

our low-income people since then. So the standard deduction in 1996 was \$134 a month. If it had not been frozen in 1996, the standard deduction today would be \$188 a month, not \$134 a month. We could not go to \$188. We didn't have enough money. So we raised it to \$144 a month, but we indexed it for the future so we won't have this benefit erosion in the future. It gives you some idea of what is happening to low-income families.

Think about this. If we had not frozen that benefit level in 1996 at \$134, it would be \$188 a month right now. Yet, we could only raise it to \$144. We did our job with the money we had. We also provide more money to families with childcare expenses by removing entirely the cap on childcare deductions. We also raised the minimum benefit by almost 50 percent and indexed that also to future inflation, and the asset level is indexed forward. We were unable to raise it because of money concerns, but we did index it for the future. No longer will erosion take place because of inflation.

We increased the food bank supplies by adding some \$1.2 billion to the Emergency Food Assistance Program. We provide \$1 billion in new funding over the next 10 years for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program for kids in schools. This program, which I started in the 2002 farm bill, when fully implemented, will serve nearly all children in our poorest elementary schools—that is, the schools that have at least 90 percent of their kids eligible for free and reduced-price meals. In those schools that would fully implement this, almost every poor kid will get free fresh fruits and vegetables during the day.

To meet the soaring worldwide demand for food and energy crops, millions of acres of land are being brought into production. A lot of this land is environmentally fragile. To address that challenge, we authorize nearly \$4.5 billion in additional funds for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program over the next 10 years. Again, these are payments to farmers, to incentivize and encourage them to be even better stewards of our soil, water, air, and wildlife habitats on working lands—rather than taking land out of production. Combined spending for these two programs, the EQIP program and the CSP program, will total more than \$27.7 billion in the next 10 years.

With this support, the Conservation Stewardship Program will enroll nearly 13 million acres each year. To participate, producers will have to maintain and expand environmental benefits by adopting rigorous conservation and management practices.

The Wetlands Reserve Program also gets a number of improvements, with an additional \$1.3 billion to implement those improvements. We have simplified and streamlined the process of valuing property and getting into the Wetlands Reserve Program. Over the

next 5 years, this money will provide for a total enrollment in the Wetlands Reserve Program of over 3 million acres.

This bill also creates a new and interesting focus on restoring the Chesapeake Bay. This money covers the Chesapeake Bay watershed. This is very important to Members of Congress and the Senators from Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. We put \$438 million of new money into the environmental and conservation needs of the Chesapeake Bay Initiative.

On the energy side, all-time gasoline prices, as we know, are wreaking havoc with family budgets. But as studies have shown, without the inputs of ethanol, prices at the pump would be as much as 40 cents a gallon higher. Well, this new farm bill will dramatically ramp up the agricultural sector's capacity to produce clean, renewable energy. We provide more than \$1 billion to expand the supply of biofuels made from biomass and crop byproducts other than grain. We also provide new assistance to farmers who would grow energy crops, and to entrepreneurs who will build biorefineries to convert the biomass into biofuel.

Like any compromise bill resulting from hard bargaining among regional and other interests, this farm bill, I suppose, is far from perfect—perfection being in the eye of the beholder, of course. I don't think anyone, on either the Democratic or Republican sides, would say they love every little thing in this bill. As the chair of this conference committee, I can tell you it has been a long and difficult road, but the end product is a bill with significant reforms, urgent new investments in nutrition, conservation, energy, and the health of our school kids.

That is why I was disappointed last week when Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer held a news conference to say the President would veto the bill. The administration said we didn't cut payments to farmers in times of high farm income. But this administration itself actually proposed increasing direct payments, which are least responsive to high prices in income.

By contrast, Congress determined that it makes more sense to ensure the programs that help producers manage risk are as effective as possible if farm revenue is disrupted because of price or production shortfalls. We have only added to the income support if prices or revenue declines. That is the right approach. The administration said, no, we will put more money in there even if you have high prices. We said that is the wrong approach. The right approach is counter-cyclical. That is what we do. We have the support in place so it is available if needed.

What the administration and USDA proposed would have increased payments regardless of the prices. Congress correctly rejected the administration's proposal.

Finally, when the Senate passed the farm bill in December on the Senate

floor, the bill was approved with 79 votes—the largest majority vote any farm bill has received since 1949. I was proud of that vote, being chairman of the committee. The bill was further strengthened in the conference process. And we went, I believe, over halfway to accommodate the President's wishes and concerns. He said the income limits weren't low enough. The administration proposed \$200,000. As I said earlier, for nonfarm income it used to be \$2.5 million. We brought it to \$500,000. That is way over halfway in meeting what the President had proposed. So, again, like any compromise bill, this bill has things in it that I suppose any one of us could say is not quite right. But as a compromise bill, it includes real reforms, major advances in conservation, renewable energy, rural economic development, nutrition, and help for our kids in schools.

I am proud of this bill. I hope we have a strong vote in the Senate. I still hope the President will sign it. If he doesn't, I am hopeful we will have the votes to override the veto and put the bill in place for the future of our country.

How much time do I have remaining?
The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Two minutes.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I wish to discuss briefly the matter of the collective bargaining for our firefighters and public safety employees. I am an original cosponsor of S. 2123. Decker Ploehn, the city administrator in Bettendorf, Iowa, wrote me:

I have represented both sides of the table [he was police chief at one time] and for the last 18 years have successfully negotiated 5 contracts with our police union because of strong good collective bargaining laws in Iowa. This system has great checks and balances with binding arbitration and a "no strike" clause. It causes both sides to come to the table and to make meaningful concessions. We have done so in Bettendorf quite successfully. That is all we're asking for with this legislation—to give public safety officers elsewhere this kind of opportunity.

Many of our Federal workers, such as Capitol Police, Border Patrol agents, Customs agents, immigration enforcement officers, have the right of collective bargaining. It helps them to serve our Nation's security interests.

Again, it is time that we provide this now to the 21 States where our public safety people are not allowed to bargain collectively. This bill passed the House by 314 to 97. Hopefully, it will pass the Senate with an equally large vote.

If you ask any safety officer, they will tell you that they want the tools to do the best job that they can do. These are not the kinds of jobs that people take to get rich. Public safety workers have a different calling—they want to serve their communities. These are the kind of people who showed up from all over the country to help the victims of the attacks on September 11, 2001. Without concern for

their personal safety or compensation, our Nation's first responders are always there for us. That is why they need a seat at the table to discuss their equipment, training, and staffing needs in order to do the best possible job.

That is why I am an original cosponsor of S. 2123, Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act. Not only will this legislation allow police officers and firefighters to band together and share their ideas about how to improve their workplace and therefore our safety, but when they can negotiate for good pay and benefits, we are able to attract the best possible workforce to most ably serve its citizens. This bill would only affect the 21 states that don't already provide their public safety officers with the right to bargain collectively. States that do not currently provide these protections can choose to establish their own collective bargaining systems, or may ask the assistance of the Federal Labor Relations Authority in doing so.

As I mentioned, Decker Ploehn is the city administrator in Bettendorf, IA. I followed him around on a work day back when he was the chief of police there. He contacted my office last week to talk about this bill. He said:

I have represented both sides of the table and for the last 18 years have successfully negotiated 5 contracts with our police union because of strong good collective bargaining laws in Iowa. This system has great checks and balances with binding arbitration and a "no strike" clause. It causes both sides to come to the table and to make meaningful concessions. We have done so in Bettendorf quite successfully.

That's all we are asking for with this legislation—to give public safety officers elsewhere this kind of opportunity.

I would also like to point out that this bill doesn't create a new right to strike. I know there will be some vehement antiunion forces out there scaring people into thinking that somehow this legislation will reduce public safety by creating a situation where police and firefighters will be leaving their posts in labor disputes. It is simply not true.

We must ensure that we have seasoned, dedicated officers by giving them a voice in the workplace. The best way to do that is to uphold their freedom of association, which will enhance the safety of millions of Americans who rely on their services every day. As I said, similar legislation has passed the House by a vote of 314 to 97, and I am hopeful that Congress will soon approve this issue of basic fairness and freedom.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alabama.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Iowa for his work on the Agriculture bill. It is time we get this bill done. I hope we can do

so. I am sure he would agree with some of the statements the Bush administration has made with regard to the question of ethanol that it is not the driving force behind the increase in food prices. This administration has never been overwhelmingly in favor of ethanol, but they have concluded that 2 percent to 3 percent of the increase in food prices deals with ethanol.

We certainly made some progress in reducing the number of gallons we import around the world, sending wealth around the world because we have farmers and American workers who are producing this ethanol. Iowa is in the center of that, and I congratulate the leadership of the Senator from Iowa over the years. It is a net positive for the country.

ENERGY PRICES

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I wish to speak about energy prices because this is a national crisis; it is a matter this Congress needs to deal with.

Prices are at record highs. According to AAA, the average price of regular unleaded gasoline this morning was \$3.71 a gallon. For an average family with two cars, that could well mean \$70 to \$100 a month extra money out of their budget to get the same number of gallons they bought 2 or 3 years ago. This is particularly troubling since 60 percent of the oil we import comes from abroad, and a big portion of that money the American family pays is going to foreign governments hostile to the United States, in some instances. And, it is just not healthy. In my view, it also cannot be disputed that this wealth transfer is a major factor in the economic slowdown we are experiencing today.

The question we in Congress have to ask is, What are we going to do about it? I believe there is a simple answer with many complex parts. The simple answer is, let's get busy doing what works, what we know will work. Certainly, let's not do things that make the situation worse, that is going to drive up the price of energy even more, and that is being proposed in this Senate. It is time to take a long road back to a sound energy policy that can and will bring down the price of gasoline. Permanently? I don't know. We see economies around the world growing, nations such as China that have about one automobile for every 20 people, and we average two automobiles per family in the United States. They are coming into that. They are going to continue to grow, have more cars. South America is growing. Other areas of the world are growing. They are utilizing more energy. They have bigger houses and they have more automobiles and the supply is not going to be able to continue to increase.

I want to talk about the reality today and the fact that I believe energy prices are higher than they need to be, and there are some things we can do to improve them.

Congress has done some things. We increased fuel efficiency. Last year we passed, and the President signed into law, the Energy Independence and Security Act. Among its provisions, this measure raises the CAFE standards, the automobile mileage standards, to 35 miles per gallon for an automobile manufacturer's entire fleet by 2020. That is moving. We think we can do that. I supported it. I believe we can get to that goal. I am confident we can.

Prior to this step of going to 35 miles per gallon, CAFE standards were just 27.5 miles per gallon for automobiles and 22 miles for light trucks and SUVs. So raising the standard to 35 miles overall will certainly reduce oil demand by ensuring that we travel further per gallon of gas, we get more benefit from each gallon of gas.

I hope Americans, looking at the prices and looking at our national interest and not being so dependent on foreign oil, will seek ways in their own families to save money for themselves and help America by reducing unnecessary utilization of energy. Yet reducing demand through increased efficiency is not the only solution. Our population is growing, and other factors are at work. We are not going to be able to conserve our way out of this problem. We use more energy as the population grows and as people make more money. In order to produce this additional energy, more must be done to increase clean American production of energy. We can do that. The United States has significant reserves of oil at home, and this Congress has the ability to allow these reserves to be produced.

According to the Department of Interior and the U.S. Geological Survey, approximately 119 billion barrels of oil exist on and offshore in the United States. Remember, we produce 40 percent of the energy we utilize today for automobiles. That is liquid energy, and we can produce more of it. It will have an impact on the global price if we increase in the months to come the amount of oil we produce at home.

Developing traditional energy sources of oil is not the only way to increase the supply and reduce the cost of gasoline. The United States has an immense supply of unconventional oil called oil shale. The Congressional Research Service—that is our independent research service in Congress—estimates this country's oil shale reserves to be the equivalent—hold your hat—the equivalent of approximately 2 trillion barrels of oil—trillion barrels. We utilize about 5 billion a year. That is eight times the amount of Saudi Arabia's oil reserves. And we also have an abundant supply of coal which can be converted into gasoline using technology currently proven in South Africa.

This is a step we need to work on and to take. We realize we have to do clean coal, we have to do clean technology in the oil shale area, and we have to understand that it will probably create more CO₂ than just producing a barrel