second input for receiving a third voltage provided by a third source, and an output for generating a control signal. The control signal is a function of a difference between the voltage representative of the first voltage and the third voltage. A switch is connected to second terminals of the first and second capacitors. The switch is selectively operable in one of at least a first mode and a second mode in response to the control signal, wherein in the first mode the switch is operative to connect the first and second capacitors together in parallel, and in the second mode the switch is operative to connect the first and second capacitors together in series. The first mode is indicative of the voltage representative of the first voltage being less than or about equal to the third voltage, and the second mode is indicative of the voltage representative of the first voltage being greater than the third voltage.

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H03K 5/153 (2006.01)
H01G 23/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **327/77; 361/233**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** **327/50, 327/77, 365, 427; 363/60, 59; 361/233, 361/139**

See application file for complete search history.

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21 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets

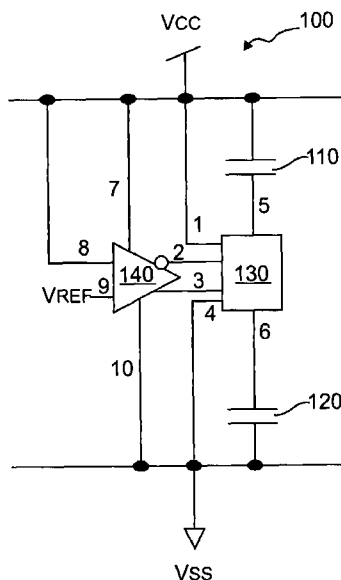


FIG. 2A

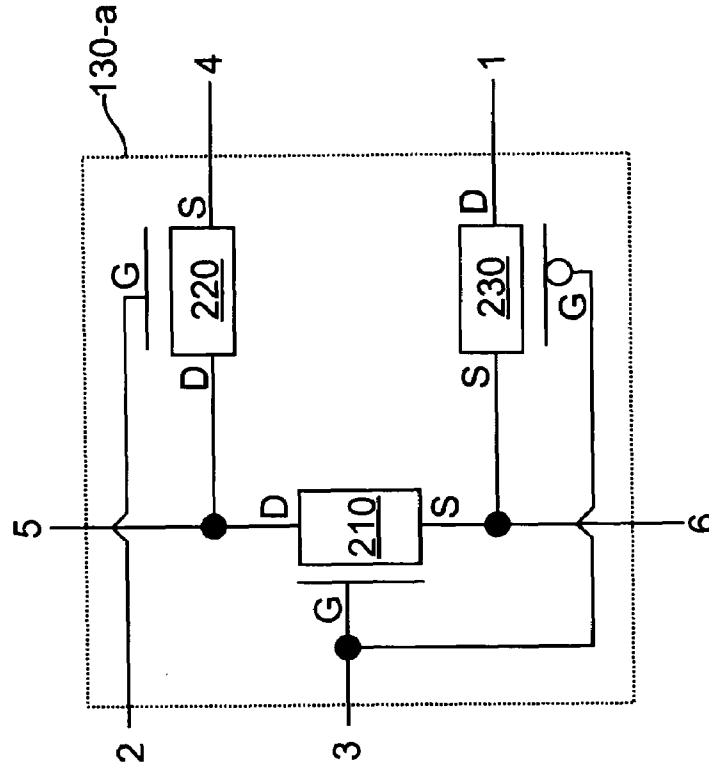


FIG. 1

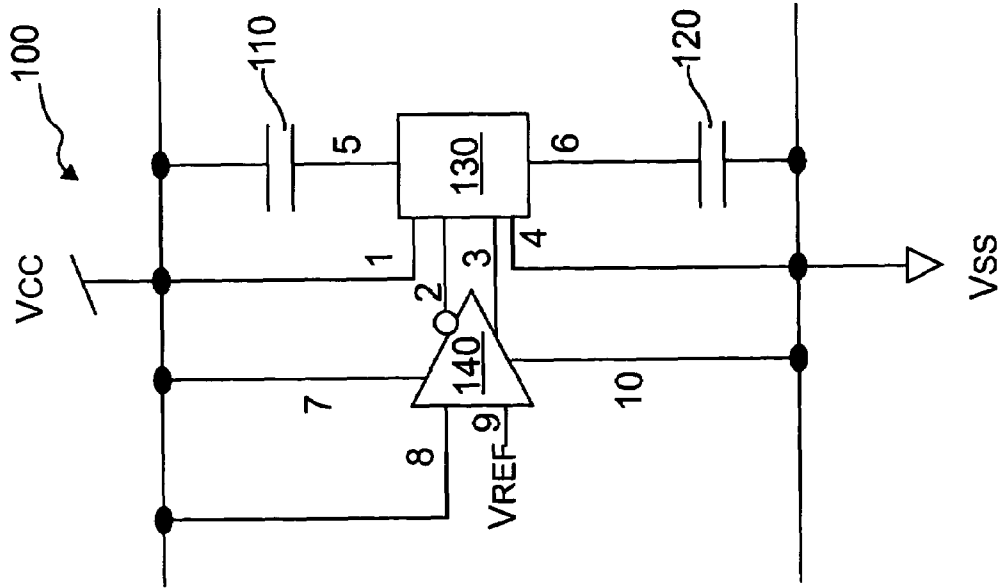


FIG. 2C

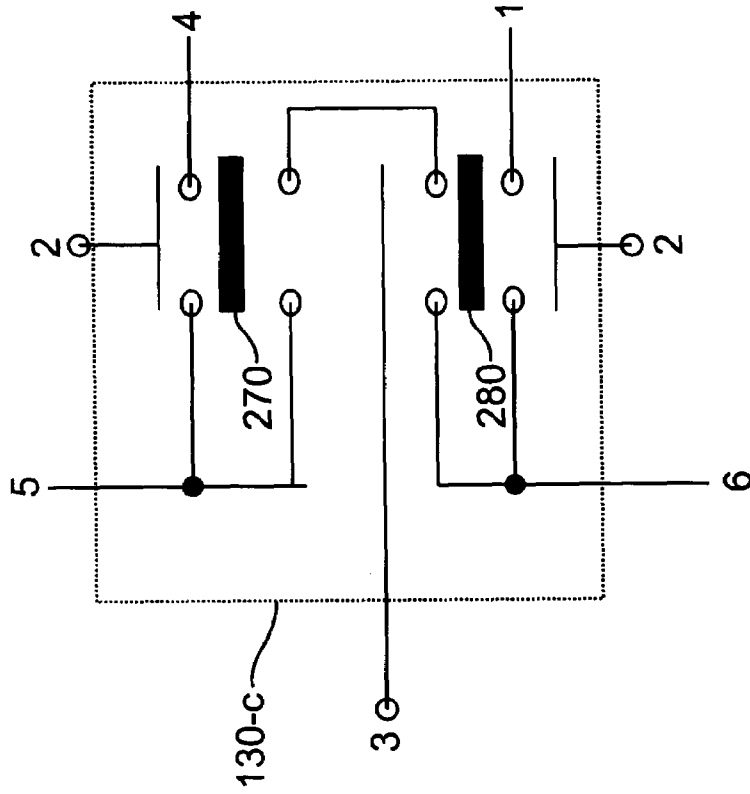


FIG. 2B

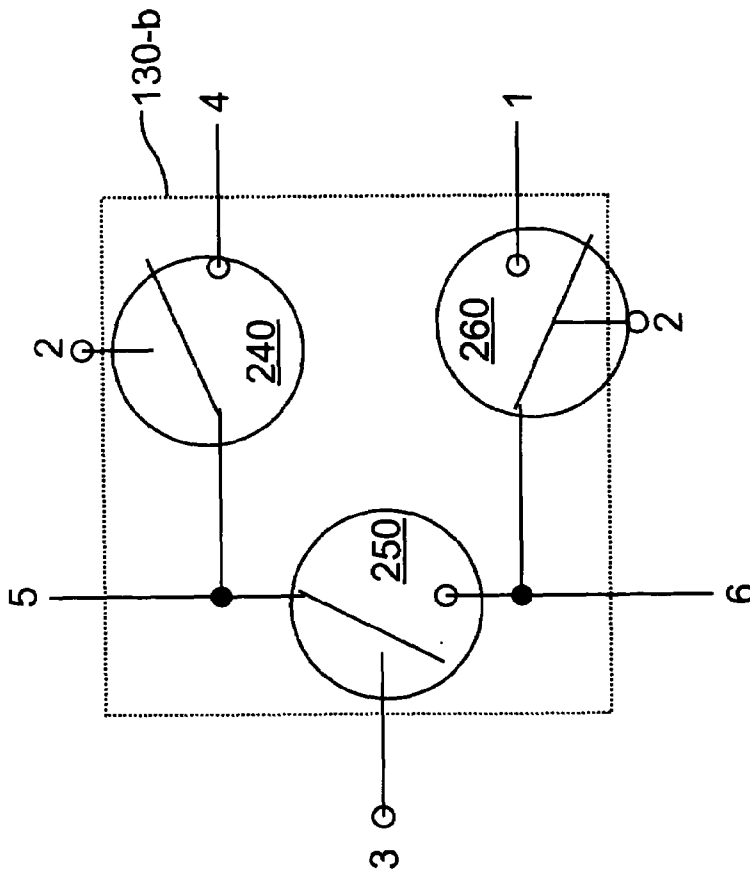


FIG. 3

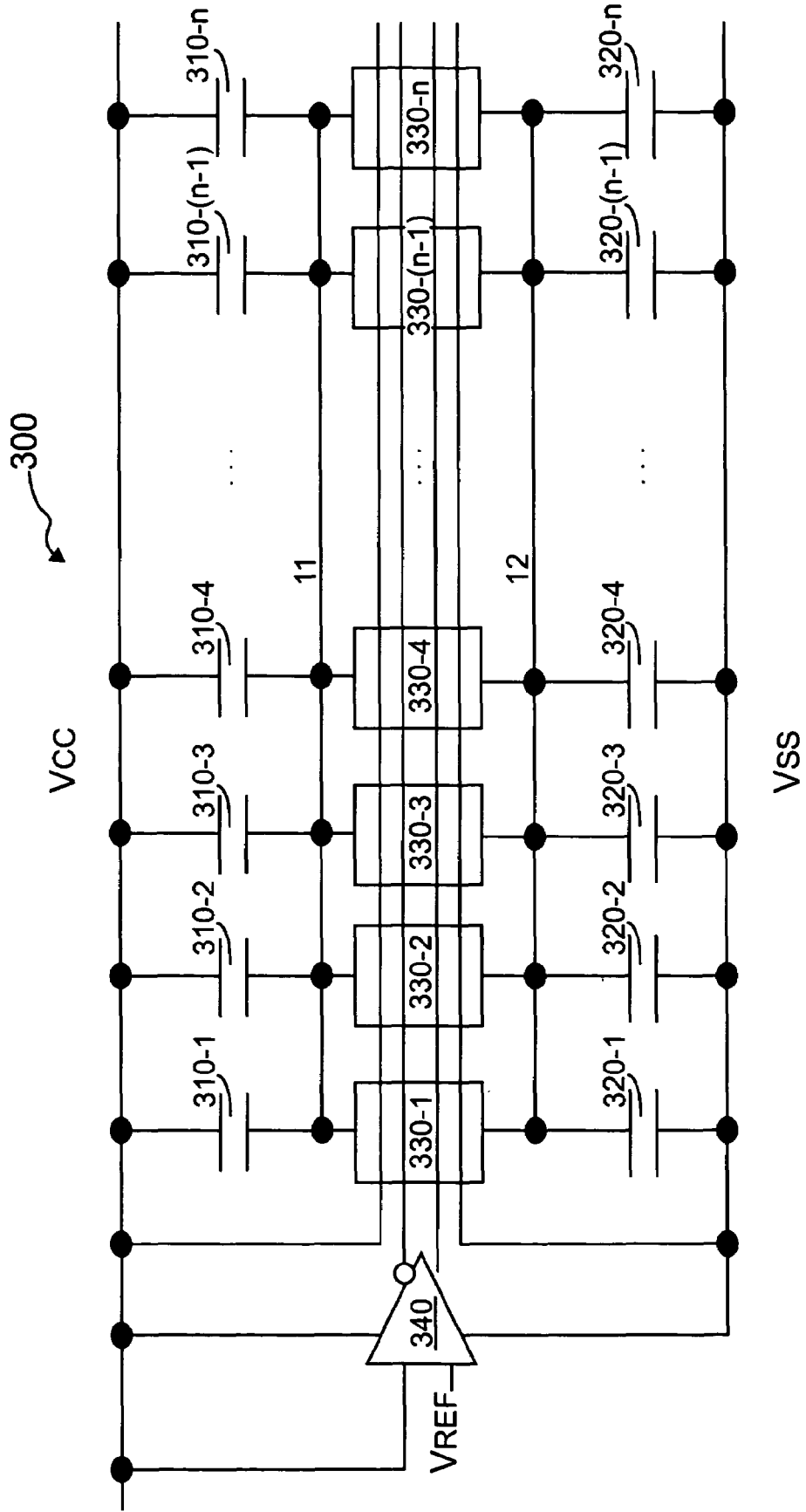
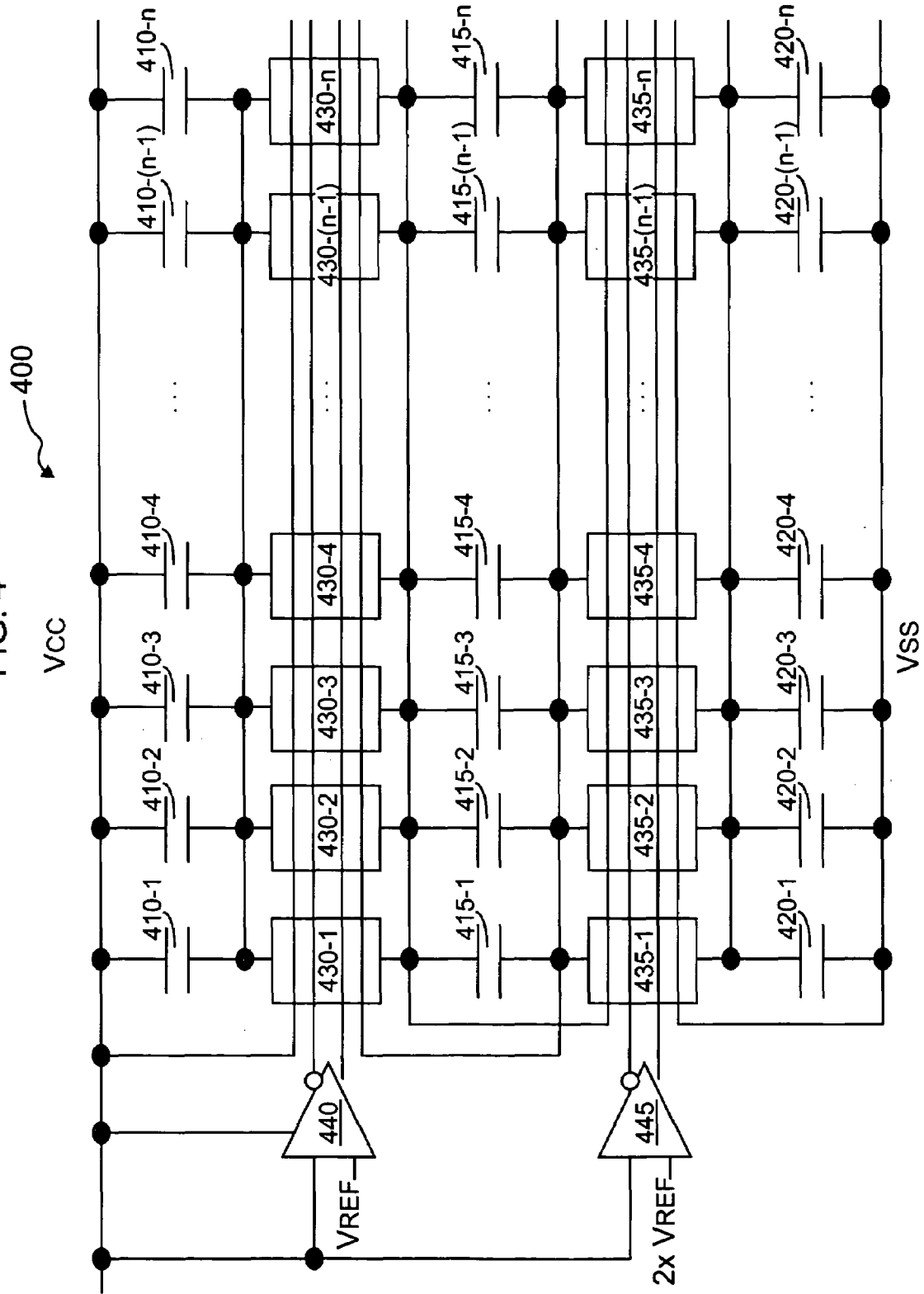


FIG. 4



1

CAPACITOR RELIABILITY FOR MULTIPLE-VOLTAGE POWER SUPPLY SYSTEMS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to capacitor circuits, and more specifically to capacitor circuits that are operative across a range of power supply voltages.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Capacitors are widely used in semiconductor technology. They may be used, for example, for noise decoupling, for blocking direct current, and for charge storage in radio-frequency (RF) and analog applications. Semiconductor capacitors typically take the form of diffusion capacitors, trench capacitors, gate capacitors, and metal-insulator-metal (MIM) capacitors. Typically, these devices depend on an insulating layer, frequently silicon dioxide, to form the dielectric between the terminals of the capacitor. Like other layers in a semiconductor device, these dielectric layers are continuously scaled in order to make devices smaller, to increase performance, and to reduce cost of production. As dielectric layers are scaled, especially when scaled faster than the voltage or power supply level, premature punch-through, breakdown, and other dielectric damage is frequently encountered. As a result, obtaining highly-reliable, high-value capacitors becomes increasingly more challenging.

Adding to this challenge is the fact that integrated circuits must frequently be designed to work within a wide range of operating voltages. For example, an integrated circuit may need to work within a power supply voltage range from 1.2 volts to 3.6 volts. This is especially true when a designer wishes that a device be compatible with both modern and older semiconductor technologies.

One way to resolve the problem of voltage-induced dielectric damage in semiconductor capacitors is to simply connect two or more capacitors in series. With this configuration, the voltage drop across any one of the capacitors is reduced and, correspondingly, the reliability of that capacitor is maintained. Nevertheless, maximum total capacitance for a given array of capacitors is achieved by wiring the capacitors in parallel. As a result, it is most advantageous to wire an array of capacitors in parallel when the power supply voltage is low enough that capacitor reliability is not adversely affected. This allows the circuit to have the maximum total capacitance for a given area. Conversely, when the power supply voltage is high enough to adversely affect capacitor reliability, it is usually advantageous to wire the array of capacitors in series to such an extent that reliability is maintained at the cost of reduced total capacitance. Accordingly, in those integrated circuits that are used over a wide range of power supply voltages, it is desirable to be able to selectively and dynamically modify the wiring configuration of capacitors depending upon the level of power supply voltage.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention addresses the above-identified need by providing, in an illustrative embodiment, a novel capacitor circuit that allows its constituent capacitors to be dynamically configured as a function of a level of the voltage across the capacitors. When a supply voltage to the capacitor circuit is greater than a specified level, the circuit

2

selectively connects the capacitors together in series, so as to distribute the supply voltage across the capacitors in such a manner as to improve reliability of the capacitors. When the supply voltage is less than the specified level, the circuit connects the capacitors together in parallel, so as to increase an overall capacitance of the circuit for a given area.

In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, a capacitor circuit having improved reliability includes at least first and second capacitors, a first terminal of the first capacitor connecting to a first source providing a first voltage, a first terminal of the second capacitor connecting to a second source providing a second voltage, the first voltage being greater than the second voltage. The capacitor further includes a voltage comparator having a first input for receiving a voltage representative of the first voltage, a second input for receiving a third voltage provided by a third source, and an output for generating a control signal. The control signal is a function of a difference between the voltage representative of the first voltage and the third voltage. A switch is connected to second terminals of the first and second capacitors. The switch is selectively operable in one of at least a first mode and a second mode in response to the control signal, wherein in the first mode the switch is operative to connect the first and second capacitors together in parallel, and in the second mode the switch is operative to connect the first and second capacitors together in series. The first mode is indicative of the voltage representative of the first voltage being less than or about equal to the third voltage, and the second mode is indicative of the voltage representative of the first voltage being greater than the third voltage.

In an illustrative embodiment, a capacitor circuit comprises two capacitors, a voltage comparator, and a switch. Three voltage levels are provided: a power supply voltage, V_{cc} , a ground level, V_{ss} , and a reference source voltage, V_{ref} . V_{ref} is placed at a voltage approximately equal to the maximum sustainable voltage at which the capacitors can achieve a desired reliability lifetime. The voltage comparator is operative to cause the switch to connect the two capacitors in parallel when V_{cc} is less than V_{ref} so that the full power supply voltage, V_{cc} , is dropped across each capacitor. Total circuit capacitance is thereby maximized. When V_{cc} exceeds V_{ref} , the switch connects the two capacitors together in series such that V_{cc} is distributed across the combination of capacitors. In this way, the reliability of the capacitors in the circuit is maintained even when the power supply voltage exceeds the maximum voltage for sustained capacitor reliability.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating an exemplary capacitor circuit, formed in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2A is a schematic diagram illustrating an exemplary switch comprising metal-oxide-semiconductor (MOS) devices suitable for use in the capacitor circuit of FIG. 1, in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2B is a schematic diagram illustrating an exemplary switch comprising cantilever-type microelectromechanical system (MEMS) devices suitable for use in the capacitor circuit of FIG. 1, in accordance with a second embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2C is a schematic diagram illustrating an exemplary switch comprising hinge-type MEMS devices suitable for use in the capacitor circuit of FIG. 1, in accordance with a third embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 3 is a schematic diagram illustrating an exemplary capacitor circuit comprising two groups of capacitors, formed in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 4 is a schematic diagram illustrating an exemplary capacitor circuit comprising three groups of capacitors, formed in accordance with another embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention will be illustrated below in conjunction with illustrative embodiments of capacitor circuits. It should be understood, however, that the invention is not limited to the particular circuitry arrangements of the illustrative embodiments. Moreover, in the illustrative embodiments, the capacitor circuit will be illustrated as a component of an integrated circuit. Nevertheless, the scope of this invention is intended to include a capacitor circuit formed of discrete device components mounted on, for example, a printed circuit board, substrate, etc. These and other possible modifications to the illustrative embodiments within the scope of this invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art.

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram depicting an exemplary capacitor circuit 100, formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. The circuit 100 comprises two capacitors 110, 120, a switch 130, and a voltage comparator 140, or alternative voltage detection circuitry. Three voltage levels are provided to the circuit 100: a power supply voltage, V_{cc} ; a ground level, V_{ss} ; and a reference source voltage, V_{ref} . It is to be understood that in an alternative embodiment of the invention, more than one power supply voltage level may be detected, and thus additional reference source voltages may be provided to the circuit 100. A first terminal of capacitor 110 is connected to the power supply voltage V_{cc} , and a second terminal of capacitor 110 is connected to switch 130 at node 5. A first terminal of capacitor 120 is connected to switch 130 at node 6, and a second terminal of capacitor 120 is connected to ground level V_{ss} . Switch 130 connects to V_{cc} at node 1 and connects to V_{ss} at node 4. At least a given one of capacitors 110 and 120 preferably comprises an MOS gate oxide capacitor, a trench capacitor, a diffusion capacitor, a metal-insulator-metal (MIM) capacitor and/or a discrete capacitor, although the present invention is not limited to only these particular types of capacitors.

V_{cc} , or a voltage representative thereof, is connected to a first input of the voltage comparator 140 at node 8. V_{ref} is connected to a second input of the voltage comparator 140 at node 9. Power is supplied to the voltage comparator 140 by connecting the comparator to V_{cc} at node 7 and to V_{ss} at node 10. In order to reduce glitches which may be generated by the voltage comparator 140, particularly when V_{cc} is substantially close to V_{ref} , hysteresis can be employed. Various methodologies for implementing hysteresis in a comparator are well known by those skilled in the art.

Voltage comparators are frequently found in electronic circuits and will be familiar to those skilled in the art. Moreover, voltage comparators are described in various publications including, for example, P. Horowitz and W. Hill, *The Art of Electronics*, Newnes Publishing 1991, which is incorporated by reference herein. Generally, the output(s) of a voltage comparator is(are) switched to a logical high or low state depending on the relative magnitudes of the voltages at the inputs thereof. In the embodiment shown in

FIG. 1, the voltage comparator 140 compares the voltages on nodes 8 and 9 and generates an output which is a function of a difference between the two voltages. If the voltage on node 8 (V_{cc}) is higher than the voltage on node 9 (V_{ref}), then the voltage comparator outputs at nodes 2 and 3 go high and low, respectively. If, on the other hand, the voltage on node 8 (V_{cc}) is lower than that on node 9 (V_{ref}), the voltage comparator outputs at nodes 2 and 3 go low and high, respectively. As shown in FIG. 1, comparator 140 includes two outputs which generate corresponding output signals that are logical complements of one another. This is often referred to as a differential output comparator. It is to be appreciated, however, that a comparator having a differential output is not a requirement of the invention.

In accordance with an aspect of the invention, the outputs of the voltage comparator 140 at nodes 2 and 3 are operative to cause switch 130 to electrically connect capacitors 110 and 120 together in parallel when V_{cc} is less than V_{ref} , and to cause the switch 130 to connect the capacitors 110, 120 together in series when V_{cc} is greater than V_{ref} . Numerous circuit configurations of switch 130 can be used to implement this function. By way of example, and without loss of generality, FIGS. 2A through 2C show three illustrative embodiments for implementing switch 130, in accordance with the invention. It is noted that the reference designations depicted in FIGS. 2A–2C correspond directly to the reference designations shown in FIG. 1.

The illustrative switch embodiment depicted in FIG. 2A comprises MOS transistor devices. More specifically, switch 130-a comprises two n-channel MOS (NMOS) transistor devices 210, 220, and one p-channel MOS (PMOS) transistor device 230. The NMOS transistor device 210 has a gate (G) connected to node 3, a source (S) connected to node 6, and a drain (D) connected to node 5. The second NMOS transistor device 220 has a gate connected to node 2, a source connected to node 4, and a drain connected to node 5. The PMOS transistor device 230 is configured such that its gate is connected to node 3, its source is connected to node 6, and its drain is connected to node 1.

The functioning of switch 130-a in FIG. 2A involves the operation of typical NMOS and PMOS transistor devices and will, as a result, be easily comprehended by one skilled in the art. As described above, when V_{cc} is greater than V_{ref} , the outputs of the voltage comparator 140 at nodes 2 and 3 will be high and low, respectively. A high voltage on node 2 causes NMOS transistor device 220 to turn on such that a substantially low-resistance (e.g., less than about ten ohms) electrical path is created between nodes 4 and 5. This is operative to electrically connect the second terminal of capacitor 110 in FIG. 1 to V_{ss} . At the same time, a low voltage on node 3 turns off NMOS transistor device 210 and turns on PMOS transistor device 230. Nodes 1 and 6 are thereby electrically connected together through the PMOS transistor device 230. This results in V_{cc} being applied to the first terminal of capacitor 120. The end result of these connections is that the capacitors 110, 120 are wired together in parallel. V_{cc} is, thereby, applied across each capacitor 110, 120.

On the other hand, where V_{cc} is lower than V_{ref} , the voltage comparator 140 of FIG. 1 operates such that node 2 goes low and node 3 goes high. As a result, NMOS transistor device 220 and PMOS transistor device 230 are turned off while NMOS transistor device 210 is turned on. Nodes 5 and 6 are, as a result, connected together, resulting in capacitors 110, 120 being wired in series with one another between V_{cc} and V_{ss} .

Alternatively, in accordance with another aspect of the invention, switch element **130** may comprise MEMS devices. MEMS devices may integrate mechanical elements, sensors, actuators, electronics, etc., in a common silicon substrate through microfabrication technology. While the electronic components may be fabricated using, for example, a standard lithographic integrated circuit process (e.g., complementary MOS (CMOS), Bipolar, or BiCMOS processes), the micromechanical components may be fabricated using compatible micromachining processes that selectively etch away parts of the silicon wafer and/or add new structural layers to form mechanical and electromechanical devices. The operation and formation of MEMS devices is well described in readily-available publications, including, for example, *The MEMS Handbook*, edited by M. Gad-El-Hak, CRC Press, 2001, which is incorporated herein by reference.

MEMS devices for semiconductor applications have many advantages, including low insertion loss, low direct current (DC) power consumption, high linearity, and broad bandwidth performance. FIG. 2B shows a schematic diagram of an exemplary switch **130-b** comprising cantilever-type MEMS devices for use in implementing the switch **130** depicted in FIG. 1, in accordance with a second illustrative embodiment of the invention. This switch **130-b** comprises three cantilever MEMS devices **240**, **250** and **260**. Referring to MEMS device **240**, when a high voltage is placed on a control terminal of the device at node **2** and a low voltage is placed on node **4**, such as when comparator **140** detects that V_{cc} is greater than V_{ref} , the cantilever membrane is repelled such that it swings into a position where it electrically connects nodes **4** and **5** together. Similarly, in MEMS device **260**, the high voltage on a control terminal at node **2** causes nodes **1** and **6** to be connected together. In MEMS device **250**, a low voltage on a control terminal at node **3** cause the cantilever membrane in the device to be positioned such that nodes **5** and **6** are electrically disconnected from one another (e.g., open circuit). As before, this configuration results in capacitors **110**, **120** being wired in parallel. Alternatively, where voltage comparator **140** places a low voltage on node **2** and a high voltage on node **3**, such as when the comparator **140** detects that V_{cc} is less than V_{ref} , nodes **5** and **6** will be electrically connected together, while nodes **1** and **6**, and nodes **4** and **5**, will be open circuit. Capacitors **110**, **120** are, thereby, wired in series with one another.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the invention, the switch **130** shown in FIG. 1 may comprise hinge-type MEMS devices. FIG. 2C is a schematic diagram illustrating an exemplary switch **130-c** comprising hinge-type MEMS devices, in accordance with a third illustrative embodiment of the invention. Hinge-type MEMS devices are described, for example, in U.S. Pat. No. 6,143,997, which is incorporated herein by reference. Advantageously, hinge-type MEMS devices may overcome the need for high actuation voltages found in other types of MEMS switches. In switch **130-c**, hinge plates **270**, **280** are attracted toward either a first control terminal at node **2** or a second control terminal at node **3** by a high voltage applied to either node **2** or node **3**, respectively. When node **2** is high and node **3** is low (e.g., when V_{cc} is less than V_{ref}), hinge plates **270**, **280** move toward node **2** and thereby electrically connect nodes **4** and **5** together, and nodes **1** and **6** together. Capacitors **110**, **120** are connected together in parallel in this manner. When node **2** is low and node **3** is high (e.g., where V_{cc} is greater than V_{ref}), hinge plates **270**, **280** move toward node **3**, thereby connecting nodes **5** and **6** together. This operation causes the capacitors **110**, **120** to be connected in series.

Based on the preceding, it is clear that the level of the reference source voltage, V_{ref} , is largely determinative of whether capacitors **110**, **120** are wired in series or in parallel in the capacitor circuit embodiment of FIG. 1. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, V_{ref} is selected to be approximately equal to a specified maximum sustainable voltage at which the capacitors **110**, **120** can achieve a desired reliability lifetime. Such a maximum sustainable voltage is typically determined by stressing prototypes of integrated circuit capacitors prior to large scale production. Typically, one or more capacitors are exposed to a fixed electric field at a fixed temperature and a time-to-fail is measured. To meet certain lifetime requirements, a capacitor with a silicon dioxide thickness in a range of about 3–5 nanometers will typically have a maximum sustainable voltage of about 1.2 volts. As the dielectric layer becomes thicker, the maximum sustainable supply voltage will generally increase. However, the actual maximum sustainable voltage achievable by a given capacitor will likely depend on a combination of one or more characteristics of the capacitor and its dielectric. Beyond dielectric thickness and temperature, these characteristics may include, for example, dielectric impurity content, capacitor shape, method of dielectric growth, and others.

It will be recognized by those that skilled in the art that the circuit depicted in FIG. 1 would work in a manner consistent with that described above if a fraction of V_{cc} (e.g., $V_{cc}/2$) were applied to an input of the voltage comparator **140**, as opposed to the full power supply voltage, and if V_{ref} were reduced by the same ratio. The scope of this invention is intended to cover such a configuration. For example, a voltage equal to one half of the supply voltage V_{cc} could be input into the voltage comparator **140** at node **8**. If V_{ref} at node **9** were also reduced by one half, the illustrative capacitor circuit **100** of FIG. 1 would work identically to that where the full V_{cc} and V_{ref} are applied to the voltage comparator **140**. A voltage can be reduced by many methods including, but not limited to, implementation of a simple voltage divider circuit comprising two or more resistors (not shown). Such a voltage divider is described, for example, in *The Art of Electronics*, cited earlier.

The scope of the present invention is also not restricted to a capacitor circuit comprising only one pair of capacitors, as shown in FIG. 1. For example, FIG. 3 shows a schematic diagram of an exemplary capacitor circuit **300**, formed in accordance with an alternative embodiment of the invention. The capacitor circuit **300** comprises n pairs of capacitors **310-1** and **320-1** through **310- n** and **320- n** , and n switches **330-1** through **330- n** , where n is an integer greater than one. As apparent from the figure, a single voltage comparator **340** may be used to generate one or more control signals for selectively controlling a connection of the capacitors as a function of the supply voltage V_{cc} , in a manner similar to that described above in connection with FIG. 1.

An upper group of capacitors may be defined, comprising capacitors **310-1** through **310- n** , referred to collectively as **310**. Each of the capacitors **310** is preferably configured such that a first terminal is connected to V_{cc} and a second terminal is connected to node **11**. Similarly, a lower group of capacitors may be defined, comprising capacitors **320-1** through **320- n** , referred to collectively as **320**. Each of the capacitors **320** is preferably configured such that a first terminal is connected to node **12** and a second terminal is connected to V_{ss} . Switches **330-1** through **330- n** are preferably connected between nodes **11** and **12**. Each switch may be configured in a manner consistent with switch **130** depicted in FIG. 1. Like the single capacitor pair arrange-

ment of FIG. 1, the operation of switches **330-1** through **330-n** depends primarily on the outputs of the voltage comparator **340**. When the supply voltage V_{cc} exceeds V_{ref} , the two capacitor groups **310**, **320** are connected together in series, otherwise the capacitor groups are connected together in parallel.

It should be noted with respect to the illustrative capacitor circuit **300** shown in FIG. 3 that, although a single switch could be used to implement the selective connection of the upper and lower capacitor groups, using a plurality of switches is preferable. Utilizing a plurality of switches ensures a more uniform and effective switching action, thereby enhancing circuit performance.

If the supply level is expected to be higher than twice V_{ref} , then three or more groups of capacitors may be necessary in order to effectively distribute the voltage across the capacitors so that capacitor reliability is not adversely affected. FIG. 4 shows a schematic diagram of an exemplary capacitor circuit **400** which may be employed when the supply voltage V_{cc} is too high to be distributed effectively across two capacitors (or two groups of capacitors), in accordance with another aspect of the invention. In this illustrative embodiment, three groups of capacitors are employed, namely, capacitors **410-1** through **410-n**, referred to collectively as **410**, capacitors **415-1** through **415-n**, referred to collectively as **415**, and capacitors **420-1** through **420-n**, referred to collectively as **420**, where n is an integer greater than one. The invention, however, is not limited to the particular circuit arrangement shown.

In the exemplary capacitor circuit **400**, a first voltage comparator **440** is preferably used to compare V_{cc} and a first reference voltage, V_{ref} . When V_{cc} exceeds V_{ref} , switches **430-1** through **430-n** are preferably operative to connect capacitors **410** in series with capacitors **415**, in a manner consistent with that previously described in conjunction with FIG. 1. Simultaneously, a second voltage comparator **445** is preferably used to compare V_{cc} with a second reference voltage, which may be, for example, equal to twice V_{ref} ($2 \times V_{ref}$). When V_{cc} exceeds twice V_{ref} , the third group of capacitors, **420** are added in series with capacitor groups **410** and **415**. In this manner, the supply voltage V_{cc} is distributed across two groups of capacitors connected in series when $V_{ref} < V_{cc} < 2 \times V_{ref}$, and V_{cc} is distributed across three groups of capacitors connected in series when $V_{cc} > 2 \times V_{ref}$. When V_{cc} is less than V_{ref} , all of the capacitors are preferably connected in parallel, thereby maximizing the total capacitance for a given area.

It should be noted that certain components and/or devices may be formed using standard semiconductor processing techniques. For example, the capacitors employed in the present invention may comprise trench capacitors, diffusion capacitors, gate capacitors, metal-insulator-metal capacitors, etc. Semiconductor processing techniques required to form such capacitors, as well as other devices in the capacitor circuit, will be familiar to those skilled in the art. Such IC processing techniques frequently include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following: deposition, etching, silicon growth, photolithography, ion implantation, cleaning, and polishing. Each of these IC processing techniques are further described in a number of publications, including, for example, S. M. Sze, *VLSI Technology*, McGraw-Hill, 1988, which is incorporated herein by reference.

At least a portion of the capacitor circuit of the present invention may be implemented in an integrated circuit, although the techniques of the present invention are similarly applicable to a circuit comprised of discrete components. In forming integrated circuits, a plurality of identical

die are typically fabricated in a repeated pattern on a surface of a semiconductor wafer. Each die includes a device described herein, and may include other structures or circuits. The individual die are cut or diced from the wafer, then packaged as an integrated circuit. One skilled in the art would know how to dice wafers and package die to produce integrated circuits. Integrated circuits so manufactured are considered part of this invention.

Although illustrative embodiments of the present invention have been described herein with reference to the accompanying drawings, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited to those precise embodiments, and that various other changes and modifications may be made therein by one skilled in the art without departing from the scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A capacitor circuit, comprising:

at least first and second capacitors, a first terminal of the first capacitor connecting to a first source providing a first voltage, a first terminal of the second capacitor connecting to a second source providing a second voltage, the first voltage being greater than the second voltage;

a voltage comparator including a first input for receiving a voltage representative of the first voltage, a second input for receiving a third voltage provided by a third source, and at least one output for generating at least one control signal, the at least one control signal being a function of a difference between the voltage representative of the first voltage and the third voltage; and a switch connected to second terminals of the first and second capacitors, the switch being selectively operable in one of at least a first mode and a second mode in response to the control signal, wherein in the first mode the switch is operative to connect the first and second capacitors together in parallel, and in the second mode the switch is operative to connect the first and second capacitors together in series, the first mode being indicative of the voltage representative of the first voltage being less than or about equal to the third voltage, and the second mode being indicative of the voltage representative of the first voltage being greater than the third voltage.

2. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the third voltage is substantially equal to a maximum sustainable voltage at which at least one of the first and second capacitors can achieve a specified reliability lifetime.

3. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the voltage comparator is operative to generate at least first and second control signals, the first and second control signals being independent functions of the difference between the voltage representative of the first voltage and the third voltage.

4. The circuit of claim 3, wherein the first and second control signals are logical complements of one another.

5. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the switch comprises at least one metal-oxide-semiconductor (MOS) transistor device.

6. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the switch comprises at least one microelectromechanical system (MEMS) device.

7. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the switch comprises at least one hinge-type microelectromechanical system (MEMS) device.

8. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the switch comprises at least one hinge-type microelectromechanical system (MEMS) device.

9. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the switch comprises first and second n-channel MOS (NMOS) devices and a

p-channel MOS device, a drain of the first NMOS device being connected to the second terminal of the first capacitor, a gate of the first NMOS device receiving the control signal, a source of the first NMOS device being connected to the second terminal of the second capacitor, a drain of the second NMOS device being connected to the drain of the first NMOS device, a gate of the second NMOS device receiving a logical complement of the control signal, a source of the second NMOS device connecting to the second source, a drain of the PMOS device connecting to the first source, a gate of the PMOS being connected to the gate of the first NMOS device, and a source of the PMOS device being connected to the source of the first NMOS device.

10. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the switch comprises first, second and third cantilever-type MEMS devices, control terminals of the first and third MEMS devices receiving a logical complement of the control signal, a first terminal of the first MEMS device connecting to the second source, a second terminal of the first MEMS device being connected to the second terminal of the first capacitor, a first terminal of the second MEMS device being connected to the second terminal of the first MEMS device, a control terminal of the second MEMS device receiving the control signal, a second terminal of the second MEMS device being connected to the second terminal of the second capacitor, a first terminal of the third MEMS device being connected to the second terminal of the second MEMS device, and a second terminal of the third MEMS device connecting to the first source.

11. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the voltage comparator includes hysteresis.

12. The circuit of claim 1, wherein at least a given one of the at least first and second capacitors comprises at least one of a metal-oxide-semiconductor gate oxide capacitor, a trench capacitor, a diffusion capacitor, a discrete capacitor, and a metal-insulator-metal capacitor.

13. A capacitor circuit, comprising:

at least a first plurality of capacitors and a second plurality of capacitors, first terminals of the first plurality of capacitors connecting to a first source providing a first voltage, and first terminals of the second plurality of capacitors connecting to a second source providing a second voltage, the first voltage being greater than the second voltage;

a voltage comparator including a first input for receiving a voltage representative of the first voltage, a second input for receiving a third voltage provided by a third source, and at least one output for generating at least one control signal, the at least one control signal being a function of a difference between the voltage representative of the first voltage and the third voltage; and

at least one switch connected to second terminals of the first and second plurality of capacitors, the at least one switch being selectively operable in one of at least a first mode and a second mode in response to the control signal, wherein in the first mode the at least one switch is operative to connect the first and second plurality of capacitors together in parallel, and in the second mode the at least one switch is operative to connect the first and second plurality of capacitors together in series, the first mode being indicative of the voltage representative of the first voltage being less than or about equal to the third voltage, and the second mode being indicative of the voltage representative of the first voltage being greater than the third voltage.

14. The circuit of claim 13, wherein the third voltage is substantially equal to a maximum sustainable voltage at which at least one of the first and second plurality of capacitors can achieve a specified reliability lifetime.

15. The circuit of claim 13, wherein the voltage comparator is operative to generate at least first and second control signals, the first and second control signals being independent functions of the difference between the voltage representative of the first voltage and the third voltage.

16. The circuit of claim 15, wherein the first and second control signals are logical complements of one another.

17. The circuit of claim 13, further comprising a plurality of switches, each of the switches being connected to a corresponding pair of capacitors, the pair of capacitors including a capacitor from the first plurality of capacitors and a capacitor from the second plurality of capacitors, each of the switches being selectively operable in one of at least the first mode and the second mode in response to the control signal, wherein in the first mode the switch is operative to connect the corresponding pair of capacitors together in parallel, and in the second mode the switch is operative to connect the corresponding pair of capacitors together in series.

18. The circuit of claim 13, wherein the at least one switch comprises at least one metal-oxide-semiconductor (MOS) transistor device.

19. The circuit of claim 13, wherein the at least one switch comprises at least one microelectromechanical system (MEMS) device.

20. An integrated circuit including at least one capacitor circuit, the at least one capacitor circuit comprising:

at least first and second capacitors, a first terminal of the first capacitor connecting to a first source providing a first voltage, a first terminal of the second capacitor connecting to a second source providing a second voltage, the first voltage being greater than the second voltage;

a voltage comparator including a first input for receiving a voltage representative of the first voltage, a second input for receiving a third voltage provided by a third source, and at least one output for generating at least one control signal, the at least one control signal being a function of a difference between the voltage representative of the first voltage and the third voltage; and

a switch connected to second terminals of the first and second capacitors, the switch being selectively operable in one of at least a first mode and a second mode in response to the control signal, wherein in the first mode the switch is operative to connect the first and second capacitors together in parallel, and in the second mode the switch is operative to connect the first and second capacitors together in series, the first mode being indicative of the voltage representative of the first voltage being less than or about equal to the third voltage, and the second mode being indicative of the voltage representative of the first voltage being greater than the third voltage.

21. The integrated circuit of claim 20, wherein at least one of the first and second capacitors is at least partially formed in a trench in a semiconductor substrate of the integrated circuit.

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

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INVENTOR(S) : L.L. Hsu et al.

Page 1 of 1


It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

In the claims:

Claim 7, col. 8, line 61, delete "hinge-type" and insert --cantilever-type--.

Signed and Sealed this

Second Day of January, 2007

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray dotted background. The signature reads "Jon W. Dudas" in a cursive style.

JON W. DUDAS

Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office