

only way we have ever been able to get this done in the past. We expect that will be the only way to get it done in the future. We will press it across the countryside.

We ask our fellow Americans. This issue is one that concerns them. I don't know a single member of our side who would not support an increase in the minimum wage. I hope they will understand that when they go to the polls.

THE MEDICAL DEVICE USE FEE AND MODERNIZATION ACT OF 2002

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I bring to the attention of the membership the bill H.R. 5651, the Medical Device User Fee and Modernization Act of 2002. It has now passed the House of Representatives. We have been working on this legislation for 10 years. It has been a divisive issue, both the issue and as a public policy issue. We finally have virtual support from the Members in the House of Representatives, the committees of jurisdiction, and also the Members here. There may be Members who have questions. We are prepared to answer those.

I indicate this is a public health matter of enormous importance and consequence. If Members are going to object, they are going to have to come to the floor of the Senate and express those objections and reasons. We will not tolerate someone holding up this bill in hopes that they can get it carried back to the House. We have worked too long. We have worked too hard. This is an enormously important health issue. We will not tolerate it. I will not tolerate it. Those members of our committee will not tolerate it.

I want to make it very clear, if they ever expect any kind of cooperation on any other health matters, they had better understand the importance and significance of this measure—if they ever expect any cooperation on any health matters down the road.

I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. NELSON of Florida). The Senator from Indiana.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. BAYH. Mr. President, I begin by thanking our colleague from Massachusetts for his impassioned advocacy of this important issue. It is a cause that both the Chair and I support wholeheartedly. The Senator from Massachusetts has been a tireless advocate of raising the minimum wage for many years. It is my privilege to join with him. This is an issue whose time has come. It needs to be done, and we need a sense of urgency for those on the other side of the aisle and this administration. I thank my colleague once again.

Mr. President, let me share some thoughts about the importance of extending coverage for the unemployed in our country. Given the weakness of our economy, I think this is a critically

important issue that will help millions of our fellow citizens who are suffering unemployment through no fault of their own. It is also an important component of a coherent economic strategy to get America working again.

As you and others know all too well, the economy is weak, people are out of work, we need leadership to get the economy moving, people back to employment, and to help those who have suffered unemployment, putting money back into people's pockets to put it back into the economy to create jobs and growth. Extending unemployment benefits is an important part of that strategy, an idea whose time has come, a lot like raising the minimum wage.

The economy is not doing well. Unemployment has risen. Long-term unemployment in September was 1.6 million working men and women. Household income for the typical family has fallen for the first time in a decade. Home foreclosures have reached a 30-year high. Poverty rates across America rose last year. Regrettably, the economy seems unlikely to reverse its sluggish course anytime soon. Manufacturing has slowed. Retail sales are weak. Capital investment has declined. Foreign demand for American goods and services is stalled.

As a result, job creation actually declined last year. Many Americans are hard hit, and others are worried they will be next. Mr. President, 1.1 million Americans had exhausted their unemployment benefits as of August. This figure is expected to double to 2.2 million hard-working Americans as soon as December—regrettably, just in time for the Christmas season.

In my own home State of Indiana, we have not been unaffected. Twenty-one thousand hard-working Hoosiers have exhausted unemployment benefits as of August. This figure will more than double to 45,000 by December. There is no State in the Union that is unaffected by this unfortunate state of affairs. These Americans need a helping hand. I want to emphasize that it is not only the compassionate thing to do, but it is the economically sensible thing to do as well, because not only are we helping individuals who are in need, we are also helping the economy get back on its feet and thereby helping all Americans, be they employed or unemployed.

We need stimulus for job growth and economic expansion. These benefits will be used for consumer spending. Economists have long recognized that helping those who are unemployed leads directly to added demand in the economy. Labor Department statistics, in fact, indicate that there is a significant multiplier effect. For every \$1 that goes into unemployment benefits, a full \$2.15 is added to the gross domestic product. By any definition, \$1 into \$2.15 of increase to the gross domestic product is a good investment for the American people.

Consumers are stressed right now. They have high levels of debt. They

have tapped into their home equity at rates that could be unsustainable. The tax cut of last year has run its course. There are other reasons to believe consumers may be cutting back on their purchases. Adding about \$17 billion to consumption through extending unemployment benefits will help the consumers maintain their course, allowing the economy to hang in there until capital investment comes back and demand from abroad picks up.

What is more, we can afford this at this time. It is fiscally sustainable and responsible. There is more than \$27 billion currently in the unemployment trust fund, more than sufficient to cover the costs extending unemployment benefits, as I and others are proposing. So this will not mean an increase in the annual deficit or in America's debt. We can do what is right for individuals, what is right for the economy, and do so in a fiscally responsible way.

I ask that we adopt this measure. It will extend unemployment benefits eligibility by 13 additional weeks for every State across the Union. It will add an additional 7 weeks for those States with the highest rates of unemployment and adjust the trigger mechanism to expand eligibility to make sure that the reality of unemployment across the Nation is reflected in the law.

Also, I ask for a new sense of urgency from this administration when it comes to promoting economic growth. The last time I was privileged to speak to my colleagues on the floor it was to call for support of the President's initiative and resolution with regard to Iraq. We generated substantial bipartisan support for that resolution. I ask the administration and our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to bring that same sense of urgency and bipartisan cooperation to the cause of improving our domestic economy. After all, in the long run it is the foundation upon which our national security is built.

There is precedent for these steps. The President's own father took these steps back in the early 1990s, expanding unemployment eligibility by the same number of weeks, including the same mechanism for determining eligibility. That proposal at that time passed by 94 to 2. It was the right thing to do to get the economy moving in the early 1990s. It is the right thing today. It received overwhelming bipartisan support at that time. It will receive, if we can get a vote, overwhelming bipartisan support today. It was advocated by the first President Bush. It is a cause this President Bush should also embrace to promote economic growth.

I ask we move forward with this initiative and that the President demonstrate he is truly the compassionate conservative that he campaigned to be.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 619, S. 3009, a bill to provide for a 13-week

extension of unemployment compensation; that the bill be read three times, passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table without intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. NICKLES. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I think some people are playing political games. I understand some people are interested in passing a unanimous consent agreement on unemployment compensation. I heard the request. It was to provide a 13-week extension of unemployment compensation. That is not what this bill does. I don't know how many times I have to say it on the floor. The bill provides for a 26-week extension, not a 13-week, a 26-week extension. There is a big difference.

I believe I heard the sponsors say it changes the trigger—it does change the trigger. It is not a clean extension because it changes the trigger so that more States are eligible for long-term extension. This bill has a 26-week Federal unemployment compensation extension on top of the State 26 weeks, and an additional 7 weeks for those States that have the highest unemployment compensation. That would be a total of 52 weeks—59 weeks, in some States; 52 weeks for all States, 59 weeks for some States.

It also has a section that says we should not count people who might be employed. It is a crummy bill. I have stated again my willingness to try to work with colleagues to pass a clean extension which would cost about \$7 billion instead of \$17 billion.

While we are here, there are a couple of bills I would like to pass. So I am going to be asking unanimous consent, I tell my colleagues on the Democrat side—it is my intention to propose a couple of unanimous consent requests as well.

One will be to permanently eliminate the tax on Social Security. This is a tax that passed in 1993. It was part of President Clinton's tax package. It passed by one vote in the Senate, and passed by one vote in the House. It is still the law of the land. We still tax senior citizens' Social Security benefits.

I have heard a lot of people say they wanted to eliminate it. The House passed a bill to eliminate it in 2000. Unfortunately, we have not been able to do that. Senator TIM HUTCHINSON from Arkansas has introduced legislation this Congress to do that. It has several cosponsors.

So, Mr. President, I want to notify my friends and colleagues on the Democratic side of the aisle that I intend to propound a unanimous consent request so they have a chance to respond as I have been responding on several requests.

I am going to propound a unanimous consent request to make part of the

tax bill we passed in 2001 dealing with marriage penalty relief permanent. Unfortunately, much of the tax bill that we passed in 2001 is temporary. That bill helped lessen the burden, since we found ourselves in a recession and part of that was marriage penalty relief. That provision sunsets. It stops in the year 2009 or 2010. We should make that permanent. The House has passed legislation, H.R. 4019. They passed it with an overwhelming vote, by a vote of 271 to 142. They passed it on June 13. Unfortunately, the Senate has not found time to take that legislation up. All we have to do is pass that House bill, it goes straight to the President, and he will sign it so it can become law. So I am going to propound a unanimous consent request to pass that bill.

I see my friend, the assistant Democrat leader. I will now make both of these requests.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that H.R. 4019, a bill to provide that the marriage penalty relief provisions of the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 shall be made permanent, be discharged from the Senate Committee on Finance and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration, the bill be read a third time, passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid on the table and any statements thereupon be printed in the RECORD at the appropriate place.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. On behalf of a number of Senators, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

SEVERAL SENATORS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma retains the floor.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to immediate consideration of Calendar No. 308, H.R. 3529, that all after the enacting clause be stricken, the text of S. 237, a bill by Senator HUTCHINSON, a bill to repeal the 1993 income tax increase on Social Security benefits, be printed in lieu thereof, the bill be read a third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, any statements thereupon be printed in the RECORD at the appropriate place.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is objection?

Mr. REID. On behalf of a number of Senators, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

SEVERAL SENATORS addressed the Chair.

Mr. NICKLES. I thank my friend and colleague from Nevada. I told him that two people can play these games. I would very much like to see the marriage penalty relief package that we passed in 2001 be made permanent. I would also like to see us repeal that portion at least, if not—I would like to see us, frankly, repeal the entire—President Clinton's tax package of 1993,

but certainly repeal the tax on Social Security benefits. We tried to do that. Objection was heard.

The Senate has over and over again found itself, unable in the last year and a half, to pass permanent tax relief for American citizens, not for marriage penalty relief, and not even for seniors who are paying high taxes on their Social Security benefits. I find that regrettable.

Maybe there will be a change in the makeup of the Senate in a couple of weeks and legislation such as the two I just requested consent to pass—maybe we can pass those under regular order. I hope that will be the case.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

DROUGHT RELIEF

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I was surprised to get up this morning and read the Washington Post and see that the Speaker of the House, Mr. HASTERT, said the House could pass drought relief legislation after the election, “. . . if there is a problem.”

Where has the Speaker been? If there is a problem?

Tell that to the farmers of North Dakota. This is a photo of what it looks like in southwestern North Dakota. That is a moonscape. Nothing is growing. There is no question, I would say to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, about whether or not there is a problem. There is a deep problem. This is a disastrous year.

Let me read just one letter from a farmer in North Dakota. He says:

DEAR SENATOR CONRAD:

I am a 40 year old man with a wife and 4 children. I am a third generation farmer. We enjoy farming very much but it's getting very hard to keep on going.

He continues:

When we have had good crops in the past there was no price. Now in 2002 we have no crop, no grass, no hay, and no rain, which all leads to no money.

I know it is hard for city people to understand the difficulties of farming, but it has become very hard to keep a good attitude when you are always under financial pressure. Without any disaster aid this fall, a lot of good farmers will be forced to sell, or will simply just quit.

He went on to say:

I hope and pray that you can persuade the Members of the House how serious it is out here in rural North Dakota.

I do not know of anything that could tell the story more clearly than this picture. This isn't just a small part of southwestern North Dakota. This is mile upon mile of southwestern North Dakota. This is a drought as bad or worse than the 1930s.

This has to be responded to. For the Speaker to say yesterday that the House could pass drought legislation “if there's a problem” misses the point entirely. There is a problem. It is more than a problem. It is a crisis. And it is not just in North Dakota.

How can the Speaker of the House have missed this? In Montana, in South