Senate, you spend most of your time begging for money. Is that what Americans want in the Senate or the House of Representatives? I don’t think so.

A bipartisan bill—Senator JOHN MCCAIN, a Republican, of Arizona, and Senator RUSSELL FEINGOLD, a Democrat from Wisconsin—said we can clean up this system, but this Congress failed to enact meaningful campaign finance reform. Only 55 Senators—45 Democrats and 10 Republicans—came forward in support of this most basic change in reform.

As part of the legislative landfill of the 106th Congress, Republicans were successful in not passing campaign finance reform.

Minimum wage increase? The minimum wage in this country is $5.15 an hour. When you calculate that out, it means, it was $30,000 a year in income for a farmer. The income for a farmer was about $48,000 a year.

The Republican approach represented special interests in stopping the minimum wage increase prevail in 20 years. They did not do it over 2 years; they did it over 3 years, which costs those wage earners $1,200 a year in income to take that approach. Mr. President, $1,200? You might say that is not that big a deal. It is if you are making $10,000 a year; it is a very big deal.

The Republican approach represented special interests in stopping the minimum wage increase prevailed in 20 years. They also added in there some tax breaks that, frankly, cannot be taken seriously because they did not pay for them. There we have it—the minimum wage issue into the landfill.

This is one you will remember, the juvenile crime control bill. You will remember it because it came up right after Columbine High School. It was an effort by the Senate to pass a sensible gun control law. When the final vote was called, it was $30,000, Vice President, the other $30,000.

Al Gore came to the floor, broke the tie, and we enacted the bill which said as follows: When people buy guns at gun shows, we want to know if they are buying from people who live in cities where gun violence is a commonplace occurrence, and have to tell them this Congress failed to pass any sensible gun control legislation.

Smaller class size—thank goodness the President prevailed in his negotiations. The President's goal, and one I share, is to reduce class size in the early grades so quality teachers can meet with kids right when they are starting their education and help them along. You take the kids who are the best and the brightest and you give them the biggest challenges. You take those who may be suffering from some learning disability, you diagnose their year. This year, it will be about $25,000. That is about half. But $13,000 of the $25,000 will come from Federal payments. The other about $12,000 will come in farm operations. We cannot sustain a farm economy where half the income of farmers in Illinois and Minnesota or Nebraska comes from the Federal Treasury. The law has to be changed, and this year we did not take up a change in the law as we should have.

The last point I would like to make before I yield to my colleague from Minnesota is this. The Patients’ Bill of Rights is an issue we have to return to as the highest priority in the next Congress. When you consider the lives of people who are dependent on this action, you understand the severity of it. I will tell one quick story.

Take a look at this little girl here. She is Theresa. She lives in Yorkville, IL. Her dad is a police officer and her mom stays at home to look after her. She suffers from a rare disease known as spinal muscular atrophy. It is a very debilitating disease. As you can see, she is on a ventilator, and I met a couple of kids just like this. This is what her mother says:

She was hospitalized from September 2nd last year until February 15 of this year due to fighting the insurance company for certain provisions we could not do without in this world.

We had to fight and fight with the insurance company for things the doctors had said were needed, for Theresa, not fought for 2 1/2 months. We eventually did get everything that we needed, except it was a very long battle.

Can you imagine having your family separated that long because the insurance company did not want to help?

Theresa caught RSV in the hospital while we were waiting for the appeal to go through. That is why she now has a ventilator and tracheotomy.

That is a real life family. Theresa’s dad is a policeman. Theresa and her family would not be protected by the Republican version of the Patients’ Bill of Rights. They would not have the benefit of an appeals process in a timely fashion so they could get a good answer, a sensible medical answer for this little girl. Instead, they are embroiled in month after month of weary debate with the insurance company. That is health care in America for too many American families. This Congress has failed, utterly failed to address this critical issue.

I yield to the Chair.

Several Senators addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky is recognized. We are going from side to side.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I thank the Chair. I wonder if I can ask unanimous consent to follow the Senator from Kentucky?

Mr. INHOFE. Reserving the right to object, I inquire of the Chair, it is my understanding we had until the hour of 1 o’clock equally divided. I ask how much time is remaining on each side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On the Republican side, there are 22 minutes 37 seconds. On the Democratic side, there are 9 minutes 33 seconds.

Mr. INHOFE. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the Senator from Minnesota will be recognized following the Senator from Kentucky.

THE TICKET TO WORK AND WORK INCENTIVES IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of the work incentives and ticket to work legislation.
November 18, 1999

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—SENATE

This is a day I have looked forward to for a long time. It is a day for the disabled in America. By passing this legislation, we are going to make it easier for them to return to work and become self-sufficient. We are going to give those who want to try to return to work the tools they need to support themselves and to escape from the dependency on a monthly Government check.

For years, the Social Security disability program has provided a vital safety net to assist those who fall on hard times and need help when they become sick or injured and cannot support themselves. It has done this job well. But for the many disabled people who have wanted to return to work and could be able to work, the disability program has not worked as well. It has not provided for the disabled to return to the workforce. It has not given them the tools they need to move off the disability rolls. In fact, fewer than 1 percent of those who go on the disability rolls—that is currently 4.5 million people—return to work because the program does not provide an adequate support network or resources for these Americans to move back into the workforce.

For these disabled people, the disability program has become a black hole. Once they fall in, they cannot escape. The bill we hope to pass today or tomorrow finally gives these Americans new hope, the ladder they need to climb out of that hole. The Ticket To Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act modernizes the disability program and moves it into the modern age and provides more options for the disabled who want to work. It provides them with a ticket that can be used to help acquire skills to reenter the workforce.

Under the old system, these workers had only one option if they wanted to return to work; they had to work or return to work the tools they need to move off the disability rolls. In fact, fewer than 1 percent of those who go on the disability rolls—that is currently 4.5 million people—return to work because the program does not provide an adequate support network or resources for these Americans to move back into the workforce.

This legislation also addresses the most pressing need for most of those who want to leave the disability rolls and return to work—the availability of adequate health care. Many of these potential workers continue to require a high degree of medical care even after they return to work. Obtaining this care—and paying for it—is often a high hurdle, especially for those who move back to the workplace in entry and lower-level positions. Under the bill we are dealing with today, we expanded continued Medicare coverage for the disabled and also increase Medicaid funding to the States to help them address the problem.

All in all, this bill is win-win. It is a winner for the disabled community and a winner for the American taxpayers and all of us who pay Social Security taxes. The Congressional Budget Office tells us that for every 1 percent of disability recipients who return to work, the Social Security disability trust fund saves $3 billion. That is serious money. If this legislation only works partly as well as we expect, it will make a tremendous difference for the future of the trust fund and our ability to look after the neediest Americans.

It’s been almost 5 years since Congress began looking into problems with the disability program. In 1995, when I was the chairman of the House Social Security Subcommittee, we began holding hearings on possible changes we could make to Social Security to help the disabled. After those hearings, former Congresswoman Barbara Keranley and myself wrote reform legislation that passed in the House in 1996 by a vote of 410–1. While my bill died in the Senate last year because Senator Kennedy put a hold on my bill and some shenanigans by the White House, it is at the core of the legislation we are passing today and I am very proud of that. We have worked very hard to make sure the ticket-to-work portion of this reflects the bill that passed the House last year 410–1.

This is a good bill, and I urge my colleagues to support it. It will truly make a difference for many Americans who need it the most, and I think it will stand as one of the most significant pieces of legislation to pass during this Congress.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

NORTHEAST DAIRY COMPACT

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, in a while—though it is not clear when—it is my understanding that Congressman OBEY from Wisconsin—and I see Senator FEINGOLD from Wisconsin on the floor right now—is in the House with a number of different motions to adjourn before this conference report is acted upon.

We will eventually get this huge omnibus conference report. Those of us from the midwest dairy States are indignant about what has been done. It goes beyond dairy. Later on, believe me, we are going to have plenty of time to talk about dairy farmers. We are going to talk about what it means to dairy farmers, what it means to our States, and what it means to the country when, in a conference committee, provisions that extend the Northeast Dairy Compact and also block what Secretary Glickman was trying to do with the milk marketing order reform are put into the overall bill.

We had a vote on this in the Senate. We voted against extending the dairy compact. It was a square and fair debate and vote. Then, in a conference committee, completely unrelated to the appropriations bills, completely unrelated to what the Senate Majority Leader ARMEY announced they had done it, and Senate Majority Leader LOTT announced the provisions in. There was never debate and discussion. They tucked into the conference report this huge monstrosity of a bill that hardly any of us have had a chance to read yet, which will come over here sometime.

I come to the floor to say to Congressman OBEY in the House: I applaud your efforts. What we have is raw politics—just get this through. That is what they have done with this Northeast Dairy Compact. They could not do it on the floor of the Senate. They stuck it in a conference report. They did it in the dead of night. They did it outside any public scrutiny. And now they present it to us in a conference report as a fait accompli. They set up a continuing resolution that goes into next week.

They figure out ways of jamming people, and it is the majority party to leverage we have left. But, as Congressman OBEY is doing in the House, I am sure those of us who are from Wisconsin and Minnesota in the Senate intend to speak out. We intend to be very clear about what has happened, and we will do all we can as Senators. We will go from there.

I say to my colleagues that almost as much as the final product, I came to