INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second time by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. DURBIN (for himself, Ms. MOSELEY-BRAUN, Mr. JOHNSON, and Mr. WELLSTONE):

S. 1008. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide that the tax incentives for alcohol used as a fuel shall be extended as part of any extension of fuel tax rates; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. KENNEDY:

S. 1009. A bill to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to increase the Federal minimum wage; to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

By Mr. THURMOND:

S. 1010. A bill to suspend the rate of duty with respect to certain chemicals; to the Committee on Finance.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. DURBIN (for himself, Ms. MOSELEY-BRAUN, Mr. JOHNSON and Mr. WELLSTONE):

S. 1008. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide that the tax incentives for alcohol used as a fuel shall be extended as part of any extension of fuel tax rates; to the Committee on Finance.

EXCISE TAX LEGISLATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I am introducing legislation that would extend the current excise tax incentive for ethanol use. I am pleased to be joined by Senators MOSELEY-BRAUN, JOHNSON, and WELLSTONE in this important effort.

We are moving forward with this extension today for several reasons. Last month the Senate included extension language in the reconciliation bill. I believe this sends a strong signal that ethanol enjoys wide, bipartisan support on this side of the Capitol. Based on that action, now is the appropriate time to pursue extension through any and all avenues. Reconciliation is one avenue. Reauthorization of the Intermodal Surface Transportation and Efficiency Act [ISTEA], the vehicle used in this legislation, is another. We would prefer that it be done sooner in the reconciliation bill, rather than later in the ISTEA reauthorization. But we want to make it clear that, one way or another, we will not rest until this extension becomes law.

I stand in strong support of the Senate's reconciliation language that would extend the program through 2007. I commend my colleagues, Senators GRASSLEY and MOSELEY-BRAUN for their tireless efforts to include an extension in the Senate language. And, I urge Senate conferees to hold fast to that position.

Despite strong support in the Senate, the House Ways and Means Committee voted last month to cut, cap, and kill this important program. Even with a moderation of the Committee language in the House and the action by the Senate, the House Committee action has caused considerable uncertainty about the future of the ethanol program which will no doubt affect the growth of this renewable fuel program.

The ethanol program has been an excellent example of a program that works. At a time when we are laboring to enact a balanced budget, I believe that programs, like ethanol, that pay for themselves and provide important benefits should be maintained rather than summarily eliminated.

Ethanol's benefits are well documented—it strengthens the economy, improves the environment, and decreases our dependence on foreign oil. A recent study conducted by the Midwest Governors' Conference concluded that the ethanol program produces a net savings to the Federal budget of more than $3.6 billion, adds over $450 million to State tax receipts each year, increases total U.S. employment by 195,200 jobs, and boosts net farm income by more than $4.5 billion annually. The Federal Government gains $1.30 for each gallon of ethanol sold in America—more than double the 54-cent-per-gallon cost of the incentive.

The increased use of ethanol helps offset the greenhouse gas emissions that result from the burning of fossil fuels. Ethanol-blended fuels reduce emissions of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and air toxics. Also, ethanol reduces the demand for imported gasoline and imported oxygenates by more than 90,000 barrels per day.

Clearly, ethanol is not a favorite of many of the big oil companies. But just as clearly, ethanol use is good for America. Each gallon of ethanol production capacity not built due to uncertainty about ethanol's tax status represents a loss of revenue to the U.S. Treasury as well as to our Nation's farmers. If investors are scared away because of legislative attacks on ethanol, the taxpayer loses.

That is why we are introducing legislation to reaffirm and extend our national commitment to this domestic, agriculture-based, renewable fuel program. We need to give this important sector of our economy the stability that will allow it to keep expanding. We need a solid, long-term commitment to help ensure that the demand for home-grown ethanol continues.

It is a critical time for ethanol. Instead of debating how to cut, cap, and kill the ethanol program as a number of legislators on the other side of the Capitol have done, supporters, whether from rural or urban areas, should be discussing the most appropriate way to extend the program. A program that works.

Mr. President, I invite my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring this legislation to send a signal that Congress will keep its commitment to renewable alcohol fuels.

By Mr. KENNEDY:

S. 1009. A bill to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to increase the Federal minimum wage; to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

LEGISLATION TO RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, today, we renew the battle for a fair minimum wage. Last year, after an unacceptable lag of 5 years, Congress enacted legislation to raise the minimum wage, which had shamefully been allowed to fall below acceptable levels and was no longer a living wage for the 10 million Americans who rely on it for their income.

We all remember the battle in the last Congress. For over 18 months, Republican Senators, newly in the majority, stalled action on any increase. The irresponsibility and unfairness of that obstruction became increasingly obvious, and the opponents became increasingly nervous about their position. Public support for a fair increase in the minimum wage finally became overwhelming. As the 1996 elections came closer, the obstructionists surrendered—and a fair two-step increase was signed into law by President Clinton last August. Under that legislation, the minimum wage rose from $4.25 an hour to $4.75 an hour on October 1, 1996, and it will rise to $5.15 an hour on September 1 this year.

Current law stops there. No further increases will take effect unless Congress acts again. It is time for us to do so now, in order to guarantee that further fair increases take place in the years ahead.

Today, therefore, I am introducing legislation to provide increases of 50 cents an hour in each of the next 3 years and increases of 30 cents an hour in each of the following 2 years—to $5.65 an hour on September 1, 1998, to $6.15 an hour on September 1, 1999, to $6.65 an hour on September 1, 2000, to $6.95 an hour on September 1, 2001, and to $7.25 an hour on September 1, 2002.

At a time when Congress is making many other decisions on taxing and spending over the next 5 years, it is entirely appropriate that we act on the minimum wage over the 5-year budget period, too.

The increases I am proposing are based on a simple principle. Intense Republican opposition to raising the minimum wage during the 8 years of the Reagan administration, and periodic opposition during the past 7 years, have left the real value of the minimum wage far below the levels it had in the previous 40 years. The bill introduced today will restore the purchasing power of the minimum wage to the level it had when the Reagan administration came to power.

The experience with the 50-cent increase that went into effect for the minimum wage last October refutes the doomsday predictions that opponents have always raised whenever Congress considers a fair increase. A study released today by the Economic Policy Institute sums up the experience of the past 9 months. As the title of the study states, ''The Sky Hasn't Fallen'' because of the increase.