The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct. We are in morning business.

INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I wish to, again, thank my friend from Illinois and also our leader for their strong support on the increase in the minimum wage. We will have more as we go on through the morning. We expect to vote at noontime today on the increase on the minimum wage. This is day seven. We had five courageous Republicans who voted with us to pass what we call a clean minimum wage law that would increase the minimum wage from $5.15 an hour to $7.25 without additional kinds of tax provisions in there. The nine times we have increased the minimum wage we have only added tax provisions on one time. It is not necessary to add additional tax provisions, since we are restoring the purchasing power of the minimum wage to what it was some 10 years ago.

But I raise another broader issue for a few moments and that is, What is it about these working families that so outrages our Republican friends? What is it about providing a decent wage—some would say it is not decent because it is still so low at $7.25 an hour—but what is it about our Republican friends that they refuse to give us a vote in the Senate? It is true that 80 Republicans voted for an increase over in the House of Representatives. But Republican leadership has been strongly opposed to this over the last 10 years that I tried to bring up an increase in the minimum wage. It goes back a long period of time. We are seeing it once again, here, as the President is against an increase in the minimum wage.

I remind those who are watching the Senate deliberations this morning that we do not have any amendments over here on our side. The Democrats do not have any. They have more than 90 amendments over on the other side. I reminded the Senate, they have had amendments for over $200 billion. Some are dealing with Social Security. There are $35 billion in tax cuts on education, but they didn't include any help or assistance for children on the IDEA, those with disabilities or, for the neediest children, the Pell grants. We haven't had any consideration on that. They dropped that amendment in on the minimum wage program, completely unrelated to the minimum wage program. They had health savings accounts to benefit people with incomes of $133,000. We have had all those kinds of amendments, and they continue, if you read through that list. I have gone through those amendments and they continue.

My question comes back to this. What is it that the Republican leadership has against working families? I have raised that over the period of the last few days and I raise it today. I was looking back at the record of our Republican friends over the last year or so. They eliminated 6 million workers from overtime. Do we understand that? In the last 2 years, 6 million workers have had their overtime effectively canceled.

Since the 1930s, under President Roosevelt, there was a recognition that if people work more than 40 hours a week, they were going to be able to get overtime. The number of those individuals who work more than 40 hours a week is significant. It is over 28 percent in our country today. But this administration eliminated that extra time and a half for 6 million workers.

We say: What is it about those 6 million workers? Then we think about the opposition to the increase in the minimum wage. We take away their overtime when we are seeing this extraordinary increase in executive salaries, salaries which are exploding through the ceiling. Take away that overtime for 6 million workers. All right.

Then we see the great tragedy we had with Katrina, and we saw the attempts to rebuild after Katrina. What was the first thing the administration said? Eliminate any coverage or protection for workers in terms of their wages down there, what they call the Davis-Bacon program. It means they are not going to get paid what they get paid in the various regions, eliminate that so you can drive wages down even further in New Orleans. What is the reason for that? It is a good way to drive wages down for workers.

What is it about people in the construction industry? They average, I think it is $29,000 a year. That is too much for our Republican friends? Or $10,712 for a working American, a man or woman at the minimum wage, and they refuse to give some increase in that to $7.25 an hour? Here you have the average construction worker at $29,000 a year, and you are saying that is too high. What is it about this Republican Party, against the working families?

What was in their minds when they eliminated safety positions and reduced the budget for mine safety, prior to the Sago and Alma mine disasters? What was in their minds at that time, to reduce the kind of safety provisions? Is the power of the mine companies so great they can increase the risks for workers? Oh, yes, there are workers down there. They are the ones we want to cut back on, in terms of their overtime. They are the ones we are going to cut back on, in terms of safety.

I remember when this President Bush—after the first hearings we had, I think, in our committee—acted to eliminate the protections that had been recommended by President Clinton in the area of ergonomics, particularly affecting women who spend a great deal of time on computers. It affects others—those in the meat-packing industry and poultry industry, workers who perform repetitive kinds of procedures. We had extensive hearings. The Clinton recommendations were very modest. He encouraged companies to get into this and work with industry. Some people thought they were too weak, but they were protecting workers, hard-working people doing some of the most difficult work in America, protecting them so they are not going to get the kinds of complicated health challenges that will disable so many of those.

We know what the science is. We have had study after study by the National Academy of Sciences that said do something in Congress. We did something. But oh, no, the Republican leadership said: No, we are not going to do that. We are not going to provide protection for those workers. We are going to cut back on safety for those who work in the mines. We are going to cut back on overtime for 6 million. We are going to refuse to cover the workers down there in New Orleans who are working, trying to rebuild, when this administration basically ignored the problems there. Workers who were out there working, we are going to cut back and skimp on their salaries on this.

What is it about working people that this administration—the list goes on. Look at the amendments that are lined up to weaken OSHA. We see the number of lives that have been saved—tens of thousands of lives were saved. We have cut the death rate by more than 77 percent since OSHA has been in effect. There are new problems, new challenges, in terms of toxic substances, we have to look at. What is the voice over there? We hear great speeches about what is happening to the middle class. Let's take a step that can make some difference—certainly to 6 million children who will benefit if we increase the minimum wage from $5.15 to $7.25—6 million children's parents will benefit. We will have that opportunity.

I don't know what has changed in productivity. We worked closely together, for years and years, for a decent wage. It shows back in the 1960s, 1965 into the 1970s, we saw where our great American economy was moving along, increasing productivity. That increase in productivity was shared between the corporate world, the business world, and the workers. That is what was happening. We will get the charts later on.

Evidently our friends on the other side want to prolong this debate. We will get the charts to show that all America moved along in the 1940s and the 1950s, all the way through the 1960s—each quintile moved along virtually together. If you saw growth in the economy, it benefited all the groups together.

What has come over this country, and particularly the Republican Party, to say that no longer works in the United States? We don't want an economy that is going to work for everyone. We want an economy that is going to work for some—a few. What is it about it? I termed it ''greed.'' It is greed.

We have seen now what has happened in the change, in the increase in productivity. Still, the minimum wage goes down.

Mr. President, my excellent staff found that chart I was referring to—''Growing Together, 1947 to 1973.'' The lowest quintile, the second, third, right up to the very top—if you look at the different colors, you will see that all America moved along together. Now look what has happened. Corporations get a $276 billion tax break, small business a $36 billion tax break, and no increase in the minimum wage.

I hope somewhere during the course of this debate, our Republican friends will come out and make at least some argument about either the economics—it is an impossible one to make. You can't say it is the loss of jobs. We have dealt with that issue.

They will say you can't increase the minimum wage because it is inflationary in our economy. We show it is less than one-fifth of 1 percent of total wages paid over the course of the year. That argument doesn't work.

They will try to say it is not what our country is about, we can't afford that in the richest country in the world, where people are working. We demonstrate that the States which have an increase in minimum wage have grown faster and grown stronger and have a better economic record. And most important, child poverty has gone down.

I imagine, over the period of this year, we will hear 100 speeches in the different parts of our country about our children being our future. We have an opportunity today at noontime to do something about that. You don't have to make a speech, you have to vote right. You can vote today and, with that vote, hopefully, expedited process, that we can wind this legislation up and work out the differences with the House of Representatives and get it to the President to sign. Six million children will benefit.

So if you are talking about your concerns about middle class, if you are talking about working families, if you are talking about fairness and decency, if you are talking about children's issues, women's issues, civil rights issues, today at noon you have a chance to do something about it.

So I hope we will have more of an opportunity as we get closer to the time to add some additional comments. But I would hope that finally this basic, fundamental, and I think irrational, irresponsible, unacceptable, postured position our Republican friends have in terms of opposition—continued opposition, opposition, opposition—to the minimum wage would end. Today we are on the seventh day, but we debated this 16 other days to try to get an increase in the minimum wage without the Republicans letting us have it. How many days? What is the price? We don't even know what the price is. What are we supposed to do—keep bidding it out and sweetening the pot until the Republicans come along? Is that what the Americans want us to do? That is not what we are prepared to do.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Missouri is recognized.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I assume we are proceeding as in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

Mr. BOND. I thank the Chair. I would just say that like many Members on my side of the aisle, we pushed for a minimum wage bill last fall. Regrettably, it was filibustered, so we couldn't bring it to a vote. We are looking for and I intend to support a minimum wage bill if it has some reasonable tax incentives for small businesses that would be seriously harmed in some instances by the cost of a very drastic rise in the minimum wage. But I am hoping we will be allowed and not be prevented from adding those tax breaks that I think everybody needs.

IRAQ AND RELATED ISSUES

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about Iraq and Iraq-related issues. I had the opportunity this past weekend and the previous weekend to spend a good deal of time with the Missouri National Guard men and women in Missouri who do a great job in providing civil response to tremendous problems, whether it is floods or tornadoes or, in some instances, an ice storm that was devastating. Many of them have been to Iraq and Afghanistan and are going back, and they are proud of what they do. They know they are doing the job the military was assigned to do, and they are proud of it and we should support them.

Mr. President, it is noteworthy that I mention again my colleague and National Guard Caucus Cochair Senator PAT LEAHY and I will reintroduce the National Defense Enhancement and National Guard Empowerment Act later today.

This comprehensive legislation recognizes the paramount contributions that our citizen soldiers and airmen have made not only in Iraq and Afghanistan, but all over the globe and particularly here at home.

The bill provides four central planks: the elevation of the Guard chief to the rank of general, a seat for the chief of the Guard Bureau on the Joint Chiefs of Staff; mandates that the Deputy NorthCom position be for an eligible National Guard officer; and it allows for the National Guard Bureau to identify and validate equipment requirements, particularly those unique to the Guard's homeland missions.

When we went after the terrorists in Afghanistan, the Guard was there. When we needed to establish order and stability in Iraq, the Guard was there. When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast, the Guard was there. When a natural or man-made disaster strikes, the Governors call on the Guard, and the Guard is there. The next time America needs military forces overseas, the Guard will be there.

Unfortunately, when the Pentagon makes key decisions that impact the Guard, the Guard is still not there.

The need to empower the National Guard is not only still there but grows each day. We need to give the Guard more bureaucratic muscle, so that the force will not be continually pushed around in policy and budget debates within the Pentagon.

Time and time again, the National Guard has had to rely on the Congress, not its total force partners in the active duty, to provide and equip fully the resources it needs to fulfill its missions.

Our legislation will end this nonsense. We will put the National Guard on an equal footing with other decision makers responsible for national security and the transformation of the military forces.

As GEN Steve Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau put it, they need to be ''in the huddle'' at the Pentagon if they are to be in the game. This will ensure that the next time the 430,000 National Guard citizen-soldiers and airmen of the Guard are discussed at the senior levels of the Pentagon, the Guard will be there.

Additionally, I remind my colleagues that the Fiscal Year 2007 Military Construction and Quality of Life Appropriations bill was not passed into law. As a result, approximately $17 billion in new construction and BRAC projects authorized by the Congress in 2007 cannot proceed.

The military service chiefs have urged the Congress to pass this legislation

The projects funded by the Fiscal Year 2007 MILCON bill are necessary to sustain readiness and quality of life for U.S. service personnel. I also ask that letter from the Navy and Army Secretaries and Service Chiefs that raise concern about the risk by operating under a continuing resolution be printed in the RECORD.

I ask unanimous consent that letters in support of this legislation be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY, CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS, COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS,
Washington, DC, December 22, 2006.

Hon. TRENT LOTT,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR LOTT: We are seeking your assistance in lessening the severe burden placed on the Department of the Navy in the absence of a Military Construction, Quality of Life, and Veterans Affairs FY 2007 Appropriations bill, and to offer our continued support for expeditious passage of this important legislation.

Although the Continuing Resolution (CR) has provided some initial relief, a CR in its