

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce two bills. The first bill is the National Beverage Container Reuse and Recycling Act of 1997.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. JEFFORDS. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Mr. JEFFORDS pertaining to the introduction of S. 215 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. JEFFORDS. The second bill I will be introducing today with Senator FRIST. This bill is IDEA. Then, after that, I will briefly talk on low-income fuel assistance and put in the RECORD a letter which myself and 49 Senators have participated in.

For now, I will go ahead and discuss and send to the desk the bill IDEA, for introduction.

(The remarks of Mr. JEFFORDS and Mr. FRIST pertaining to the introduction of S. 216 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

#### PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR—S. 216

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent Jim Downing, a legislative fellow in my office, be granted the privilege of the floor during consideration of the IDEA legislation, when it occurs.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RELEASE EMERGENCY LIHEAP FUNDS

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, last Thursday 48 Senators representing the Northeast-Midwest Senate Coalition, which I chair with Senator MOYNIHAN, my colleague from Vermont Senator LEAHY, and Senators from other States hard hit by skyrocketing heating prices and cold weather, sent a letter to President Clinton asking him to release \$300 million in emergency low income home energy assistance funds [LIHEAP].

The 1997 Omnibus Appropriations Act allows the President to release up to \$420 million in LIHEAP emergency funds. In the Northeast and Midwest, the price of home heating oil has jumped over 25 percent from last year, while natural gas and propane prices in all cold weather States are significantly higher. The Reverend Dr. Robert E. Martin of Newport, VT recently wrote me that the propane bill of the Lowell Congregational Church has risen 52 percent over last year. Any distribution of emergency LIHEAP funds must take into account this rise in fuel prices, which in Vermont, so far, has been worse than the weather.

Mr. President, the rising cost of energy weighs heavy on low-income working Americans who devote about 12 percent of their income to energy bills. The elderly and disabled low-income individuals relying on supplemental security income spend on aver-

age 19 percent of that income on energy bills, and families with children living on Aid to Families With Dependent Children devote almost 25 percent of their benefits to energy bills.

Although many State regulations prohibit utilities from terminating service for nonpayment during the winter, households that rely on home heating oil, propane, and wood do not have this same safety net. These households must pay for services up front or face fuel cut offs. With the prolonged spike in fuel prices, additional Federal funds are needed to prevent many families from having to face life threatening cold this winter.

Mr. President, freezing temperatures and high fuel prices are a recipe for disaster for low-income Americans. Forty-eight Senators from both parties are urging President Clinton to act quickly so that low-income Americans do not have to choose between heating and eating this winter.

Mr. President, I yield the floor for others who desire to speak on this important issue.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, I always appreciate working with the Senator from Vermont and the Senator from Massachusetts. We have been on the floor before talking about low-income energy assistance, and we really have to be on the floor today speaking about this.

Sometimes we talk about these issues, and we just talk. It may not be connected to people's lives. But what we say today on the floor of the U.S. Senate is connected to people's lives in many of our States.

It is between 8 and 15 degrees below zero in most of Minnesota today. It might get to zero this daytime.

Mr. President, we have had a brutal winter in our State and, in addition, as the Senator from Vermont mentioned, natural gas prices are up 60 percent from last year's prices, heating oil is up 40 percent over last year, and the cost of propane is 60 percent higher than last year.

Our State is colder than it was last year. It costs much more to heat a home. These oil prices have skyrocketed, and this means we have a crisis, all in capital letters.

Mr. President, the Governor, Governor Arne Carlson, has used \$9 million of the State's fund for additional assistance, but we have in fiscal year 1997 additional money, several hundreds of millions of dollars, for emergency energy assistance. It is an emergency.

In Minnesota, we have about 300,000 citizens who are dependent upon this lifeline program. It is not a large grant. It averages about \$350, but for many of these citizens—many of them elderly, many of them children—this is a lifeline program, without which either people go cold or people huddle in one room in their home. I wish that

was an exaggeration, but it is not. I have visited with these families. Our people somehow figure out how to pay for their heat, but then they don't have enough money to buy food or they don't have enough money to buy prescription drugs that they need. This is a particular problem with the elderly.

Mr. President, we are going to run out of assistance. We are going to have a dire situation in Minnesota. This is no melodrama on my part. It is time this emergency money be released.

Almost every day I am on the phone talking to the White House, talking to Health and Human Services, the Office of Management and Budget, and I don't speak on the floor of the Senate today to point the finger, because I believe that in the next few days—the sooner the better—the White House will release this money.

Last year, I went to the President—other Senators joined: Senator KENNEDY, Senator JEFFORDS, and others—and just made the request face to face. I said, "Mr. President, I don't want people to go cold in my State."

This is not an exaggeration. I am sure that this money will be released, but today on the floor of the Senate, my appeal to the White House is: Please, make the decision. Please, make the decision today. Please release the funding. Time is not neutral. Time is not on our side. It doesn't do any good to get the funding in April. We need this assistance for vulnerable citizens in our cold-weather States, and we need it now.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. KENNEDY addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I intend to speak to the Senate about this same subject that my friend, Senator WELLSTONE, spoke to. I think all of us have understood his strong leadership on this issue a year ago or 2 years ago and before he was elected. Now he is again battling away on the same issue with the same powerful voice, and I join in expressing strong appreciation for all of his leadership.

#### IDEA

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, before speaking on the issue of LIHEAP, I want to thank the chairman of our Human Resources Committee, Chairman JEFFORDS, and also the Senator from Tennessee, Senator FRIST, for introducing the IDEA legislation today and to indicate this is one of the prime areas of priority for the Human Resources Committee.

This issue, in terms of helping and assisting the special needs of children in education, is of incredible importance to millions of families all across this country, and we cannot afford to let the authorizing legislation expire.

I join in commending the leadership that has been provided by Senator FRIST in our last Congress, along with Senator HARKIN, who has been our

ranking member on the Subcommittee on Disability and who has made such a very important contribution on all of the issues relating to the disabled in this country over a very distinguished career, Senator JEFFORDS, and others on our committee.

This has been a strong bipartisan effort. We welcome the opportunity to work very closely with them. This is not to minimize the issues that are outstanding, but it does represent a continuing commitment of those who support the legislation to try to continue the very important efforts that have marked this legislation and finding cooperation and finding ways to deal with some of the still outstanding issues.

So I am very, very grateful for their statements on the floor today.

#### LIHEAP

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, on the issue others have spoken to, I want to add my strong voice in hope and anticipation of the President's release of these emergency LIHEAP funds to help the families in the Northeast and Midwest. I think all of us have understood the extraordinary hardships and loss of lives that are affecting people in the Midwest, and people are hurting in my part of the country, in the Northeast, as well, with the soaring heating bills this winter.

The reduced benefit levels and the skyrocketing prices of home heating oil have been a double whammy for the 5 million low-income families nationwide who receive LIHEAP assistance.

Federal funding for LIHEAP is already near an all-time low—listen to this, Mr. President—down from \$2.1 billion in 1985 to \$1 billion today. In Massachusetts, Federal fuel aid has declined from \$87 million to \$41 million over that same period, about half of the resources in dollars. When you measure it out in terms of inflation, it is even less than that. When we see what has happened to the cost of home heating oil, we will see that people are in dire straits.

Local fuel assistance directors have been successful in past years in stretching the limited LIHEAP funds to serve as many needy families as possible. This winter, however, low stocks have sent heating oil prices through the roof, causing excessive hardships to LIHEAP recipients across the Nation.

According to the Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources, the cost of home heating oil has risen 20 percent, and, in some communities, considerably higher, from some 95 cents a gallon in December 1995, to over \$1.15 today. Despite the oil companies' efforts to bring their inventories to last year's levels, heating oil prices still remain high because of increased world demand.

This rise in heating oil prices has imposed a heavy burden on low-income families, many of whom must devote a significant portion of their limited resources to paying their energy bills.

Who are these families, Mr. President? Forty-three percent of the recipients for the LIHEAP program are elderly or disabled citizens. They spend an average of 19 percent of their income to keep their homes warm in the winter, whereas middle-income families devote 4 percent.

That is who we are talking about: elderly people, the neediest people who are living and affected by this colder climate, are spending way out of proportion of their income in order to just remain warm.

The AFDC recipients spend as much as 25 percent of their income for home heating. At the same time, these families are hard pressed and struggle to pay their bills for food, rent, and health care.

A decade ago, LIHEAP assistance could sustain a low-income family through an entire winter, purchasing as much as 750 gallons of heating oil. Today, the higher cost of heating oil and the lower benefit levels will only purchase a third of that amount. Some 10 years ago, there was the ability to address this issue for the neediest families for the winter and now a third of the winter, even with these resources that would be available.

Many local fuel assistance directors are already planning for the worst. According to Jim Murphy, whose TRICAP Community Action Program serves 1,500 clients in Malden, MA, over 40 percent will be without any heating assistance at the end of next week unless emergency funds are provided.

Other communities in Massachusetts are facing a similar crisis. In Boston, as many as 2,000 families, out of 13,000 served by LIHEAP, have run out of heating oil. An additional 4,500 households will be at risk in the next few weeks. We are talking the next 2 to 3 weeks.

In economically distressed towns like Gloucester, many working families involved in the fishing industry have already exhausted their annual benefits. According to Elliott Jacobson, chairman of the New England Energy Directors Association, charities are being tapped for additional assistance 2 months ahead of schedule, taxing their limited resources to serve the community.

Clearly, without an immediate release of emergency funds, little relief is in site for these families. If another cold spell strikes, even more families will be without protection.

As we mentioned, 49 Senators wrote to the President last week requesting the release of the emergency LIHEAP funds before more cold weather grips the country. This year, \$420 million in emergency funds could be made available at the President's discretion. The letter sent to the President Thursday requested \$300 million of that amount. I hope all of my colleagues will support this necessary action and will support action by the President to respond to these very important and critical needs.

#### THE PRESIDENT'S EDUCATION BUDGET

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, on another item, I want to draw the attention of the Senate to President Clinton's announcement today for making education a top priority in his balanced budget plan. The President has announced the proposal and recognizes the importance of investing in education as the cornerstone of a stronger future for the Nation.

In the coming years, a college education will be more important than ever. We know that by the year 2005, 60 percent of all of the new jobs will require not only a high school education, but also skills in the utilization of computers. So the President's program is focused on a number of priority areas. I will introduce at the end of my statement a brief summary of those items, but I would like to just mention some of those which I think are most important.

First of all, to try and assure working families in this country that not only high school will be available, but really the 13th and 14th grades, the first 2 years of college, would be available as well. That is being done in a number of ways:

First, with a \$10,000 deduction for the payments of tuition that will be available to working families and middle-income families, what they call the Hope Tax Credit, which will be a \$1,500 credit for the sons and daughters who are going to college.

This would amount to the payment in full of tuition for 67 percent of all the community colleges in the country; and then an expansion of the Pell grants by some \$300 to a maximum of \$3,000 for those individuals who are eligible for Pell grants. That is a very important and significant commitment. That will mean about 130,000 more students across this country will be able to take advantage of the Pell grants.

Then there are the changes in the Pell grant provisions that will be primarily targeted upon older students, those who have been out in the work force and are coming back, those who are 24 or 25 years old or older. I do not know whether the distinguished Chair has had the kind of opportunity I have had to visit some of the community colleges in his own State as I have in Massachusetts. We find changes which are taking place where the makeup of the student body is considerably older.

Changes in the Pell language are going to make available 218,000 additional slots for those individuals who are returning to college to upgrade their skills, which is very important.

We also have a strong commitment in the areas of literacy. We will see an expansion of the Work-Study Program, which provides important opportunities for students to help work their way through college. It is an absolutely vital link to permit students to match together what they are able to earn in the summertime by working, with what they earn working under the