

years—in 10 years. That will be the first increase in the minimum wage. It will be increased to \$5.85 an hour, followed by an additional 70 cents one year later, and an additional 70 cents one year after that.

This will mean new hope and opportunity for 13 million men and women. Primarily women, because almost 60 percent of minimum wage workers are women. It will benefit some 6.4 million children because more than half of the women who will benefit from the increase have children. So it will benefit the children. This means hope is on the way.

It has been a long time, Mr. President. We have heard those who say: Well, the increase in the minimum wage is going to cost jobs, and it will work a hardship on these people. Of course, that is what they have said on every increase there has been. This is the 10th increase in the minimum wage, and they have been wrong each and every time. Currently, the second largest economy in Western Europe is Great Britain—they are paying \$10.97 as a minimum wage. They have lifted almost a million children out of poverty. At the present time, Ireland also has one of the strongest economies in Western Europe and their minimum wage is \$11.25 an hour, and they have the strongest economy in all of Western Europe. They have reduced child poverty by 40 percent, and their economy is strong. So \$5.85 in this great country at this time is just a statement that many of us believe that work should pay, and that people who work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year, should not live in poverty.

So tomorrow will be an important day, Mr. President, and it is appropriate that the Senate be reminded of it.

VOTE-ARAMAS

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, last Thursday night, in an embarrassing display, the Senate engaged in the perennial and painfully ridiculous budget vote-arama.

This is the process where the Senate considers either a budget resolution or reconciliation bill, and, under the rules of the Budget Act, Senators are permitted to offer and secure votes on amendments after the statutory limitation on debate has expired. By consent, Senators are usually allocated 2 minutes to describe their positions for and against an amendment before the Senate votes. Because Senators are not required to file their amendments in advance, far too often, Senators cannot read an amendment before a rollcall vote begins. We cannot even get an inkling of some of the mischief contained in many of these amendments. Many times, the amendments being considered would require sweeping changes to current law, and Senators are forced to cast their votes on these complex matters without the benefit of debate, an understanding of the costs, or even the

chance to peek at the text of the amendment.

In recent years, the budget vote-arama has come to signify an absolute breakdown in the deliberations of the U.S. Senate. The vote-arama is a degrading process that sullies the reputation of the Senate every time it occurs. I can only imagine, and I cringe at the thought of, how the Senate must appear to the American people, voting on matters without debate, and without even something as simple as a copy of the amendment.

Last Thursday night, during the debate on the Higher Education Access Act, the so-called education reconciliation bill, the process deteriorated even further, into something appalling. The Senate fell into a political tit-for-tat, with Senators offering, at first, an unrelated amendment regarding the Federal Communications Commission, and then a sense-of-the-Senate resolution regarding the detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and then an unrelated amendment to alter the collective bargaining rights of American workers. The free-for-all further deteriorated when an amendment was offered urging the President not to pardon the Vice President's former Chief of Staff, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, and then a retaliatory amendment was offered regarding the pardons granted by President Clinton. And on it went.

Amendment after amendment was offered, each completely unrelated to the education bill before the Senate, and subject to multiple violations under the Budget Act. And, yet, each side continued to raise the stakes, taking political shots at the opposing side, while the Senate suffered through a humiliating night of political ping-pong. Cooler heads finally prevailed, thanks to the intervention of the majority leader, and, at least, the amendments regarding Presidential pardons were withdrawn. Nevertheless, the soap opera of last Thursday night underscores the dangers of the budget reconciliation process—where bills are considered under expedited procedures, where debate is almost nonexistent, where vote-aramas occur, and where Senators are called upon to cast votes on nearly anonymous amendments that amount to little more than colorful sloganeering.

The spectacle also underscored the absolute necessity of the Byrd Rule. Section 313 of the Budget Act—the Byrd Rule—prevents extraneous matter from being added to reconciliation bills, and being jammed through the Senate on party-line votes, like the ones we saw last Thursday night. The Byrd Rule was designed to prevent passage of exactly the kind of amendments that were being offered.

As the hours ticked by, I believe that many Members were embarrassed by the performance of the Senate, as it got dragged into a political game of tossing zingers. In hindsight, we have to admit that matters got carried away, and that this body drifted far

from its constitutional responsibility to legislate for the American people, and not the political media. Last Thursday night, the Senate displayed an utter lack of seriousness and appreciation for the depth and complexity of the issues before this country. I opposed every amendment that violated the Byrd Rule—regardless of whether it was offered by a Republican or Democrat, and regardless of how I viewed the subject matter—because I was so appalled by the deterioration in the Senate's deliberative processes. I can say honestly that I took no part in the message-mongering amendments that were extraneous to the underlying bill, and that showed this institution in such a shameful light.

Last Thursday night's spectacle ought to cause every Senator to re-evaluate the budget process in the U.S. Senate. I will renew my efforts to do away with these pernicious vote-aramas, and I hope my colleagues will join me in that effort.

REFUGEE CRISIS IN IRAQ ACT

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, yesterday's Washington Post included details from a memo by our Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, in which he makes a strong case that we need to do more to make it possible for Iraqis employed by our government to come to the United States.

Ambassador Crocker emphasizes the growing danger facing these Iraqis, who as he states "work under extremely difficult conditions, and are targets for violence including murder and kidnapping." According to the article, Ambassador Crocker has called for establishment of an immigrant visa program for these Iraqi employees.

In fact, Senators SMITH, BIDEN, HAGEL, LIEBERMAN, LEAHY, LEVIN, and I have introduced legislation which establishes a program to do precisely what Ambassador Crocker calls for.

Our legislation establishes an immigrant visa program for Iraqis who have worked for or directly with the United States government for at least 1 year. Our Government now provides such special immigrant visas but only for Iraqi and Afghan translators and interpreters. Our bill expands it to include Iraqis in other professions who have been employed by us or who have worked directly with us.

In addition, our legislation creates additional options for Iraqis who are under threat because of their close association with the United States to apply to our refugee resettlement program.

The Senate is obviously divided on the best overall policy to pursue on the war. I thought it was a mistake from the beginning. That is no secret. Some of our colleagues are convinced that continuing the use of military force in Iraq is necessary to protect our national security.

But our divisions on that issue should not obscure the fact that all of