

whom each of us relies every day. These are the workers who deserve to have their wages restored to a level that will afford them a reasonable standard of living.

In West Virginia alone, over one-fifth of our workers will directly benefit from a \$1.50 increase in the minimum hourly wage. This would mean an increase of almost \$3,000 a year for full-time workers. In more concrete terms, this translates into more than a year of groceries, rent for seven months, seventeen months of utility bills, or a year of tuition at a two-year college. Currently, a full-time minimum wage earner with two children may be faced with difficult decisions when trying to both feed and clothe her children. We need to make sure that a mother or father who works forty hours a week does not have to decide between groceries for the family and paying the electric bill.

Ultimately, we must acknowledge that the minimum wage standard has been allowed to slowly erode over the past thirty years. At present, the \$5.15 hourly minimum has reached its lowest purchasing power in two decades, which has aggravated problems for the working poor. Today, the real value of the minimum wage is \$2.90 below what it was in 1968. As our country continues to make unprecedented economic gains, this is simply unacceptable. We have an obligation to the working families in West Virginia, and across the Nation, to raise the minimum wage to a level that will lift them out of the day-to-day struggle of meeting their most basic needs.

I believe that raising the minimum wage over the next two years is essential to help families and to reinforce the fundamental American values of hard work and self-sufficiency. The goal of the country's minimum wage is to ensure that working Americans earn a living wage that makes work a truly better choice than welfare or other public assistance. The fact that 70 percent of workers earning minimum wage are adults over the age of twenty, that 60 percent are women, and that nearly half have full-time jobs means that this is an issue central to millions of hard-working families in our country. In West Virginia alone, almost 14 percent of our work force earn at the minimum wage, and our state has one of the largest populations of workers receiving the minimum wage. I am proud to join Senator KENNEDY and my colleagues to work together to enact this essential bill for working Americans.

HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, last Friday, at least one gunshot was fired at Detroit's Osborn High School. The gunshot hit a classroom window and two students and a teacher were injured as glass shattered across the room. Al-

though the shooting produced no substantial physical injuries, it created great anxiety for the students and families of Osborn High School, who no doubt will sustain the emotional injuries of such a shooting for some time.

The students and teachers at Osborn High School are not alone in their anxiety. Around the nation, students and their families are seriously concerned about safety in their schools. Students deserve to feel safe in their learning environments rather than feeling anxious and fearful. For the students at Osborn High School and everywhere else in America, Congress must work to limit the accessibility that young people have to guns, and reduce the gun violence in our schools and community places.

THE SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS TAX RELIEF ACT 2001

Mr. HUTCHINSON. Mr. President, last week I introduced legislation which I hope is the first of several steps taken by Congress to correct a terrible injustice currently imposed on seniors who have worked hard all of their lives and are receiving Social Security benefits.

Many people do not realize that, after they have paid Social Security taxes throughout their work careers, up to 50 percent or 85 percent of the monthly benefit they receive from Social Security may be taxed again.

Prior to 1993, up to 50 percent of Social Security benefits were taxable for individuals with incomes above \$25,000, and couples with incomes above \$32,000. In 1993, after President Clinton raised the portion of Social Security benefits which are taxable up to 85 percent for individuals with incomes over \$34,000, and couples with income over \$44,000.

President Clinton's 1993 tax increase on senior citizens made a bad policy even worse. Essentially, this graduated tax scheme penalizes seniors with fixed incomes who have worked hard to ensure their retirement security.

S. 237, the Social Security Benefits Tax Relief Act, which I have introduced along with my colleagues, Senators COCHRAN, FRIST, INHOFE, LOTT, MURKOWSKI and WARNER, would repeal the 1993 Clinton tax increase on Social Security benefits and rolls the tax levels back to their pre-1993 levels.

By eliminating the taxation of Social Security benefits, we will allow seniors to have more money to pay for prescription drugs, medical care, housing and food. This legislation provides greater tax fairness for increasing numbers of middle-income seniors.

It is widely agreed that Social Security was never intended to be the sole source of income for retirees. In light of Social Security's financial troubles, now is the time to remove disincentives for those who wish to save and plan early for their retirement. Hope-

fully, this legislation is a first step toward the repeal of all taxes on Social Security benefits.

I urge my colleagues in the Senate to provide tax relief to seniors by passing this important legislation and by examining ways to make the system as fair as possible for all beneficiaries who have paid into the system and who may or may not be subject to taxes on their benefits.

LITHUANIAN INDEPENDENCE

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, on Sunday, February 11, 2001, Americans of Lithuanian descent will be gathering, in my home State of Michigan, to celebrate the 83rd anniversary of Lithuanian Independence.

Given the Lithuanian people's long history of successfully preserving and maintaining their culture and identity, there is reason for all those of Lithuanian descent to be proud. Such an achievement stands as an inspiration for people everywhere.

The Lithuanian people have long refused to be placed under the yoke of oppression. They became independent in 1918, fought the Nazis during the Second World War and refused to lose hope during many years of Soviet rule. Reflecting on these trials can be cause for great sadness but also much hope.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lithuania has experienced nearly eleven years of democracy and free markets. The Lithuanian people are to be commended for the significant steps they taken to ensure Lithuania's place in the free world. In 1999, I had the opportunity to meet with President Valdas Adamkus, and discuss many issues facing both our nations. Many of my colleagues may not know this, but so great is President Adamkus' love for his ancestral homeland that he returned to Lithuania to run for President after a successful career in the United States, including service as an official in the States Environmental Protection Agency.

In its efforts to reform, Lithuania has placed a premium on joining the European Union, EU, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO. Sound monetary policy and a stable currency have given Lithuania the framework for economic growth and prosperity. On the security front, Lithuania was the first member of the former Soviet Union to participate in the Partnership for Peace. The Partnership for Peace is an important program where the United States and its NATO allies work with former Warsaw Pact nations on common security measures.

At this time when we honor Lithuania's independence, it is only fitting that we laud the extraordinary advances made by the Lithuanian people. I know my Senate colleagues join me in saluting the Lithuanian people for