60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, sixty years ago today, President Roosevelt signed into law an historic piece of legislation. The Fair Labor Standards Act established a number of basic protections for workers, including one of the great landmarks of American law—the federal minimum wage.

President Roosevelt called that Act ''the most far-reaching, far-sighted program for the benefit of workers ever adopted here or in any other country.''

And he was right. 700,000 workers got a raise in 1938. The minimum wage helped pull the country out of the Great Depression. And, in the decades that followed, it helped to lift millions of working families out of poverty.

Our standard of living has improved steadily and dramatically since 1938. And, for thirty years, the minimum wage kept pace with those improvements.

But the last thirty years have seen an about-face. The real value of the minimum wage has dropped steeply since 1968. To have the purchasing power today that it had thirty years age, the minimum wage would have to be $7.38 and hour—40% higher than its current level of $5.15.

Working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, minimum wage workers today earn just $10,700 a year—$2,900 below the poverty level for a family of three. In the midst of what many experts are calling ''the best economy ever,'' 12 million Americans are earning poverty-level wages.

For them survival is the daily goal. If they work hard enough and their hours are long enough, they can make ends meet—but only barely. They don't have time for their families. They can't participate in activities with their children. They can't afford to buy birthday presents or do the countless other things that most of us take for granted.

We know who minimum wage workers are. They are teachers' aides and home health aides. They care for our children in child care centers and our parents and grandparents in nursing homes. They sell us goods at the corner store, and serve us coffee at the local coffee shop.

They clean office buildings in communities across the country.

They are workers like Valerie Bell, a custodian for a contractor in Baltimore, who told us what a higher minimum wage means in human terms. For workers and their families, it means far more than dollars and cents. It means dignity. As she said, ''We no longer have to receive food stamps or other social services to supplement our incomes. We can fix up our homes and invest in our neighborhoods. We can spend more at the local grocery store. We can work two low-wage jobs, rather than three low-wage jobs, and spend more time with our families. Our utilities won't be cut off. We can pay the medical bills we accumulated from not having health benefits in our jobs.''

That's why we say now is the time to raise the minimum wage. Our proposal will raise the minimum wage by 50 cents on January 1, 1999 and 50 cents more on January 1, 2000—bringing the minimum wage to $6.15 an hour at the turn of the century. Twelve million working families across the country deserve no less.

Our Republican friends just cut capital gains taxes for the wealthiest Americans by more than $300 million over the next five years. Yet they oppose giving minimum wage workers an additional $1 an hour. ''Let them eat cake,'' they say.

Plums for the rich and crumbs for everyone else is the wrong priority. We need to do more for hard-working families in communities across America, and we can do more. We can raise the minimum wage. And with the strong support of President Clinton and Democrats in the Senate and House, we will raise it.

I intend to offer the minimum wage on the first available legislation after the July 4th recess. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate the anniversary of the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act and the establishment of the federal minimum wage. For sixty years, this law has provided hard-working Americans a promise—a promise that, in this country, we value the labor of all of our workers.

Over the last several decades, we have kept that promise by periodically raising the minimum wage. We have passed legislation six times since 1955 to ensure that this vital safety net is not just symbolic, but, instead, a true standard of decency. It is time to do this again.

Just like investors who expect a fair return for the money they put into the stock market, workers should expect a fair return for the labor they invest. In today's thriving economy, investors have gotten back more than they could have hoped for. Those making minimum wage, however, have seen a declining return on their investment. An hour of work does not give back what it used to.

In 1997 dollars, the minimum wage of today is more than two dollars less than what it was in the late 1960s. Our parents' generation had a minimum wage equivalent to $7.33. Now our children—despite an unparalleled booming economy—are faced with a minimum wage that places them below the poverty level.

That, Mr. President, is outrageous. People who work forty hour weeks year round, trying to provide for themselves and their families, are finding that their efforts are just not enough.

Perhaps, most troubling of all, this low minimum wage is having a disproportionately devastating effect on working moms. Sixty-two percent of all minimum wage workers are women, many the sole heads of their households. Where do these moms turn when they can't provide for their hungry children?

Many have been forced to seek outside assistance. Last year, a US Conference of Mayors study indicated that eighty-six percent of cities reported an increased demand for emergency food assistance. Thirty-eight percent of those people seeking food at soup kitchens and shelters were employed. This is an increase of fifteen percent since 1994.

This new trend is alarming. In a nation as great as ours, in a time as prosperous as this one, we should guarantee the American people that, if they are willing to work, then they will be able to live off of their income; they will be able to feed their children; they will be able to afford clothing and shelter, and they will be able to live their lives with basic dignity and fair compensation.

I call upon my colleagues to raise the minimum wage so that we can help millions of working people lift themselves up from poverty. Opponents of the minimum wage claim that we cannot afford to do this. But, for the most vulnerable in America's workforce, the truth is that we simply cannot afford not to.

TRULY A BRIGHT IDEA: NO COST TO TAXPAYERS

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, it is an exciting development that the electrical cooperatives in North Carolina are improving public education and the quality of classroom instruction without spending a dime of the taxpayer's money.

Since 1994, the electrical cooperatives in my state have sponsored a grant program for teachers called ''Bright Ideas'', and it has been a roaring success—encouraging creative teaching by awarding grants of up to $2,000 to K–12 teachers in annual competitions. There is no restriction on subject matter to apply; in fact, Mr. President, teachers are not required to teach in a cooperative service area to compete.

Teachers need only to show that they are using original, innovative ideas to improve the education of young people. These new teaching methods range from reading and music programs to creative math and science programs; from research involving computers and video technology to career-oriented programs to prepare teenagers for the working world. 2,000 teachers applied to cooperatives for grants this year, and more than 400 classrooms in North Carolina became ''Bright Ideas'' classrooms.

Mr. President, North Carolina's electric cooperatives operate in 93 of our 100 counties, providing power to almost a quarter of our state's population. Most members of these cooperatives aren't walking around with deep-pockets. They're hard-working folks in rural areas who recognize the value of a good education.

The ''Bright Ideas'' program initiated by these fine people continues to flourish. In 1994, North Carolina's electric cooperatives authorized a collaborative statewide effort and allocated $225,000 annually for Bright Ideas for a five-year period. But a funny thing happened, Mr. President. These grants proved so successful that individual co-operatives are getting into the act and supplementing already allocated funds with money of their own. Their initiative will allow the cooperatives to award more than $1 million dollars in grants a full year ahead of schedule.

In fact, Chuck Terrill, Executive Vice-President and CEO of the North Carolina Electric Membership Corporation says that ''Bright Ideas'' grants for North Carolina's school will top $1.5 million by the end of the 1998–1999 school year.

Mr. President, ''Bright Ideas'' is just one of the many ways the members of North Carolina's electric cooperatives help their communities and support their public schools. I congratulate them for seeing a need and providing precious resources to challenge the children in North Carolina's classrooms.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Wednesday, June 24, 1998, the federal debt stood at $5,503,890,151,659.51 (Five trillion, five hundred three billion, eight hundred ninety million, one hundred fifty-one thousand, six hundred fifty-nine dollars and fifty-one cents).

One year ago, June 24, 1997, the federal debt stood at $5,336,558,000,000 (Five trillion, three hundred thirty-six billion, five hundred fifty-eight million).

Five years ago, June 24, 1993, the federal debt stood at $4,304,357,000,000 (Four trillion, three hundred four billion, three hundred fifty-seven million).

Ten years ago, June 24, 1988, the federal debt stood at $2,527,474,000,000 (Two trillion, five hundred twenty-seven billion, four hundred seventy-four million).

Fifteen years ago, June 24, 1983, the federal debt stood at $1,303,410,000,000 (One trillion, three hundred three billion, four hundred ten million) which reflects a debt increase of more than $4 trillion—$4,200,480,151,659.51 (Four trillion, two hundred billion, four hundred eighty million, one hundred fifty-one thousand, six hundred fifty-nine dollars and fifty-one cents) during the past 15 years.

U.S. FOREIGN OIL CONSUMPTION FOR WEEK ENDING JUNE 19TH

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, the American Petroleum Institute has reported that for the week ending June 19 that the U.S. imported 7,883,000 barrels of oil each day, more than a quarter million (253,000) barrels a day more than the 7,630,000 imported during the same week a year ago.

Americans relied on foreign oil for 55.5 percent of their needs last week. There are no signs that the upward spiral will abate. Before the Persian Gulf War, the United States imported about 45 percent of its oil supply from foreign countries. During the Arab oil embargo in the 1970s, foreign oil accounted for only 35 percent of America's oil supply.

All Americans should ponder the economic calamity certain to occur in the U.S. if and when foreign producers shut off our supply—or double the already enormous cost of imported oil flowing into the U.S.—now 7,883,000 barrels a day at a cost of approximately $78,908,830 a day.

SUPREME COURT'S LINE ITEM VETO DECISION

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today the United States Supreme Court held the Line Item Veto Act unconstitutional. I voted against that Act when it was considered by the Senate and joined the senior Senator from West Virginia and others in warning giving the President, any President, line item veto authority would result in a dramatic shift in power from the legislative branch to the executive branch that was inconsistent with the constitutional principles of separation of powers. We warned that this shift in power that would damage our fundamental principle of majority rule, encourage horse trading between Members of Congress and the President, and not reduce the deficit in any meaningful way. Unfortunately, all of those warnings have come true.

In 1997 I called upon Congress to admit its mistake and repeal this unconstitutional Act before the courts struck it down. Congress was given a second opportunity to correct its ill-considered action when the Supreme Court dismissed, on the limited ground of lack of standing, the challenge brought by Senator BYRD. In that case, Byrd v. Raines, District Judge Jackson had ruled that the Act violated the Constitution.

Having failed to do its job properly, the majority in Congress is now confronted with a Supreme Court that was forced to do the Congress' job. Consistent with its judicial power under the Constitution, the Supreme Court has once again had to preserve the Constitution from legislative attack. As it did when it defended the First Amendment from being undermined by the so-called Communications Decency Act, and when it defended federalism against the encroachment of the Brady Act, here again the Supreme Court has been called upon to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution. As a Senator who voted against these measures in spite of their momentary popularity, and as a Vermonter who cherishes the Constitution and the freedoms that it guarantees, I thank the Court for its service.

I have long been concerned that the line item veto encourages minority rule by allowing a presidential item veto to stand with the support of only 34 Senators or 146 Representatives. That is not majority rule. Those anti-democratic super-majority requirements are fundamentally at odds with the principles underlying legislative action.

Our Founders rejected such super-majority requirements on matters within Congress' purview. Alexander Hamilton described super-majority requirements as a ''poison'' that serves ''to destroy the energy of the government, and to substitute the pleasure, caprice, or artifices of an insignificant, turbulent, or corrupt junto to the regular deliberations and decisions of a respectable majority.'' Such super-majority requirements reflect a basic distrust not just of Congress, but of the electorate itself.

In addition, these super-majority requirements hurt small states, like my home State of Vermont, by upping the ante for those who dare take on the President. Under the line item veto, Members from small states have to convince two-thirds of each House to override the President's veto for the sake of a project. With Vermont having only one representative in the House, why would other Members risk the President's wrath to help us with a vetoed project? It is truly a task for Hercules to override a veto. Just look at the record—of the more than 2,500 Presidential vetoes in our history, Congress has been able to override 105.

As the senior Senator from West Virginia has so forcefully argued, we should tread carefully when expanding the fiscal powers of the presidency. The line item veto would have weakened one of the fundamental checks and balances that form the separation of powers under our Constitution. The line item veto would have handed over the power of the purse to the President.

I have heard the howls of some of my colleagues who lost worthy appropriations since the approval of the line item veto. And what if the President makes a mistake by line item vetoing a worthy project? The Administration even admitted that it mistakenly vetoed some projects. Do Senators trust the bureaucrats over at the Office of Management and Budget to decide, within a few short days, which projects are deserving and which are not? Is that consistent with the Founders' vision?

I was born and raised in Vermont and go home almost every weekend. I am confident that I have a better sense of Vermont than someone who thinks Vermont is an avenue that lies somewhere between K and L streets in northwest Washington, D.C.

Let us keep the power of the purse with Congress—where it belongs. As the Ranking Member of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, I am frequently called upon to visit emerging