

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I was also encouraged by the comments of my colleague from New Mexico and others who have come to the floor endorsing some very similar suggestions. It is important that we speak today about this issue because of the OPEC meeting that is about to occur in Vienna, Austria. I want to reiterate that it is extremely important that the administration assert pressure on OPEC, the OPEC members who are meeting in Vienna, to forego their proposed 1 million barrel-per-day production cut. We do need to rein in high oil and gas prices and we need to send a strong message that cutting production of oil in OPEC is not the way to do that.

OPEC has the ability to affect price in two important ways: They can add to supply or they can talk down the price of oil on the world market. We have seen them do both in previous periods. I don't see any real action to affect the price of oil on either front at this point. We have been out of the price band—this is, I believe, this \$22 to \$28 band that OPEC has talked about—for quite some time now. At the same time that we have been way above that band, some OPEC members are talking about not only keeping production steady but actually cutting production.

This would be a very wrong-headed move. It would have adverse consequences on American consumers. I hope very much they will reconsider and I hope our administration will use its very best efforts in the next day or two to ensure that OPEC in fact does not cut production.

EXHIBIT 1

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF CONVENIENCE STORES,
Alexandria, VA, March 25, 2004.

Hon. JEFF BINGAMAN,
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Energy
and Natural Resources, Dirksen Senate Of-
fice Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR: On behalf of the retail members of the National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS), I would like to express our appreciation for your comments yesterday regarding the proliferation of boutique fuels. As the representative of an industry that sells more than 75 percent of the gasoline consumed in the United States every year, NACS has long advocated for a comprehensive fuels policy that would restore gasoline fungibility to the system without sacrificing supply.

The problems associated with the proliferation of boutique fuels are significant. As you noted yesterday, these specifications have "greatly reduced the overall flexibility and efficiency of our fuels system." We could not agree with you more. America's motor fuels system, including the refining, pipeline and storage infrastructure, was not designed to accommodate dozens of unique, non-fungible fuel blends.

Last year, NACS commissioned a study that analyzed the impact these boutique fuels have on the nation's gasoline supply and assessed the effect possible adjustments to the fuels regulatory system might have on refining capacity. Our study revealed that reducing the number of boutique fuel blends, while maintaining or improving environmental quality, will improve fungibility. However, it will also reduce the production capacity of the domestic refining system by

requiring the production of more environmentally sensitive blends, which are more difficult to produce. For this reason, an approach to boutique fuels must be carefully balanced with the preservation of supply.

Your acknowledgement of the challenges facing the petroleum industry and your interest in overcoming these challenges is greatly appreciated by the convenience store industry. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues in a non-partisan, policy-specific effort to restore efficiency and flexibility to the gasoline marketplace.

Thank you and please let me know how NACS might be of assistance.

Sincerely,

JOHN EICHBERGER,
Director, Motor Fuels.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, how much time remains of the 5 minutes I requested?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 1 minute and 10 seconds.

Mr. BINGAMAN. I ask unanimous consent for an additional 5 minutes.

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

IRAQI AND AFGHANISTAN LIBERATION MEDALS

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to speak to a bill to honor our service men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan who have served and continue to serve their country by working for a fee, independent and stable Iraq and a new Afghanistan. These missions have been difficult and the cost has been high; nearly 600 Americans have been killed and almost 3,000 Americans have been injured in Iraq, while more than 500 Americans have been injured and more than 100 U.S. servicemen and women have been lost in Afghanistan.

More than a year after the initial invasion, nearly 110,000 troops are still stationed in Iraq, working to build a new, stable beacon of freedom in the region. My fellow Senators, the liberation of Iraq is turning out to be the most significant military occupation and reconstruction effort since the end of World War II. We cannot understate the importance of the work being done there today.

The administration's focus on Iraq leaves the mission in Afghanistan incomplete. Despite constant progress there, the fighting is still not over. Recent assassinations of government officials, car bombings, and the lingering presence of terrorist forces and former Taliban fighters force thousands of our troops to stay in-country.

For their courageous efforts, the Department of Defense has decided to award our brave young men and women with the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal—GWOT—and no other medal. This is despite the fact that G.W.O.T. medal is meant for any individual who has served overseas during the war on terror and may have come within a few hundred miles of a combat zone. The dangers of serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are greater; therefore, along with my colleagues, Senators LOTT, LANDRIEU, INHOFE, and

LUGAR, I propose to correct this mistake by passing legislation authorizing the Iraq and Afghanistan Liberation Medals in addition to the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal.

While some of us in this body have not shared the administration's view on this war, we are united when it comes to supporting our troops. These young men and women from active duty, National Guard and Reserves are all volunteers and exemplify the very essence of what it means to be a patriot. We believe that what they are doing in Iraq and Afghanistan today differs from military expeditionary activities such as peacekeeping operations or no-fly zone enforcement.

They continue to serve, even though they do not know when they will return home to family and friends. They continue to serve despite the constant threat to their lives and the tremendous hardships they face.

There is a difference between an Expeditionary Medal and a Campaign medal. We only need to look at an excerpt from U.S. Army Qualifications for the Armed Forces Expeditionary medal and Kosovo Campaign medal. In order to receive the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, you don't need to go to war. You only need to be "placed in such a position that in the opinion of the Joint Chief of Staff, hostile action by foreign armed forces was imminent even though it does not materialize."

To earn the Kosovo Campaign medal, the standard is higher. A military member must:

Be engaged in actual combat, or duty that is equally hazardous as combat duty, during the Operation with armed opposition, regardless of time in the Area of Engagement. Or while participating in the Operation, regardless of time, [the service member] is wounded or injured and required medical evacuation from the Area of Engagement.

Many within the military agree that there is a difference. According to the Army Times, "Campaign medals help establish an immediate rapport with individuals checking into a unit." An expeditionary medal like the GWOT does not necessarily denote combat. A campaign medal is designed to recognize military personnel who have risked their lives in combat.

Campaign medals matter.

"When a Marine shows up at a new duty station, commanders look first at his decorations and his physical fitness score—the first to see where he's been, the second to see if he can hang. They show what you've done and how serious you are," said Gunnery Sgt. James Cuneo. "If you're a good Marine, people are going to award you when it comes time. . . ."

My fellow colleagues, it is time.

We must recognize the sacrifice of our young men and women who liberated Iraq, including great Americans like Army Specialist Joseph Hudson from Alamogordo, NM, who was held as a prisoner of war. The Nation was captivated as we watched Specialist Hudson being interrogated by the enemy.

Asked to divulge his military occupation, Specialist Hudson stared defiantly into the camera and said, "I follow orders." Those of us with sons and daughters were united in worry with Specialist Hudson's family. The entire nation rejoiced when he was liberated.

We have also asked much from our Reserve and National Guard forces. The reconstruction of Iraq would not be possible without the commitment and sacrifice of the 170,000 Guard and Reservists currently on active duty.

My colleagues, Senators LOTT, LANDRIEU, INHOFE, LUGAR, and I are committed to honoring our over 200,000 heroes who liberated Iraq and Afghanistan. We believe that current administration policy does a disservice to our fighting men and women. Therefore we propose, in addition to the GWOT medal, new decorations that characterize the real missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, two that are distinctive and honor their sacrifice, the Iraq and Afghanistan Liberation medals.

What we do today is not without precedent; Congress has been responsible for recognizing the sacrifice and courage of our military forces throughout history. Congress has had a significant and historically central role in authorizing military decoration. Our Nation's highest military decorations were authorized by Congress, including: the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Air Force Cross, the Navy Cross, the Army's Distinctive Service Cross, the Silver Star, and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

We have also authorized campaign and liberation medals similar to what we hope to accomplish with this legislation. A partial list includes the Spanish War Service Medal, the Army Occupation of Germany Medal, the World War II Victory Medal, the Berlin Airlift Medal, the Korean Service Medal and the Prisoner of War Medal.

The list goes on and on. The great men and women of our military forces are doing their jobs every day in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is time to do our job and honor them with an award that truly stands for their heroic service, the Iraq and Afghanistan Liberation Medals.

While some of us in this body have not shared the administration's view on the war, we are united when it comes to supporting our troops. These young men and women from Active Duty, from the National Guard, and from the Reserves, are all volunteers. They exemplify the very essence of what it means to be patriotic.

It is extremely important that we take action. Many in this body will remember that we proposed to do this last year as we were considering the Defense authorization bill. Our effort was not successful, although many Senators voted to go ahead with this legislative provision. The administration was not in favor, and the amendment failed.

I am glad we are able to reintroduce it this year. I urge my colleagues to co-

sponsor this legislation and work with us to find an appropriate time when we can bring it up for a vote, or we can add it as an amendment to one of the bills that will be working its way through the Senate later this year.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I want to speak on the welfare reform bill.

This has been an extraordinarily successful initiative which we began a few years ago. Its success is tied with the fact that States have been given a great deal more flexibility in the area of how they handle their welfare account. The fact is, we have set up as a purpose, as a government, that people who are on welfare will be given the opportunity, the skills, and the incentives to move off of welfare and move into a work environment, which is something that gives them personal credibility and personal self-respect, and at the same time assists us in reducing the public welfare rolls. It has been a huge and overwhelming success.

One of the elements of moving off of welfare, of course, is the need of parents to have transitional support, especially single mothers as they go into the workforce while dealing with their children during the time they are working; in other words, some sort of childcare assistance.

As part of this bill, we intend to offer an amendment for reauthorization of the Child Care Development Block Grant Program, called the Caring for Children Act of 2003.

This amendment came out of the committee which I chair, the Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee, unanimously. It came out with bipartisan support, obviously.

It is an attempt to update our childcare block grant initiative and make it more meaningful for the issues of today. It also gives the dollars it needs to be effective.

The bill will not only stress increased spending, it has \$1 billion of new funding from the discretionary accounts.

Earlier today, there was a vote on an initiative to add \$6 billion over 5 years to the childcare development grant. That money would be mandatory, and it was not paid for; it was outside the budget. There was a euphemistic attempt to pay for it—a superficial attempt—actually, what amounted to the ultimate shell game attempt as an offset which was cited and which has been used on, I believe, 17 different occasions as a claimed offset in this body.

The real effect of the bill was to go way outside the budget and add a huge new tranche of dollars beyond the budget which would be fine had it been realistically offset. But it wasn't.

This bill has in it a true increase which is an appropriate increase of \$1 billion over that period of the bill. That is a significant infusion of new funds. Plus it addresses some of the concerns of the program, one of the concerns being as children are getting childcare they should also be getting

some sort of development in the capacity of learning. Obviously, these are very young children. But they should have a learning component in their childcare experience, something that will put them in a position where they will be able to be at a level where their peers are—other young children who are receiving childcare.

It has language in it which encourages the States to include a voluntary guideline initiative in the area of prereading and language skills. The absolutely critical essence of learning is language skills and the ability to do phonics and identify letters and be able to get ready for reading. This bill has in it that language.

It also has in it a commitment to low-income parents. At least 70 percent of these dollars has the flow-through stage, actually, to the parents—in many cases a single parent. So the parent is getting the benefits. And we aren't simply siphoning it off into the bureaucracy, which often happens, regrettably, through administrative overhead but, rather, directing this money to the hands of the parents, especially the low-income parent so the parent can use this to assist them in transitioning off the welfare rolls by taking care of their children during the workday.

It gives parents a significant amount of choice. They can use different daycare types of facilities. Some which are faith-based are allowed to be used, or they can use it even if it is being provided by relatives and neighbors. That is important.

Further, the bill addresses a need to make sure that States focus on improving the quality of childcare. This is a very significant concern that many of us have, which is that a lot of the childcare today is, unfortunately, not of a quality that gives the child the support services they need or the academic assistance they might need in order to be brought up to speed with peers who are in different childcare delivery systems.

It allows States to set aside a certain percentage of the money in order to assess quality and try to improve quality. This gives the States more flexibility in this area, but it also gives them an impetus to go in the right direction.

It is, therefore, a bill which does a lot of good.

As I mentioned, it was reported out of our committee unanimously. It will be, hopefully, added to the base bill either by a formal vote or as part of the managers' amendment.

But we have to get back to the fundamental quandary which confronts us today, which is that the base welfare reform bill that is pending before the Congress is being held up by the other side of the aisle.

This is becoming a pattern of obstruction which we have seen throughout this session of the Congress, and it appears its intensity is actually increasing. Bills are coming to the floor