

That is what angers family farmers the most. They produce something of enormous importance to the entire world and are told it has no value. They are told that the farm bill is fundamentally bankrupt. The Freedom to Farm Act passed by this Congress several years ago is totally bankrupt. It ought to be repealed immediately.

Trade agreements, negotiated by trade negotiators who have done a terrible job and were totally incompetent, sold our farmers down the river.

So family farmers have a right to ask the question: Why can't we expect from this Congress, this Administration, and this country, a decent opportunity to make a living, a decent price for the food we produce, and a decent deal from trade agreements that are negotiated with other countries? Why can't we expect this country to stand up for family farmers?

A group from some farm States met this morning. We talked about how we will mobilize efforts to try to begin to provide two things. One, we need some emergency help—an emergency disaster relief bill to offset the income collapse which family farmers are facing. Second, we need a change in the farm program. We decided to seek a meeting next week with President Clinton at the White House. We will try to make sure this Administration proposes a robust disaster program and joins in proposing to change the underlying farm program to provide decent income support for family farmers when prices collapse.

Next week we will try to do that, meet with the President, and develop an emergency bill to provide disaster relief. Senator HARKIN and I proposed such a bill in the appropriations subcommittee. Senator CONRAD has proposed a number of ideas on how to provide disaster relief. I expect we will have to propose disaster relief somewhere in the \$10-billion-plus range.

This Congress has a responsibility to respond to this issue and to do it soon.

Second, to change the farm bill so family farmers have a safety net. Others in this country have a safety net. But somehow the suggestion was made that we can just pull the safety net out from under family farmers and that would be fine. Nobody will care. Families care. Farmers care. I do not want anybody standing up in this Chamber saying they are profamily and then turn a blind eye to the needs of family farmers. That is what has been happening.

If there were fires or floods or tornadoes that hit our part of the country and devastated all the buildings, the economy and the infrastructure, we would have folks rushing out there with help. We would have FEMA all set up in big buildings and tents, getting people in to give help. Everybody would be helping. In fact, you wouldn't even need a tornado. If some hogs got sick with a mysterious disease, we would have the entire Department of Agriculture trying to find out what

was wrong with the hogs. Only farmers can see their incomes collapse.

In our State, the incomes collapsed 98 percent in 1 year. Ask yourself, could your family stand a 98 percent loss in income? Could any Members of the Senate stand a 98 percent loss in their paycheck? Can wage earners stand a 98 percent loss in their wage? I don't think so. That is what happened to farmers in my State.

The question is, who is going to respond, when are they going to respond, and when is this country going to care whether we have family farmers left in our future? The answer for me is soon. The answer for me is now. Next week, we must expect to make progress with the President; yes, with the majority party and the minority party working together to try to provide disaster relief, No. 1, and a long-term safety net, No. 2.

I want to tell you about a fellow named Tom Ross who did something that I thought was unique in Minot, ND. Tom Ross is a newscaster with KMOT television. He got 48 acres just north and east of Minot, ND. He got some partners, and he planted 48 acres of durum wheat. His partners were experts in this area, seed companies, chemical companies, the Research Extension Service and so on. In 1997, they determined exactly what it cost, exactly what they planted, and exactly what they harvested, and what the outcome was. They did this on television to try to demonstrate the plight that family farmers were facing. Let me demonstrate what it was.

In 1997, they planted 48 acres, and they lost \$50 an acre. This is with all the experts weighing in with Mr. Ross, the newscaster, saying here is how we do it. They did it, and they lost \$50 an acre. Next year, they planted the same 48 acres and they lost \$1,930 an acre. So in 2 years they have lost almost \$2,000 an acre on 48 acres of land. If you farm 1,000 acres, which is about an average size farm, slightly smaller than an average size farm in the farm belt, you would have lost \$50,000 just in that first year.

This year, Mr. Ross planted 48 acres of roundup ready canola. Last week, I stood out in that field just northeast of Minot, ND. We will see what happens this year. Given the price, given the circumstances, they expect they will lose some money this year.

The point is that on 48 acres with controlled circumstances and all of the experts to help, you have massive losses of income over three years. This is multiplied by every family farmer across the farm belt. Why? Because prices have collapsed, and family farmers have no safety net, at least not a safety net that is available to help them survive.

This is a unique experiment, and it shows in the clearest way possible that this is not about whether family farmers are good farmers. They are the economic All-Stars in our country. The project that KMOT did in Minot, ND,

demonstrates that when prices collapse, family farmers do not have a chance to make a decent living and someone has a responsibility to help. That someone is this Congress, this Senate, this President. And the time is now; not later—now. If we want to save family farmers for this country's future, we must take action now.

On Monday, I am going to talk about a paper that was just released by the Economic Policy Institute written by Robb Scott, "The Failure of Agriculture Deregulation," describing the failure of Freedom to Farm, the failure of our trade policies, and the selling down the river of family farm interests in this country by people who should have known better. I will describe that in more detail on Monday.

We do not have time to waste. We do not have time to wait. We must act and do so with great effect to try to help family farmers. The fellow who says I may not be able to farm anymore, at least is farming now. A whole lot of folks sold out long ago, and more are selling out every month and every week.

A woman called me recently and said her 17-year-old son would not come down to the auction sale when they were forced to sell. She says it is not because he is a bad kid. This young boy stayed up in his bedroom because he was brokenhearted. He wanted to farm that land so bad and take it over from his dad at some point. He knew when the auction sale was held that it was over for him. His dreams were gone. She said he was so brokenhearted he simply could not come down and participate in the auction sale of the family farm.

That is happening all across the northern plains, all across the farm belt. At the same time, the stock market shows record highs, and we hear about this robust economy. The economic All-Stars in this country, who produce so much of what the world needs, are being told what they produce has no value and their existence does not matter. Shame on this country if it does not stand up now and decide that family farmers have value. What they produce has enormous value, and family farmers are important for this country's future.

I am betting the energy exists with this President and this Congress to finally turn the corner and say we need to make a change. We need trade agreements that stand up for the interests of farmers. We need a safety net that says when farmers' incomes drop 98 percent, we stand to help because we care about you and your future.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GREGG). THE SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Jennifer Duck, a Labor Department detailee with my office, be granted the privilege of the floor.

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

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, yesterday, the House of Representatives with very little discussion and debate voted themselves a \$4,600 pay increase. The Senate passed a similar measure earlier this month. Fair is fair. If Members of Congress deserve a raise, then surely the hard-working, lowest paid workers across this country deserve an increase in the minimum wage as well. Shame on this Congress when we vote ourselves a \$4,600 pay increase, yet do nothing for the lowest paid workers in America.

I intend to do all I can to see that Congress acts to raise the minimum wage as soon as possible. When President Clinton signs the law to raise the pay for the 535 Members of Congress, he should also have on his desk the bill to raise the pay for the 11 million Americans who work for the minimum wage.

The case for an increase in the minimum wage is overwhelming. Since 1991, congressional pay has increased \$39,400. In the same amount of time, a minimum wage worker has seen a pay increase of only \$1,870.

Legislation to raise the minimum wage—the Fair Minimum Wage Act—has been installed for many months by this Republican Congress. Our proposal will raise the federal minimum wage from its present level of \$5.15 an hour to \$5.65 on September 1, 1999 and to \$6.15 an hour on September 1, 2000.

Speaker HASTERT said last March, “I feel Members of Congress come here, they do their work. I know there are Members that have three or four kids in college at a time. I’m not crying crocodile tears, but they need to be able to have a life and provide for their family.”

I say minimum wage workers have a life, too. They need to provide for their families, too. They need to put their children through college, too.

Under our proposal, a minimum wage worker would earn an additional \$2,000 a year. That amount will pay for 7 months of groceries to feed the average family. It will pay to house an average family for 5 months. It will pay for 10 months of utilities. It will cover a year and a half of tuition and fees at a 2-year college. It will provide greater opportunities for all those struggling at the minimum wage to obtain the skills they need for better jobs and better careers and better support for their families.

We know that under current law, minimum wage earners can barely make ends meet. Working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, they earn \$10,712 almost \$3,200 below the poverty line for a family of three. A full day’s work should mean a fair day’s pay. But for millions of Americans who earn the minimum wage, the pay is unfair.

Opponents complain that increasing the minimum wage hurts small busi-

ness and causes job losses. But these claims have been proven wrong. In fact, since the most recent increases in the federal minimum wage—a 50-cent increase in October 1996 and a 40-cent increase in September 1997—employment has risen in virtually all sectors of the economy. Over 8 million new jobs have been added to the workforce, including 1.1 million retail jobs, 350,000 restaurant jobs, and more than 4 million jobs in the service industry. The increases boosted the earnings of 9.9 million low-wage workers directly, and millions more indirectly, but far from enough.

As Business Week has stated:

[H]igher minimum wages are supposed to lead to fewer jobs. Not today. In a fast-growth, low-inflation economy, minimum wages raise income, not unemployment. . . . A higher minimum wage can be an engine for upward mobility. When employees become more valuable, employers tend to boost training and install equipment to make them more productive. Higher wages at the bottom often lead to better education for both workers and their children.

Even Business Week agrees, “It is time to set aside old assumptions about the minimum wage.”

The national economy is the strongest in a generation, with the lowest unemployment rate in almost three decades. Under the leadership of President Clinton, the country as a whole is enjoying a remarkable period of growth and prosperity. Enterprise and entrepreneurship are flourishing—generating an unprecedented expansion, with impressive efficiencies and significant job creation. The stock market has soared. Inflation is low, unemployment is low, and interest rates are low.

But despite this unprecedented economic growth, too many workers are not reaping the benefits of this prosperity. To have the purchasing power it had in 1968, the minimum wage should be at least \$7.49 an hour today, not \$5.15. This unconscionable gap shows how far we have fallen short over the past 30 years in granting low-income workers their fair share of the country’s extraordinary prosperity.

Since 1968, the stock market, adjusted for inflation, has gone up by over 150 percent—while the purchasing power of the minimum wage has gone down by 30 percent. Shame on Congress for allowing that decline.

As the economy reaches new heights, so do CEO salaries, often reaching tens of millions of dollars a year. At that rate, it takes a CEO barely 2 hours to earn what a minimum wage worker earns in an entire year. The rise in income inequality between the country’s top earners and those at the bottom makes our Nation weaker, not stronger.

In a strong economy, we can clearly afford to give low income workers a rise. Our national wage total is over \$4.2 trillion. That is what American employers are paying in wages today. The increase of one dollar that we proposed would raise the national wage total by only one-fifth of 1 percent.

That is a drop in the bucket in the overall American economy, but a significant benefit for low-income workers.

According to the Department of Labor, 59 percent of minimum wage earners are women. Nearly three-fourths are adults. Forty percent are the sole breadwinners in their families. Almost half work full time. They are teachers’ aides and child care providers, home health care assistants and clothing store workers. They care for the elderly in nursing homes. They stock the food shelves at the corner store. They clean office buildings in thousands of communities across the country.

The minimum wage is a women’s issue. It is a children’s issue. It is a civil rights issue. It is a labor issue. It is a family issue. Above all, it is a fairness issue and a dignity issue. It is time to raise the federal minimum wage again. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.

This chart over here indicates clearly what has happened to the unemployment rate with previous increases in the minimum wage. For years, we have often heard that an increase in the minimum wage would see an increase in unemployment. In 1996, we had an increase in the minimum wage to \$4.75 an hour, and we have seen the gradual decline in unemployment. Then we raised it to \$5.15 an hour in September 1997, and we continue to see the decline in unemployment.

This chart over here indicates how long an average CEO has to work in order to make what a minimum-wage worker earns over the year. By 10:06 a.m. on the first working day—say, for January 1st—the average CEO has made what will take a minimum-wage worker to earn by 5 p.m. on December 31. In just over 2 hours, the average CEO has made what a minimum-wage worker will make by the end of the year.

Finally, this chart over here shows what the poverty line is for a family of three. The lower line here shows what the annual minimum-wage earnings are. What we see in 1999 is the continuing decline in the value of the minimum wage as minimum wage earners fall further below the poverty level.

It is time those men and women who work hard—play by the rules, work 52 weeks of the year, 40 hours a week, 8 hours a day—are not going to have to live in poverty. We are going to insist this issue be before the Senate in these next very few days or weeks.

THE PEACE PROCESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I rise to express my deep disappointment by the failure of the parties to move forward with the peace process in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Peace Agreement was endorsed by the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland, and it offers the only