

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. REED). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the managers are trying to work out a number of things on this most important issue of postcloture. During the next hour we will work on that.

#### RECESS

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent the recess previously scheduled begin right now.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 4:24 p.m., recessed until 5:30 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. MILLER).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

#### UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 2538

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, Senator KENNEDY and I are going to be involved in a colloquy for a couple of minutes as we await another amendment. It pertains to the minimum wage. I will have a unanimous consent request that I will propound in a moment.

As we are debating new trade practices, we must not forget important protections for America's workers. Many of these protections are addressed through the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act, but for the last 60 years there has been another important protection for workers, and that is the minimum wage.

It has now been over 6 years since Congress voted to increase the minimum wage. In that time, the cost of living has increased 12 percent while the real value of the minimum wage has steadily declined. In fact, by 2003, all of the gain achieved through the last increase will have been wiped out.

Today, minimum wage employees working 40 hours a week 52 weeks a year earn only \$10,700—more than \$4,000 below the poverty line for a family of three.

In the last 6 years, the purchasing power of the minimum wage has deteriorated to near record low levels. Teacher's aides and health care workers are among the hard-working Americans who are unable to make ends meet on a \$5.15 per hour wage.

In fact, the current minimum wage does not provide enough income to allow full-time workers to afford adequate housing in any area of the country. In my State of South Dakota, the minimum wage is hardly enough for a family to make ends meet.

According to the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, a minimum wage earner can afford a monthly rent

of no more than \$268. In South Dakota, a worker earning the minimum wage must work 79 hours a week in order to afford a typical two-bedroom apartment. In fact, estimates show that for a worker to be able to afford a two-bedroom apartment in South Dakota, they would have to earn \$10.12—nearly 200 percent of the present minimum wage.

That is why we need to pass Senator KENNEDY's new minimum wage legislation. It would provide a \$1.50 increase over the next 2 years. This is the least we can do, and it is long overdue.

By increasing the minimum wage by \$1.50, working families will receive an additional \$3,000 per year in income. While this increase would not be enough to lift the family of three above the poverty line, it would provide the resources to buy over 15 months of groceries, 8 months of rent, 7 months of utilities, or tuition at a two-year community college. The reality is that American workers are working harder and harder for less and less.

It is time for Congress to address the needs of America's working families. It is time to act and raise the minimum wage.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I wonder if the majority leader would be kind enough to yield for a few questions.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I would be happy to yield to the Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, now we are dealing with the trade bill which will provide benefits, obviously, to many corporations. We also ought to think of the workers, especially those workers at the bottom rung of the economic ladder.

I listened with interest to the Senator from South Dakota. As the Senator pointed out, if we fail to increase the minimum wage, which has not been increased in 6 years, the purchasing power of the minimum wage will near an all-time low.

All we are trying to do is bring it up a little bit, which would be generally below what the average has been over recent years.

Is the Senator aware that if we fail to act with an increase in the minimum wage, it will be virtually at an all-time low if we don't act this year?

Mr. DASCHLE. It is not as well known as I wish it were. But how ironic it would be if in the same Congress that passed tax breaks for those at the very top—tax breaks worth \$50,000 a year to those in the top 1 percent—we could not do something to address the needs of those at the lowest end of the income scale.

I certainly appreciate the graphic depiction of the trend of the minimum wage which the Senator from Massachusetts has outlined. That is the whole idea behind this legislation.

Mr. KENNEDY. I would like to ask the Senator a further question. Does the Senator not agree with me that for years this body—Republicans and Democrats—thought that people who

worked 40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year should not have to live in poverty in the United States? Does the Senator understand now that the minimum wage is well below the poverty line for working families?

Some will say we have an earned-income tax credit. But still the fact is for a single mom, or even for families of three, they are still well below the poverty line.

Does the Senator not agree with me, as I believe most Democrats do, that work ought to pay and that those individuals who work 52 weeks of the year, 40 hours a week should at least be at a poverty line, not a living wage even, but a poverty line?

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, the answer to that would be emphatically yes, especially given the stated desire of Members of Congress who have passed welfare reform. The whole idea behind welfare reform was to make work pay, to make work more palatable than welfare. But it is hard for me to understand how a head of household can see how work pays when they are working for the minimum wage, 52 weeks a year, 40 hours a week and earning only \$10,700 a year.

That is why we have people in South Dakota—and I am sure in Massachusetts—working two and three jobs. That is why we are concerned about the pressures on families these days. It is hard to raise children, and it is hard to address all of the other familial responsibilities if you are working two and three jobs a week in an effort to rise above that poverty line that the Senator's chart illustrates.

Mr. KENNEDY. Of course, I believe the increase in the minimum wage is a women's issue because the majority of those earning the minimum wage are women. It is a children's issue because so many of those women have children. It is a civil rights issue because great numbers of those who receive the minimum wage are men and women of color, and it is a fairness issue.

In looking over the historic increases that have been enacted by the Congress since 1956, the proposal is an increase of \$1.50—60 cents the first year, 50 cents the next year, and 40 cents. This represents in the bar chart what the percentage increase would be going back to 1956. It will be actually one of the lowest over the period of the next 3 years.

When the Senator propounds his unanimous consent request, we will probably hear those who will say this is new legislation when we talk about an increase in the minimum wage. We haven't had a chance to study it. This is something that sort of takes us by surprise.

Will the Senator not agree with me that this issue is as old as the 1930s, effectively, when we first enacted the minimum wage, and that this proposal of \$1.50 over 3 years is actually a very modest proposal indeed?

Mr. DASCHLE. The Senator is absolutely right. Not only is it modest but it is overdue.