

ranking member on the Subcommittee on Disability and who has made such a very important contribution on all of the issues relating to the disabled in this country over a very distinguished career, Senator JEFFORDS, and others on our committee.

This has been a strong bipartisan effort. We welcome the opportunity to work very closely with them. This is not to minimize the issues that are outstanding, but it does represent a continuing commitment of those who support the legislation to try to continue the very important efforts that have marked this legislation and finding cooperation and finding ways to deal with some of the still outstanding issues.

So I am very, very grateful for their statements on the floor today.

#### LIHEAP

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, on the issue others have spoken to, I want to add my strong voice in hope and anticipation of the President's release of these emergency LIHEAP funds to help the families in the Northeast and Midwest. I think all of us have understood the extraordinary hardships and loss of lives that are affecting people in the Midwest, and people are hurting in my part of the country, in the Northeast, as well, with the soaring heating bills this winter.

The reduced benefit levels and the skyrocketing prices of home heating oil have been a double whammy for the 5 million low-income families nationwide who receive LIHEAP assistance.

Federal funding for LIHEAP is already near an all-time low—listen to this, Mr. President—down from \$2.1 billion in 1985 to \$1 billion today. In Massachusetts, Federal fuel aid has declined from \$87 million to \$41 million over that same period, about half of the resources in dollars. When you measure it out in terms of inflation, it is even less than that. When we see what has happened to the cost of home heating oil, we will see that people are in dire straits.

Local fuel assistance directors have been successful in past years in stretching the limited LIHEAP funds to serve as many needy families as possible. This winter, however, low stocks have sent heating oil prices through the roof, causing excessive hardships to LIHEAP recipients across the Nation.

According to the Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources, the cost of home heating oil has risen 20 percent, and, in some communities, considerably higher, from some 95 cents a gallon in December 1995, to over \$1.15 today. Despite the oil companies' efforts to bring their inventories to last year's levels, heating oil prices still remain high because of increased world demand.

This rise in heating oil prices has imposed a heavy burden on low-income families, many of whom must devote a significant portion of their limited resources to paying their energy bills.

Who are these families, Mr. President? Forty-three percent of the recipients for the LIHEAP program are elderly or disabled citizens. They spend an average of 19 percent of their income to keep their homes warm in the winter, whereas middle-income families devote 4 percent.

That is who we are talking about: elderly people, the neediest people who are living and affected by this colder climate, are spending way out of proportion of their income in order to just remain warm.

The AFDC recipients spend as much as 25 percent of their income for home heating. At the same time, these families are hard pressed and struggle to pay their bills for food, rent, and health care.

A decade ago, LIHEAP assistance could sustain a low-income family through an entire winter, purchasing as much as 750 gallons of heating oil. Today, the higher cost of heating oil and the lower benefit levels will only purchase a third of that amount. Some 10 years ago, there was the ability to address this issue for the neediest families for the winter and now a third of the winter, even with these resources that would be available.

Many local fuel assistance directors are already planning for the worst. According to Jim Murphy, whose TRICAP Community Action Program serves 1,500 clients in Malden, MA, over 40 percent will be without any heating assistance at the end of next week unless emergency funds are provided.

Other communities in Massachusetts are facing a similar crisis. In Boston, as many as 2,000 families, out of 13,000 served by LIHEAP, have run out of heating oil. An additional 4,500 households will be at risk in the next few weeks. We are talking the next 2 to 3 weeks.

In economically distressed towns like Gloucester, many working families involved in the fishing industry have already exhausted their annual benefits. According to Elliott Jacobson, chairman of the New England Energy Directors Association, charities are being tapped for additional assistance 2 months ahead of schedule, taxing their limited resources to serve the community.

Clearly, without an immediate release of emergency funds, little relief is in site for these families. If another cold spell strikes, even more families will be without protection.

As we mentioned, 49 Senators wrote to the President last week requesting the release of the emergency LIHEAP funds before more cold weather grips the country. This year, \$420 million in emergency funds could be made available at the President's discretion. The letter sent to the President Thursday requested \$300 million of that amount. I hope all of my colleagues will support this necessary action and will support action by the President to respond to these very important and critical needs.

#### THE PRESIDENT'S EDUCATION BUDGET

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, on another item, I want to draw the attention of the Senate to President Clinton's announcement today for making education a top priority in his balanced budget plan. The President has announced the proposal and recognizes the importance of investing in education as the cornerstone of a stronger future for the Nation.

In the coming years, a college education will be more important than ever. We know that by the year 2005, 60 percent of all of the new jobs will require not only a high school education, but also skills in the utilization of computers. So the President's program is focused on a number of priority areas. I will introduce at the end of my statement a brief summary of those items, but I would like to just mention some of those which I think are most important.

First of all, to try and assure working families in this country that not only high school will be available, but really the 13th and 14th grades, the first 2 years of college, would be available as well. That is being done in a number of ways:

First, with a \$10,000 deduction for the payments of tuition that will be available to working families and middle-income families, what they call the Hope Tax Credit, which will be a \$1,500 credit for the sons and daughters who are going to college.

This would amount to the payment in full of tuition for 67 percent of all the community colleges in the country; and then an expansion of the Pell grants by some \$300 to a maximum of \$3,000 for those individuals who are eligible for Pell grants. That is a very important and significant commitment. That will mean about 130,000 more students across this country will be able to take advantage of the Pell grants.

Then there are the changes in the Pell grant provisions that will be primarily targeted upon older students, those who have been out in the work force and are coming back, those who are 24 or 25 years old or older. I do not know whether the distinguished Chair has had the kind of opportunity I have had to visit some of the community colleges in his own State as I have in Massachusetts. We find changes which are taking place where the makeup of the student body is considerably older.

Changes in the Pell language are going to make available 218,000 additional slots for those individuals who are returning to college to upgrade their skills, which is very important.

We also have a strong commitment in the areas of literacy. We will see an expansion of the Work-Study Program, which provides important opportunities for students to help work their way through college. It is an absolutely vital link to permit students to match together what they are able to earn in the summertime by working, with what they earn working under the