percent cut in education that would be represented by a $15 billion cut this year in the education programs on an appropriation that we cannot even have sent here to the Senate. We find that somewhat distressing and disturbing.

What has happened in the past when the Republican leadership had responsibilities? The education proposal in 1995 came in 7 months after the end of the fiscal year. In 1997, the final agreement was not passed until the final day of the old fiscal year, September 30, 1996. In 1998, it was passed 1 week after the end of the fiscal year. In 1999, it was passed 3 weeks after the end of the fiscal year.

There is a pattern here—cutting back on education resources and doing it at the very end, the last business for the Congress.

If a political party wants to put education at the top of the American agenda, it doesn't come last, it comes first. It doesn't come with the greatest kinds of cuts we have seen in any appropriations bill in recent times; it comes after due deliberation of these very needs and requirements and then the support for those programs. That is the way we deal with it.

That is what we find as we come into the last weeks—the enormous frustration of many in this body who believe very deeply, as the American public does, that if we are going to meet our responsibilities in education, we ought to have the opportunity to debate these issues in a timely way and not have the efforts that have been made on 17 different occasions when we tried to bring up various amendments, to have those amendments either immediately tabled or immediately effectively ignored, virtually denying Members the opportunity of having a full and complete debate on what are our fundamental and basic responsibilities for a national Congress and a President of the United States in education.

So I believe the Republican leadership bear grave responsibilities in this area. We will over these next few days point this out in very careful detail, about what these particular cuts and programs are, and how they have really affected and adversely impacted the opportunities for children to move ahead. That is the record. It is one of great discouragement, and it is one I hope our Republican friends will be willing to address.

MINIMUM WAGE AND BANKRUPTCY

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, last Thursday the majority leader filed a cloture motion on S. 625, the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1999. If the Senate adopts cloture, an amendment to increase the minimum wage could not be offered to the bill. Some Senators may support cloture because they believe the minimum wage is not relevant to the bankruptcy debate, but I disagree. Raising the minimum wage is critical to preventing the economic free-fall that often leads to bankruptcy, and many of us have sponsored the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 1999 to begin to right that wrong.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. KENNEDY. Is that all 15 minutes?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The 10 minutes allotted to the Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Then I yield to myself just 4 of the last 5 minutes, please.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized.

Mr. KENNEDY. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, invoking cloture would deny us the opportunity, on the floor of the Senate, to offer a minimum wage amendment that will raise the minimum wage 50 cents next January and 50 cents the year after and provide some $2,000 of purchasing power for minimum wage workers. In all, over 11 million Americans will benefit from an increase in the minimum wage.

We seek to raise the minimum wage at a time of virtual price stability, at a time of virtual full employment, and at a time when the ink is not even dry on the vote by the Members of the Senate to give themselves a pay increase of over $4,000 this year. I will say, at least the Democrats who voted in support of that increase would also vote in support of an increase in the minimum wage. But why should we be denied that opportunity? Why should we be denied the opportunity to have a vote on this particular issue? It makes such a difference to families that work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year.

We believe raising the minimum wage is relevant to the bankruptcy issue. The threat of bankruptcy is related to the availability of resources. The fewer financial resources individuals have, the more difficult it is for them to meet their economic challenges. We do not have the opportunity, at least at this time, to get into all of the reasons so many individual Americans are going into bankruptcy. But we find half of the women are in bankruptcy because their husbands refuse to pay child support. Of workers who are over 55, the greatest percentage of those in bankruptcy are there because they don't have health insurance. Many in bankruptcy are workers dislocated from their jobs because of mergers, who find themselves caught in a downward economic spiral.

We should have an opportunity to address those issues. Why does the Republican leadership deny us the chance to have a fair vote on raising the minimum wage, providing hard working Americans with an extra $2,000? That might not seem like a lot to many here, but it is about 7 months' worth of groceries for a family, or 5 months of rent. It will pay for almost two years of tuition for a worker or her son or daughter to attend a community college. It is a lot of money for many hard-working Americans.

Finally, the minimum wage is a children's issue because the children of workers who earn minimum wage are impacted by their parents' scarce resources. It is a women's issue, because the majority of minimum wage workers are women. It is a civil rights issue because one-third of minimum wage workers are African-American or Hispanic. It is basically and most fundamentally a fairness issue. At the time of the greatest prosperity in the history of this country, are we going to continue to deny our brothers and sisters, Americans who are working hard, 40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year, the opportunity to have a livable wage?

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Kathy Curran, a Labor Department detailee, be granted the privilege of the floor during today's debate.

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

Mr. KENNEDY. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois has 1 minute remaining.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Massachusetts, as well as the Senators from Hawaii and Mexico, for joining in our message.

My fear is, in the closing weeks of this session, if the Members of the Senate were accused of having passed legislation this year to help the families of America, we could not gather enough evidence to prove the charge. We are about to leave town in a few weeks emptyhanded, having done little or nothing on education, little or nothing on minimum wage, little or nothing on health care. Frankly, I think the American people sent us to this body to do things to make life better for families across America. The Senator from Massachusetts speaks about minimum wage and education. There are so many other items on the agenda that should be addressed by a Congress listening to the American people.

I yield the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 4:15 shall be under the control of the Senator from Wyoming, Mr. THOMAS, or his designee.

The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I appreciate the opportunity to visit a little bit about the remaining weeks in this session. I have a little different view of what has happened from that of my friends who are just leaving the floor, who suggest nothing has been done. They did not mention Ed-Flex, one of the most important education bills that has been passed in this Congress, which allows families and school boards and States to have more say in education. They didn't talk about the tax bill which provides an opportunity for families to invest and save their

money so it can be used for education. They did not talk about standards and accountability, the fact we are going to take up these bills, the elementary school and secondary education bill, or Social Security, where we have done something about the proposal there, or the Taxpayer Bill of Rights.

It is interesting; when they talk about some of the things they would like to see happen, they somehow forget about the things we have done. I guess that indicates we do have a different view. It is proper. It is perfectly legitimate to have a different view about how we accomplish the things we are about.

Mr. President, I yield to the Senator from Oklahoma such time as he may consume.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Wyoming for yielding.

THE IMPORTANCE OF VIEQUES

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I do want to talk about some of the tax ramifications, today's subject. I think it is very significant.

Prior to doing that, though, we have an issue that is current, rather sensitive, and is rather serious in terms of our Nation's security.

Tomorrow, the committee I chair, the Readiness Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee, will be holding a hearing to review the national security requirement for continued training operations of the naval facility off the island of Puerto Rico called Vieques. It is a very important issue, military readiness, with the lives of military personnel on one side of the debate and the interests of the local community on the other.

At this point, I remind the President that for 57 years we have used this island of Vieques, an island that is approximately 20 or 25 miles wide, one small area way over on the east end of this island as a range, a bombing range—57 years. During that time, we have lost the lives of one person, who was a civilian employee working for the Navy. This happened last April and created quite a bit of hysteria. There are many people trying to use this as an excuse to close down the range that is so vital to our interests.

We have seen all the press reports outlining the concerns of those who oppose the military's use of the island. We have also witnessed the introduction of legislation to close this range. Unfortunately, far less attention has been given to the national security requirement for continued access to the training provided by this range. In fact, I have not heard anyone address the increased risk to our Nation's youth who serve in uniform and what they will face if we send them into combat without the benefit of the training that is offered only at Vieques Island. The subcommittee will be meeting tomorrow to explore the requirements of this language.

It is my hope that once the panel, appointed by the Secretary of Defense to review this matter and make recommendations for appropriate resolution, issues its report, the committee will be able to then meet to review those recommendations and hear from the people of Puerto Rico as well as the military.

The Secretary of the Navy recently released a report, prepared by two of its senior officers, which examines our training activities on Vieques and explores potential alternative training sites. Although no alternative site has yet been identified that would replace the training Vieques provides, I understand the panel appointed by the Secretary of Defense and by the President continues to seek a resolution to this issue.

I will read a couple paragraphs out of the Navy report prepared by those individuals. I think it is very significant:

> The Inner Range at Vieques is the only range along the Atlantic seaboard that can accommodate naval gunfire, the only range at which strike aircraft are afforded the use of air-to-ground live ordnance with tactically realistic and challenging targets and airspace which allows the use of high altitude flight profiles.

This is very similar to what we witnessed in Kosovo, and they were very successful. Even though to begin with we should not have been involved, it was necessary to use high-altitude bombing to be out of the range of surface-to-air missiles. We did that successfully, and they received their training at Vieques. I do not know what the degree of success would have been otherwise.

Continuing from the report:

> It is the only range at which live naval surface, aviation and artillery ordnance can be delivered in coordination. Additionally, Vieques is the only training venue that can accommodate amphibious landings supported by naval surface fires. . . .

It continues and talks about how this is the only facility we have, and if we do not have this facility, we are going to be deploying troops into areas without proper training. One of the conclusions of the report is:

> This study has reaffirmed that the Vieques Inner Range provides unique training opportunities vital to military readiness, and contributes significantly to the ability of naval expeditionary forces to obtain strategic objectives. This study examined alternative plausible sites and concluded that none, either in existence or yet undeveloped, would provide the range of training opportunities at Vieques Inner Range.

The U.S.S. *Eisenhower* is going to be deployed in February to the Arabian Gulf and to the Mediterranean to do just this type of exercise and will be called upon to do something to defend this country when they will not have had the proper training from Vieques because right now there is a moratorium and the U.S.S. *Eisenhower* has not had the opportunity to have that training.

Any resolution must provide the military with the ability to achieve the same level of proficiency that the training operations at Vieques currently provide. Any proposal to move operations to a phantom or an unidentified site as of yet is unacceptable. Before any decision is made to move operations from Vieques, a specific alternative site must be identified and all actions necessary to make it functional, from environmental studies to military construction, must be completed. Failure to identify a specific site and make it available will simply prove the validity of the Navy's position that no viable alternative exists. Therefore, any decision to continue the use of Vieques, but at a reduced level of operations, must still allow the military to perform the training necessary to meet the required wartime proficiency.

I fear that a decision is going to be made based on politics rather than national security. I am concerned that this administration may take action that will place at risk the lives of sailors and marines simply to court the popular vote in favor of candidates with close ties to this President.

One only has to look back at the recent decision to release terrorists from prison to fully appreciate the extent to which this President is willing to place American lives and interests at risk in order to garner votes for his friends and family. The inappropriate politicization of the issue has already been demonstrated by the Justice Department and the U.S. attorney's office in Puerto Rico which have refused take necessary action to protect the lives of American citizens.

As many of my colleagues already know, as we speak today, there are protesters over there, some four groups of protesters, who are on the live range with live ordnances. I had occasion to spend a good bit of the recess looking at this. I have been over every inch of the island either by helicopter or by car or on foot. I have seen the protesters out there throwing around live ordnances. Just imagine, in 57 years, how much is out there. One particular individual came out carrying a live ordnance and tried to get on a commercial aircraft, which would have killed everybody on the aircraft.

It is a very serious thing, and I cannot believe our Justice Department has refused to enforce the laws of trespassing on Federal military Government property. I hope these explosives do not fall into the hands of some of the terrorists the President recently released from prison.

One thing about this issue is certain. The primary mission of Roosevelt Roads is to support training operations at Vieques. If military access to Vieques is eliminated, the value of Roosevelt Roads will be greatly reduced, and those functions, other than supporting this range, can be performed very well in other areas where there is excess capacity.