

13 weeks beyond the ordinary 26-week eligibility period. In States such as Rhode Island, where people have been hardest hit, jobless workers would receive an additional 13 weeks of unemployment compensation. This critical measure was modeled after a bill introduced in January by Senator TED KENNEDY, a true champion of working Americans. It passed the House of Representatives last week with a strong bipartisan vote.

As my colleagues know, unemployment insurance is just that—insurance. Millions of Americans go out pounding the pavement each and every day looking for work to support themselves and their families. They find work, they work hard, and they earn their paychecks. As part of an employee's compensation, employers pay into the unemployment insurance system so that workers will be covered if they lose their jobs through no fault of their own. Unemployment benefits help hard-working men and women in this terrible Bush economy cover bills and living expenses while they search for a new job. The Emergency Extended Unemployment Compensation Act could help over 3 million Americans pay the mortgage or the rent or feed their families, as they continue to navigate a perilous job market. In Rhode Island alone, there are more than 18,000 people in need of a job, and their benefits either already have or will soon run out.

I have heard the argument that people would not be motivated to find work if we extend this benefit; that they need this little spur to get off the couch and out into the workforce. In my experience, this is a ridiculous argument, a demeaning argument, one that is completely disengaged from the day-to-day experience of regular Rhode Islanders, from ordinary Americans, a true beltway special of an argument. This is a hard-working country, and it is in tough economic times. Good people are hurting. We should gather together around this legislation, support them as they try to get back into the workforce, and pass this piece of legislation.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. TESTER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRODUCTION TAX CREDITS

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I rise to emphasize the importance of extending the production tax credits for renewable energy in the tax package we are voting on today at 2:15. These tax credits have helped create a strong and growing renewable energy industry, not only for wind power but also for

geothermal, biomass, and landfill gas. Wind power, especially in a State such as Montana and across the country, is critically important, but we have a long way to go before renewable sources of energy can have the full impact on lowering energy costs and fighting climate change. That is why these tax credits are so very important.

Last year the United States installed more than 52 hundred megawatts of wind power, enough to power a million and a half households for an entire year. Put another way, if the population—every man, woman, and child in Montana and Wyoming—each had their own house, there would be a million and a half homes.

All that wind power was about a \$9 billion investment into the economy. Wind now powers over 4.5 million homes in the United States. At this rate, the United States will overtake Germany as the world's leader in wind power next year, but only if we extend this tax credit. Unfortunately, everything grinds to a halt if the tax credits are not extended.

Congress has let these tax credits lapse before. Each time we have seen growth in the renewable energy industry flatline. This chart shows exactly what happens when we refuse to extend the tax credits. Over the last 9 or 10 years, you can see where the high bars are, where wind energy megawatts have gone on. That is with the tax credits. When we failed to extend tax credits, we see virtually no growth in wind energy.

I know a lot of my colleagues will be voting to extend these credits by year's end, but waiting until the last minute is just as bad as letting them expire. Right now wind developers are working out financing for future projects. They cannot move these projects forward without certainty. That means projects that are starting right now will stall if we don't re-up these tax credits today.

We have heard a lot for the last few months about energy costs and climate change. Renewable energy is attractive because it can help us get a handle on both problems. Wind is getting more and more affordable and more efficient each year, especially as fossil fuel costs go up. The wind power capacity added last year accounted for 30 percent of all new energy brought online. Because of the wind, we are keeping 28 million tons of carbon dioxide out of the air. That is 28 million tons. There is no more efficient way to help fight climate change than by supporting the tax credits that drive renewable energy. It is just common sense.

Last month, the Department of Energy reported that the United States can get 20 percent of its power from wind by the year 2030, but we need to quit talking about wind power and get some more turbines off the ground and into the air. Wind power means real dollars and cents and real jobs and economic development, especially for rural America.

The first commercial wind farm in Montana started operating in 2005 in Wheatland County. Wheatland County has a population of about 2,000 people and a median household income of about \$24,000 a year. In 2007, the wind farm paid over half a million dollars in property taxes to State and local governments. That included nearly a quarter of a million dollars to the local school district. It brought in jobs and royalty revenue for landowners.

Wheatland County, as you can tell by the name, is a farming, agricultural county. Folks there have spent the last century cursing the wind. Today, the local Chamber of Commerce calls Wheatland County the Wind Energy Capital of the United States. Next weekend, Wheatland County is putting on its first Festival of the Wind. Their slogan is to "honor the wind, celebrate our community, and move forward to a vital future."

With high gas and food prices, wind power is not just a mirage on the horizon. In fact, we have only skimmed the surface of our potential. To put things in perspective, Montana produces about 150 megawatts of wind-generated electricity. Montana is almost exactly the same size as Germany. Germany has about 22,000 megawatts of wind power. The entire United States has only 16,000 megawatts. Montana will double its wind production this year. Next year, we hope to have a new wind energy transmission line between Montana and Alberta, and we will double it again. But we need that production tax credit in place, not only for next year but well into the future.

Already this year, things have started to slow as developers anxiously watch Congress. One wind farm currently under construction is racing the clock to start selling power before year's end. Developers are scrambling to take advantage of the production tax credit. Their plans for several other wind farms are on hold until the production tax credit is passed here.

I cannot overstate the significance of the production tax credit to my State of Montana and throughout rural America for economic development. But our country cannot afford to let it lapse because of climate change and because of high energy costs.

High costs might be an underestimation. I just read yesterday that companies are raising power prices to the tune of 29 percent. That is 29 percent. That means ordinary folks all across this country are going to have to make some very difficult decisions as they sit around their kitchen tables. We cannot afford to sit back and just talk about it. It is time to get to work, and the work starts today by passing this extension, not by waiting until the end of the year.

That is why I appreciate the leadership of Senator BAUCUS on continuing to bring this measure forward. I believe that passing an extension now will send a good signal to business that Congress is serious about wind power.

Congress can invest in renewable energy that will help control energy costs and fight climate change. I urge my colleagues once again to support this measure and to vote yes and pass it today.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, are we out of the quorum call?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are out of the quorum call.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that our remaining time be yielded back.

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND JOB CREATION ACT OF 2008—MOTION TO PROCEED

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 6049, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 767, H.R. 6049, an act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide incentives for energy production and conservation, to extend certain expiring provisions, to provide individual income tax relief, and for other purposes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 12:30 p.m. shall be equally divided and controlled by the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Louisiana is recognized.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I have townhall meetings all around Louisiana on a very regular basis. At these meetings we discuss a number of crucial issues facing all of us. Lately, of course, it has been dominated by sky-high gasoline prices and the need for a coherent energy policy. But what I hear more than anything else as I reach out to my constituents all around the State, the biggest, most important sentiment I hear is: When are most folks in Congress going to stop playing political games and actually act? When are most folks in Washington going to stop posturing and arguing just toward the next election and take care of the people's business? Unfortunately, I believe this exercise we have going on on the Senate floor is yet another example of the posturing

and of the political gamesmanship that feeds that understandable frustration.

We are going to have a vote coming up later today on the Democratic tax extenders bill. This is a pure political exercise and a pure waste of time. Whether you are for it or against it, whether you like most provisions in it or not, one thing is perfectly clear: This Democratic partisan bill is going nowhere. It doesn't have the support in the Senate. In addition to that, there is a veto threat—a very crystal-clear veto threat—from President Bush. That is for substantive reasons. There are significant objections to the bill—I share most of them—with what is included in this package, things such as a huge earmark to build a train in New York, a new tax break for trial lawyers, expansion of the Davis-Bacon Act, and \$55 billion of taxes.

The point isn't the substance. Whether you agree with the substance or not, the point is this bill is going nowhere, and therefore to call it up again and again and to posture and to make speeches is just a political exercise and a waste of time. It is perfectly clear from the vote we took last week that this package doesn't have near the 60 votes required in the Senate to pass it through the process.

If that weren't enough, it is perfectly clear that President Bush will veto the bill. Of course, to override a veto doesn't simply take 60 votes, it takes two-thirds of the Senate—67. So it is perfectly clear that it is going nowhere, and here we are again posturing, making political speeches and political points on the floor.

I have a radical idea. Let's come together in a bipartisan way. Let's come around a consensus bill and actually pass it through the process and get it signed by the President. I believe the Grassley bill, which has been introduced in the Senate, is the basis for that sort of bipartisan discussion and real work.

This is particularly important for many of my constituents in Louisiana because many of those Louisianans, as well as folks in Mississippi and elsewhere, have been suffering from a very unfair situation. They are actually paying a tax penalty because of the enormous losses they suffered during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. What am I talking about? It is this: In 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the gulf coast with enormous ferocity. A few weeks later, Hurricane Rita struck southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas. Of course, as we all know, many folks suffered enormous and tragic losses. Many folks I know personally lost their entire homes and virtually all of their belongings. Of course, folks in that situation legitimately could take a big loss on their next tax return. As a result, in 2005, people did what you would expect them to do: They filed loss deductions on their tax returns for that year because of these enormous and tragic losses.

Push forward to 2007. The good news is that the American people responded

to the enormous tragedy and Congress responded, representing the American people. One of the most important things the American people funded, one of the most important things Congress passed, was help for these folks I am describing who suffered uninsured losses. In Louisiana, it became known as the Road Home Program. In Mississippi, there was a similar program called the Housing Assistance Program—grants, help from the American taxpayers to help cover uninsured losses.

So what is the problem? The problem is that under present Federal law, the IRS says that you have to add that check many of these folks got in 2007 to their income and pay taxes on it because under present Federal law that is taxable income. If it was simply a matter of counteracting, equalizing the tax benefit these same individuals gained by claiming a huge loss deduction in 2005, that would be fair, but it went far beyond that in many cases. It increased many of these individuals to a higher marginal tax rate. Because of the size of the help, it pushed them into a whole other tax bracket. It subjected many taxpayers to the AMT, which they would not have been subjected to otherwise. It phased out certain deductions for them. It even subjected some individuals' Social Security benefits to additional taxation. It made many taxpayers ineligible for Federal student loans. So it didn't simply counteract and equalize the tax benefit some folks got in 2007 by claiming a very large loss deduction; it went beyond that in thousands upon thousands of cases.

So on top of Katrina, on top of Rita, on top of unimaginable—to most of us—personal tragedy, what happened is these folks got a tax penalty. That is ridiculous. We need to fix that. There is a clear sentiment and a clear majority in Congress to fix that. That fix for the Road Home Program in Louisiana and for the Housing Assistance Program in Mississippi is included in this Grassley tax extenders bill, which can be a bipartisan product, which can garner bipartisan support, which can gain far more than 60 votes in the Senate, and which can and would be signed into law by the President.

This is enormously important for tens of thousands of Louisianans. This is enormously important for many folks in Mississippi. These aren't simply run-of-the-mill folks; these are by definition folks who suffered through some of the worst losses due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In that context—as they wait year after year simply for a fix so that they aren't penalized by the tax man on top of everything they suffered through because of the hurricanes—in that context, how dare anyone play political games. How dare anyone posture and make political speeches rather than simply trying to come together and do the people's business. But again, that is what is going on here on the floor.