

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce two bills. The first bill is the National Beverage Container Reuse and Recycling Act of 1997.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. JEFFORDS. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Mr. JEFFORDS pertaining to the introduction of S. 215 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. JEFFORDS. The second bill I will be introducing today with Senator FRIST. This bill is IDEA. Then, after that, I will briefly talk on low-income fuel assistance and put in the RECORD a letter which myself and 49 Senators have participated in.

For now, I will go ahead and discuss and send to the desk the bill IDEA, for introduction.

(The remarks of Mr. JEFFORDS and Mr. FRIST pertaining to the introduction of S. 216 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR—S. 216

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent Jim Downing, a legislative fellow in my office, be granted the privilege of the floor during consideration of the IDEA legislation, when it occurs.

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

RELEASE EMERGENCY LIHEAP FUNDS

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, last Thursday 48 Senators representing the Northeast-Midwest Senate Coalition, which I chair with Senator MOYNIHAN, my colleague from Vermont Senator LEAHY, and Senators from other States hard hit by skyrocketing heating prices and cold weather, sent a letter to President Clinton asking him to release \$300 million in emergency low income home energy assistance funds [LIHEAP].

The 1997 Omnibus Appropriations Act allows the President to release up to \$420 million in LIHEAP emergency funds. In the Northeast and Midwest, the price of home heating oil has jumped over 25 percent from last year, while natural gas and propane prices in all cold weather States are significantly higher. The Reverend Dr. Robert E. Martin of Newport, VT recently wrote me that the propane bill of the Lowell Congregational Church has risen 52 percent over last year. Any distribution of emergency LIHEAP funds must take into account this rise in fuel prices, which in Vermont, so far, has been worse than the weather.

Mr. President, the rising cost of energy weighs heavy on low-income working Americans who devote about 12 percent of their income to energy bills. The elderly and disabled low-income individuals relying on supplemental security income spend on aver-

age 19 percent of that income on energy bills, and families with children living on Aid to Families With Dependent Children devote almost 25 percent of their benefits to energy bills.

Although many State regulations prohibit utilities from terminating service for nonpayment during the winter, households that rely on home heating oil, propane, and wood do not have this same safety net. These households must pay for services up front or face fuel cut offs. With the prolonged spike in fuel prices, additional Federal funds are needed to prevent many families from having to face life threatening cold this winter.

Mr. President, freezing temperatures and high fuel prices are a recipe for disaster for low-income Americans. Forty-eight Senators from both parties are urging President Clinton to act quickly so that low-income Americans do not have to choose between heating and eating this winter.

Mr. President, I yield the floor for others who desire to speak on this important issue.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, I always appreciate working with the Senator from Vermont and the Senator from Massachusetts. We have been on the floor before talking about low-income energy assistance, and we really have to be on the floor today speaking about this.

Sometimes we talk about these issues, and we just talk. It may not be connected to people's lives. But what we say today on the floor of the U.S. Senate is connected to people's lives in many of our States.

It is between 8 and 15 degrees below zero in most of Minnesota today. It might get to zero this daytime.

Mr. President, we have had a brutal winter in our State and, in addition, as the Senator from Vermont mentioned, natural gas prices are up 60 percent from last year's prices, heating oil is up 40 percent over last year, and the cost of propane is 60 percent higher than last year.

Our State is colder than it was last year. It costs much more to heat a home. These oil prices have skyrocketed, and this means we have a crisis, all in capital letters.

Mr. President, the Governor, Governor Arne Carlson, has used \$9 million of the State's fund for additional assistance, but we have in fiscal year 1997 additional money, several hundreds of millions of dollars, for emergency energy assistance. It is an emergency.

In Minnesota, we have about 300,000 citizens who are dependent upon this lifeline program. It is not a large grant. It averages about \$350, but for many of these citizens—many of them elderly, many of them children—this is a lifeline program, without which either people go cold or people huddle in one room in their home. I wish that

was an exaggeration, but it is not. I have visited with these families. Our people somehow figure out how to pay for their heat, but then they don't have enough money to buy food or they don't have enough money to buy prescription drugs that they need. This is a particular problem with the elderly.

Mr. President, we are going to run out of assistance. We are going to have a dire situation in Minnesota. This is no melodrama on my part. It is time this emergency money be released.

Almost every day I am on the phone talking to the White House, talking to Health and Human Services, the Office of Management and Budget, and I don't speak on the floor of the Senate today to point the finger, because I believe that in the next few days—the sooner the better—the White House will release this money.

Last year, I went to the President—other Senators joined: Senator KENNEDY, Senator JEFFORDS, and others—and just made the request face to face. I said, "Mr. President, I don't want people to go cold in my State."

This is not an exaggeration. I am sure that this money will be released, but today on the floor of the Senate, my appeal to the White House is: Please, make the decision. Please, make the decision today. Please release the funding. Time is not neutral. Time is not on our side. It doesn't do any good to get the funding in April. We need this assistance for vulnerable citizens in our cold-weather States, and we need it now.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. KENNEDY addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I intend to speak to the Senate about this same subject that my friend, Senator WELLSTONE, spoke to. I think all of us have understood his strong leadership on this issue a year ago or 2 years ago and before he was elected. Now he is again battling away on the same issue with the same powerful voice, and I join in expressing strong appreciation for all of his leadership.

IDEA

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, before speaking on the issue of LIHEAP, I want to thank the chairman of our Human Resources Committee, Chairman JEFFORDS, and also the Senator from Tennessee, Senator FRIST, for introducing the IDEA legislation today and to indicate this is one of the prime areas of priority for the Human Resources Committee.

This issue, in terms of helping and assisting the special needs of children in education, is of incredible importance to millions of families all across this country, and we cannot afford to let the authorizing legislation expire.

I join in commending the leadership that has been provided by Senator FRIST in our last Congress, along with Senator HARKIN, who has been our