

critically important that the light inside every child reaches the full measure of its potential. I can't say we are there yet. I can't say we are there yet on early learning. We are making progress. I can't say we are there yet in terms of combating hunger and providing good nutrition, but we are making progress. I can't say that even on health care—even with all the great advancements on the Affordable Care Act for the country at large or the Children's Health Insurance Program. Even when we have full implementation, for example, of children's health insurance, there may be millions of children still without health care coverage.

I guess, finally, it would be safety. If there is a fourth area, it would be whether we are protecting our children from abuse and neglect. We have a long way to go there as well.

So it is important for us to point out the bad news, the challenges, the difficulties, and the nightmares, but it is also important to remind ourselves when we are making progress on early care and education and a whole range of issues that relate to children.

I have to say we have had a number of leaders over many years in the Senate from both parties, but there are very few who have contributed in the way the chairman of our Banking Committee has—someone I have served with both on that committee as well as one of the leaders on our Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. I commend Senator DODD, who is here on the Senate floor tonight with us, for his work for three decades in standing up for children in good times, when the economy was booming, and in bad times, as we are living through now when the unemployment rate is high and the recession is crippling the ability of families to provide for their kids and difficult times for State governments to provide for our kids.

No matter whether it is a good economy or a bad economy, Senator DODD has been fighting these battles year after year—literally, now, decade after decade. We are going to miss his voice, his leadership, his passion, and his effectiveness in getting legislation passed. But as I have noted for the public record and have told him personally, we will need him to come back and help us once in a while, even when he is not an incumbent Member of the Senate. We are grateful for his leadership. We take inspiration from that leadership, and I know his inspiration and his guidance will help us keep that bright light inside every child.

Mr. President, with that, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MERKLEY). The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I came to the Senate floor to express some comments on a different subject matter, but I would be remiss if I didn't express my gratitude to my friend for those very generous comments about our work on behalf of one out of four Amer-

icans who are under the age of 18—our children.

As I have said to my friend from Pennsylvania, a relatively new Member of this body, although I will no longer be a Member come next January, after three decades—30 years—in the Senate, I take great comfort in knowing that he and the Senator from Oregon, the Presiding Officer, who is also a member of this committee, have expressed such tremendous interest in this subject matter since the very first days they arrived in the Senate.

Like anyone else, I watched a number of people who were leaving as I was coming in three decades ago; people such as Hubert Humphrey, George McGovern, Bob Dole, Fritz Mondale—Vice President but also a Member of this body—and of course Ted Kennedy during our years together here, do tremendous work over the years on behalf of children and working families in our country. So I take a great deal of comfort in knowing that as I walk out of this Chamber there are people such as JEFF MERKLEY and BOB CASEY who are going to continue this effort on behalf of those one in four Americans who don't vote, who don't have lobbyists, who don't make campaign contributions, and who don't have any of the traditional trappings that constituencies have to bring their case before the Congress of the United States. America's children will continue to have champions who are going to insist that children be at the forefront in the debates about resources and how we can provide for their needs.

So I thank the Senator immensely for his work on this subject matter and look forward to watching with a great deal of pride as he continues those efforts. Just know that the Senator will have a cheerleader outside who will be doing everything he can to encourage his efforts. So I thank him very much for his comments.

PUBLIC SAFETY EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE COOPERATION ACT

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I am deeply concerned because this is a matter that, unlike an awful lot of the subject matters that we bring up and engage in, has bipartisan support in this Chamber; that is, the ability of our first responders to be able to collectively bargain in the workplace. These are our firefighters, our police officers, and our emergency personnel.

This is a bill that was championed by Senator Kennedy before he left us—a bill that has been introduced by our good friend and colleague from New Hampshire, JUDD GREGG, along with five other the Republican Members of this Chamber, along with many Democrats. In fact, it goes back over a decade, this issue of seeing to it that these, the most celebrated, the most highly endorsed and supported of public employees, would have the right to collectively bargain.

This is not something guaranteed in all States. Many States do it, but

many do not. So I am terribly disappointed that once again, just days away from the adjournment of this Congress, these individuals who consistently enjoy the outspoken praise of public officials for their work, when it comes down to actually doing something on their behalf we find the Congress missing the opportunity to step up.

I hope I am wrong about this. We have a lot of issues to grapple with in the coming days, I know. But my hope is that the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act will be an item we can pass before the adjournment of this Congress. As I mentioned, Mr. President, this is a bipartisan measure that would guarantee our Nation's firefighters, our law enforcement officers, and our emergency medical personnel the right to bargain collectively with their employers.

Again, I thank Senator GREGG, who is a champion of this proposal, for his longstanding commitment to this critically important piece of legislation, which was originally championed in the Senate by our good friend, Ted Kennedy. We ask our Nation's first responders to put their lives on the line each and every day in our country. What they do is more than a job. I think most of us appreciate that it is a calling. It is a vocation. Throughout my career in public service, I have had the privilege to meet and work with, as I know most of my colleagues have, countless first responders—police, firefighters, emergency medical personnel. They do exceptional work under the most difficult of circumstances, and the American public appreciates their service more than they do any other people in public life.

In particular, I have come to appreciate the unique and multi-faceted challenges faced by firefighters.

We have all felt our chests tighten and our pulses quicken with anxiety at the sound of a fire engine screaming through town.

We have seen the determination on the faces of the people on those rigs. For them, all the commotion is just another day at the office.

When the unthinkable happens—a devastating hurricane, industrial accident, terrorist attack, or three-alarm fire—these brave men and women are the first on the scene, hurtling into danger, to save lives.

Just this past year firefighters in my home State of Connecticut have been faced with many serious challenges—and have met them every time.

In February, when a massive natural gas explosion at a power plant under construction in Middletown, CT, killed six people and injured more than two dozen others, firefighters from eight surrounding towns rushed to the scene.

They remained for hours and days afterwards, searching for victims and working to ensure that all the plant workers were accounted for.

When massive flooding hit several parts of my State, local firefighters

worked around the clock responding to calls from panicked residents. They dealt with hazardous materials and even helped to pump out flooded basements.

They are committed to keeping our communities safe, even when that means putting their own lives at risk for the sake of protecting ours.

In the abstract, this can be hard to keep in perspective.

But unfortunately, the community of Bridgeport, CT, was recently reminded just what this commitment means.

A week ago, two firefighters, Lieutenant Steven Velasquez and Michel 'Mitch' Baik, were killed while fighting a fire in a home in that community. Three of their colleagues were also injured.

All of these individuals were incredibly brave—they entered a burning building to search for survivors and try to prevent the emergency from spreading.

This tragedy highlights just how selfless and courageous these people are each and every day.

And it should remind us all that, just as they have made a solemn commitment to us, so too must we affirm our commitment to them.

Part of our commitment is to ensure that they never, ever, put their lives at risk on our behalf without the proper equipment and training.

I have worked tirelessly over the years to ensure that this commitment is kept.

That is why I authored the Firefighter Investment and Response Enhancement—FIRE—Act back in 2000. This legislation created the first competitive grant program to assist local fire departments in addressing a wide range of equipment, training, and other fire prevention needs. Senator John Warner, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, was my partner in that effort, making it possible for it to become law.

To date this program has provided more than \$5.2 billion directly to fire departments.

And these grants have not just gone to the largest metropolitan areas. Fire departments in small and medium-sized communities across the country have received funds through the program—including departments in 150 of the 169 towns in my home State of Connecticut.

In 2003, we built on the success of the FIRE program by passing the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters—SAFER—bill, which I also authored.

This program provides funds to ensure that fire departments are adequately staffed. Too many of these rigs go out with only two or three people on them when a minimum of four is required to make sure that they are safe doing their jobs. Since the program began, more than \$1.1 billion has helped to put over 75,000 additional firefighters in our Nation's firehouses.

I am extremely proud to have been able to work with my colleagues on

both sides of the aisle to get these important programs enacted.

But our commitment to our public safety community is still not complete.

As the Presiding Officer knows, the bipartisan Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act is a critical next step towards fulfilling our commitment to the men and women who keep us safe.

As we know, firefighters, police, and emergency medical personnel have a special place in the workforce and in society. They are respected for what they do. But they are also respected for doing it no matter what they face.

Once they get the call, they don't get to decide whether to take it or not—they just go.

We depend on them every day, and they respond with unquestioned dedication.

They are looking out for our well-being. Do we not owe it to them to look out for theirs?

In many States these brave men and women are deprived one of the most basic rights that workers in America have—to bargain collectively with their employers.

The right to collectively bargain has been proven over time to improve cooperation between employers and employees.

This cooperation leads to better, fairer compensation and benefits. It contributes to improved work conditions and safety. And it makes the quality of services better and more efficient for everyone.

Quality and efficiency is vitally important in the field of public safety. It can be the difference between an emergency and a tragedy.

I know that improving public safety is a goal that I share with every single Member of this body.

The Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act is a carefully crafted bill that grants these rights to all first responders, without disrupting their vital role in emergency response.

While it requires that all States provide public safety workers with the most basic of collective bargaining rights, it also gives States the flexibility to implement plans that work best for them.

These include the right to form and join unions, and to collectively bargain over wages, hours and working conditions—rights that many States, including my State of Connecticut, already provide to these workers.

The bill also allows States with right-to-work laws—which prohibit contracts requiring union membership for employment—to continue to enforce those laws.

Importantly, the bill explicitly provides for safeguards against the disruption of emergency services. It does this with strong language explicitly prohibiting any strikes, lockouts, or other work stoppages.

Of course this legislation is about more than negotiating wages, hours,

and benefits. For our Nation's first responders, this cooperation means so much more.

It means that the men and women who risk their lives every day keeping us safe can sit down and relate their real life experiences to their employers.

It also means that their on-the-ground expertise will be used to help public safety agencies improve services in the community.

When tragedies have struck us, from the September 11 attacks to Hurricane Katrina, to the house fire in Bridgeport, CT, just last week, these workers were the first on the scene and the last to leave.

We owe them everything, and all they ask in return is the dignity and respect in the workplace that all workers deserve.

The legislation before us is important to them; therefore, it should be important to us, regardless of party and ideology.

As I say, this legislation already has strong bipartisan support in this Chamber. All we are looking for is the opportunity to bring it up and vote yes or no. After almost 20 years, with a well-crafted bill that protects against work stoppages and strikes and respects so-called right-to-work States—can we not guarantee this basic right of collective bargaining?

I hope before we adjourn that, after 20 years and at a unique opportunity, after all the speeches that have been given in praise and gratitude for the service of these men and women, we can give something back to them. This is the one thing that our first responders—our police, our emergency medical personnel and our firefighters—have asked of us. They appreciate all the wonderful speeches, all the great remarks, all the accolades, all the commendations. But what they would like to have, more than anything else, is for us to recognize their right to collectively bargain. That is something we ought to be able to give these fine men and women who serve our country every single day.

I urge my colleagues to give us one chance to vote on this legislation and decide whether we want to say to them how much we appreciate what they do. That is what we are asking for before we adjourn in this Congress.

I yield the floor.

REMEMBERING SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I join my colleagues in appreciation and admiration of Senator Robert Byrd.

By the time I took my seat in this Chamber, Senator Byrd had already held his for more than four decades. He had already held numerous leadership positions, including Senate majority leader and President pro tempore. He had already become a master of parliamentary procedure. He had already championed many Federal projects