

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business until 4:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Senator from North Dakota, Mr. DORGAN, recognized to speak for up to 30 minutes.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum, and I ask the time during the quorum call be equally divided between the majority and minority.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FOOD SECURITY CRISIS

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise today to highlight the growing food security crisis which faces the United States and countries around the world. The short-term challenges we face as a result of this food security crisis are economic, strategic, political, and humanitarian. All of these challenges we face are already being faced by the most vulnerable in our society.

Here in the United States, this crisis comes on the heels of so many other trying circumstances confronting poor and working families across America. Our Nation is facing an economic recession and ever-rising unemployment rates. Many of those who remain employed find themselves working more hours and yet earning less because their wages have not kept up with inflation.

While their incomes have declined, the unprecedented cost of food and home energy has continued to soar. Many of these same families are also facing a mortgage and housing crisis which may force them to forego ownership of the house they once considered their slice of the American dream.

In short, many families, who years or even months ago were living comfortably, are now struggling to get by. As a result, the increase in food prices over the last several months has added one more pressure to already overburdened American families.

Increasingly, these families are stretched to the breaking point and are turning to Federal food assistance pro-

grams and food banks for some measure of relief. I have seen this trend repeated firsthand at food banks and in headlines across Pennsylvania.

A couple of examples. This is the headline of the Allentown Morning Call: "Heavy Demand at Food Banks, Kitchens Is a Grim Economic Indicator for Valley" [meaning the Lehigh Valley].

The Scranton Times Tribune: "More Seeking Food Stamps: Recipients in Pennsylvania Rise 9.5 percent."

The Philadelphia Inquirer: "Working Poor Struggle to Get By."

The Pittsburgh Tribune Review: "Demand for Food Stamps 'Very Close' to Record."

All across the State and across the country, it is the same headlines, the same story, the same economic trauma, because of a food security challenge we face. The data shows evidence of this disturbing trend. The demand for food stamps in Pennsylvania is skyrocketing.

Back in December of 2000, before this current President took office, approximately 757,000 Pennsylvanians—1 out of every 16—were enrolled in the food stamp program. But this past December, 7 years later, that number has risen dramatically to 1.4 million Pennsylvanians, accounting for 1 out of every 10 State residents. This trend shows no sign of stopping.

From December 2007 to March of 2008, Pennsylvania enrolled an average of 10,000 new individuals in food stamps every month, bringing the total enrollment to 1.18 million. But the situation in our State is far from unique. All across the country the number of individuals enrolling in the Food Stamp Program continues to rise at historic rates. From December 2006 to December 2007, more than 40 States saw recipient numbers rise, and in seven of those States the 1-year rate of growth topped 10 percent. The Congressional Budget Office predicts that starting in fiscal year 2009, 28 million Americans will be enrolled in the Food Stamp Program, the most ever enrolled in this program since its inception 40 years ago.

For the millions of Americans struggling from the effects of economic recession and rising food prices but making too much to qualify for food stamps, food banks can provide some measure of respite by providing food to those who could not otherwise afford it. Unfortunately, these food banks are struggling as well from a combination of increasing food prices, decreasing donations, and increased demand.

Wholesale prices for such foods as eggs, flour, rice, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products have dramatically spiked in the last 8 years. For food banks this price spike resulted in diminished purchasing power, translating into the availability of fewer supplies to meet an ever-increasing demand. While there is no accurate nationwide or even statewide data to show the effects increased prices and

increased demand are having on food bank supplies, we know from news articles, television stories, and firsthand reports from those working at food banks that this food security crisis has adversely affected emergency food assistance programs in every State.

The Senate-passed version of the 2007 Food and Energy Security Act, otherwise known as the farm bill, includes several measures intended to shore up Federal antihunger assistance programs. In fact, 67 percent of the funding of this bill is dedicated to protecting Americans from hunger. Provisions incorporated in the bill combat hunger, and they include measures to increase the value of food stamp benefits and language to increase the annual level of Federal commodity purchases for food banks from \$140 million to \$250 million.

Unfortunately, while the House and Senate are making strides in bringing their differences together, the longer it takes to complete this bill, the longer struggling Americans must wait for some measure of relief. Rising food prices and their effect on poor and working families are only part of the food security equation. While part of the increase in food prices can be attributed to the rising fuel and energy costs needed to produce and distribute these products, the far bigger driver behind those increased costs is lack of supply. Internationally, as well as domestically, food prices have been affected by severe shortages and record inflation of major food commodities such as corn, rice, soybeans, and wheat.

The head of the World Food Program has called the global food crisis a "silent tsunami," affecting the world's most vulnerable without regard to geography or traditional borders. World Bank President Robert Zoellick has said that surging food costs could translate into "seven lost years" in the fight against worldwide poverty.

Weather disasters and crop losses have caused devastating shortages across Africa and the Asia-Pacific, leading to historically low levels of world stocks of key commodities. Australia, one of the leading worldwide wheat producers and exporters, has endured several consecutive years of drought and last year lost 60 percent of its total wheat harvest. Floods in Asia have destroyed global production centers of wheat and rice as well.

The rapid economic growth of China and India have lifted millions out of poverty, but it has also succeeded in creating a new middle class complete with Western appetites for a diet of meat and protein. While foods such as rice and wheat remain a staple of the traditional diet, increased demand from China and India for meat produced from grain-fed animals is putting a strain on global supply and will only grow over time. Many of the commodity supplies these countries once exported are now being used for domestic production. Threatened by shortages at home, many countries have

banned exports of critical foodstuffs, disrupting supplies for neighbors and trading partners and sending shock waves through the global markets.

Import-dependent countries such as the Philippines are left with no choice but to pay top dollar to forestall future crises. Others have added artificial incentives to attract food imports. These counterproductive actions only exacerbate food shortages and foster a beggar-thy-neighbor approach. The United States must work with the U.N. and other international actors to press countries against adopting such counterproductive measures. We must start looking at mid- and long-term strategies for helping countries deal with this crisis.

Higher food prices not only increase the potential for humanitarian disasters, they can also spark political instability and impact U.S. foreign policy. We have seen the devastating effect the food shortage has had on developing nations around the world, sparking violence and riots and putting added pressure on already fragile and underresourced governments.

Last week we saw protesters in Haiti chanting "we are hungry" and forcing out the Prime Minister. Food riots erupted in Egypt and Ethiopia, and troops were used in Pakistan and Thailand to protect crops and storage centers. According to the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization, 37 countries are now facing a food security crisis and are at risk of a food-related upheaval.

In areas of vital concern to U.S. national security, such as Afghanistan, the food crisis threatens hard-fought progress we have achieved in peace, stability, and reconciliation. In Darfur, where the refugees and internationally displaced have already suffered under war, famine, and genocide, the international community may be forced to cut food supplies. The United States can serve its national security and humanitarian objectives by fully funding overseas emergency food assistance programs.

In March, I sent a letter to the Appropriations Committee along with Senator DURBIN and a number of other Members of the Senate calling for a \$200 million increase in the fiscal year 2008 supplemental budget request to address the predicted shortfall in U.S. food assistance programs. Although President Bush directed the Agriculture Secretary to take out \$200 million from the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust to help with the crisis, this is only a short-term fix. The United States must do more by increasing our bilateral and multilateral contributions in funding to replenish the trust.

Supplemental funding in PL 480 title II programs is essential to maintain current food aid programs at current levels and meet the increased cost of food, freight, and fuel production. America can do more, and we must. While I don't claim to have all the an-

swers to this mounting domestic and international crisis, I do believe this is an issue deserving the full attention of the Senate. We need to begin this effort with final passage of the 2007 Food and Energy Security Act and continue by including funding for domestic and international food aid in the supplemental appropriations bill. But these measures in and of themselves will not be enough.

We must act, we must legislate. The moral gravity of this food security crisis cannot be overstated. It is a matter of economic justice. It is also about preserving human life and alleviating suffering. It is also a matter of national security.

I yield the floor, suggest the absence of a quorum, and ask unanimous consent that time under the quorum call be evenly divided.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed such time under morning business as I might consume.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I just got back from Wyoming. I am in Wyoming almost every weekend. I travel to a different part of the State each time so I can see all the people. As a result, I do not do any polls. If you talk to more people in a weekend than pollsters cover when they do something, you can get a pretty good feel for what is happening.

I did run across a national poll, and the poll said the No. 1 concern on the minds of people in America was jobs and the economy. They said the No. 2 concern was health care. There is an interesting little anomaly in No. 1 and No. 2, which is when you talk to people about No. 1, jobs and the economy, one of the reasons they are concerned about jobs and the economy is because they don't want to lose their health insurance. If their job disappears, they are out there in the market and they don't have the coverage.

So I am going to talk about health care today. I have been talking to a lot of folks about health care, which isn't difficult because it is on everyone's mind these days. During the last work period—and we sometimes call it a recess, but I prefer to call it a work period because I usually travel from 1,000 to 5,000 miles around my State during that time—I went on a 10-stop tour of Wyoming. In just over 3 days, we drove

over 1,200 miles and visited 10 towns and I met with lots of Wyomingites. I even spoke to people at several stops who live outside those 10 communities but drove miles and miles to come to our meeting. Wyoming does have miles and miles of miles and miles—about 400 miles on a side—and it is a long way between towns.

The dedication and passion of the people who live in the towns and the people who drove all those miles strengthens my commitment to getting something more done about health care. We need to do something. A lot of people feel more economically secure when they have health insurance. They know that if they have health insurance and something happens or they get sick, they will be able to get the care they need without mortgaging their home or going bankrupt. That is another concern on their mind. Nobody should have to worry about that. Everybody should be able to carry a health insurance card in their wallet.

The news isn't all bad, however. There have been plenty of wonderful things that have come from our health care system in recent years. Each year, new technologies are being invented and new drugs are being created that allow people to live longer and healthier lives. Researchers are finding cures for diseases, and parents are able to take care of sick children. They are able to take them to clinics in shopping centers and pharmacies to get throat cultures and flu shots. Plenty of good things are happening, but we can do better.

Now, during my Wyoming work periods, my wife Diana and I travel around and talk to folks about health care. I listen to what they tell me about the problems they are having and I bring that information back and I compare it to what my colleagues are saying. One of the things I do is to teach the East about the West. So when I am in DC, I usually have to explain to folks how Wyoming is different, how a plan designed around New York or Massachusetts would not work for Wyoming. I have to tell them it can be hard to get doctors and nurses to come to Wyoming. The smaller the town, the harder it is to attract good people. I remind the people in the East that we have a lot of people who work at the mines and in the oil patch and in the natural gasfields. They work hard for their hourly wages doing difficult and dangerous tasks. The type of health care they need is different than the type someone working at a computer needs. How do we help the construction worker and the computer technician both get better health care that fits their unique needs at a more reasonable price?

My position on the Senate Health Committee has allowed me to do a lot of research on this subject. I have talked to patients, health care providers, scientists, and financial advisers. You name it and we came up with a plan that I think is flexible enough to work for everybody.