

This 5th Day of March 2014

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THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

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SCHOOL FOOD MODERNIZATION ACT

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, our kids spend at least 7 hours a day at school working, learning, growing, and trying to build themselves into the people they want to grow up to become. It is our job to help them. That means giving them the education they deserve. It means giving them the support they need to keep working hard. And it means making sure they get healthy meals to keep them strong and to give them the fuel they need to focus in class.

That is why Senator SUSAN COLLINS from Maine and I introduced the School Food Modernization Act, which would help schools provide healthier meals to students in North Dakota and throughout the country. This bill would continue ongoing efforts to provide healthy meals for our children during the school day and make sure schools have the resources they need to get the most nutritious food to students.

Providing healthy meals is particularly important as childhood obesity rates in the U.S. have tripled over the last three decades. More than 23 million adolescents and children in our country—nearly 1 in 3 young people nationwide—are obese or overweight. According to the American Heart Association, it is the No. 1 healthy concern among parents—more than drug abuse and smoking. Even in my State of North Dakota, which is consistently ranked as one of the healthiest States in the country, more than 1 in 8 adolescents are overweight or obese.

Improving the nutritional quality of school meals can help fight the obesity epidemic, putting children on strong footing to prevent long-term health concerns related to obesity, such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. In 2010, Congress passed the Healthy and Hunger Free Kids Act to improve the school nutrition standards. It made important improvements to nutrition standards in school meals, but was not perfect. Most importantly, it mandated school lunch requirements without offering real support to reach those standards.

Senator COLLINS and I are working to improve these standards in order to provide greater flexibility to school meal planners to make sure they can provide students with the nutrition they need in workable fashion. We are also offering grant assistance to help schools get resources to comply with standards.

Another way we can help provide more nutritious meals to students is by providing our schools with the necessary tools to prepare meals and store

fresh produce. While nutritional standards for meals served in our schools have increased considerably, support for schools to implement these important changes has lagged behind.

Many school kitchens were built decades ago and designed with little capacity beyond reheating and holding food for dining service. In fact, according to the Pew Charitable Trusts, 74 percent of school districts in North Dakota need at least one piece of kitchen equipment to better serve healthy meals. We can do better than that.

The legislation we introduced would give schools greater access to the equipment they need to prepare healthy meals, reduce waste, and make resources stretch further.

Specifically, our legislation would provide targeted grant assistance to school administrators and food service directors to upgrade kitchen infrastructure or purchase high-quality, durable kitchen equipment such as commercial ovens, steamers, and stoves. Additionally, our legislation would establish a loan assistance program within USDA to help schools acquire new equipment to prepare and serve healthier, more nutritious meals to students. School administrators and other eligible borrowers would be able to obtain Federal guarantees for 90 percent of the loan value needed to construct, remodel, or expand their kitchens, dining, or food storage infrastructure. Finally, our legislation would strengthen training and provide technical assistance to aid school food service personnel in meeting the updated nutrition guidelines. Not every school food service employee is equipped with the expertise to comply with healthier meal and food preparation standards. Our bill authorizes USDA to provide support on a competitive basis to highly qualified third-party trainers to develop and administer training and technical assistance.

USDA has a long history of providing support for schools to upgrade meal preparation equipment; however, this support has been sporadic and unreliable for long-term planning. And in recent years, the demand for support has been great with requests for assistance far outpacing availability.

As the Senate agriculture committee begins to consider reauthorization of the school nutrition program, I look forward to working with my colleagues on improving school meal offerings and providing schools with the tools needed to give our children the nutritional fuel necessary to learn and grow.

As the daughter of a school cook, I understand the work that goes into preparing many healthy meals each day for kids, and this bill would help make limited resources stretch as far as possible to provide support to communities that need it in North Dakota and throughout the U.S. That just makes sense for our students, parents, teachers, and school cooks.

THE MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, growing up, my mother was a single parent. She

raised three children by herself. I know what it is like to run out of money at the end of the month, what it is like when every dime matters.

The minimum wage is a poverty wage. Today, the minimum wage hasn't kept up with inflation. If the minimum wage had kept up with inflation in 1968, the minimum wage today would be \$10.68. If you do the math, minimum wage workers today earn less than \$15,000 per year. If you are supporting a child or an elderly parent, that is a family income below the Federal poverty line. Raising the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 would help lift nearly a million workers and their families out of poverty. In Hawaii, nearly 100,000 women would get a raise.

This is especially important for women. More and more women serve as heads of households. And nearly two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women. Nearly two-thirds of workers in tipped occupations are women.

The situation is even more dire in Hawaii, where the cost of living is higher. In Hawaii, one out of five Hawaii women workers would get a raise if we raised the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10. A person working full time making \$7.25 per hour makes \$14,500 per year. The average rent in Hawaii for a one-bedroom is \$1,278. That is more than \$15,000 per year. That is why many in Hawaii have to work more than one job.

And there are stories all across the country of women struggling. Hawaii Catholic Charities recently shared their story with me of a woman in Hawaii working for minimum wage who was unable to afford basic living expenses for herself and her son. She had to move back in with her parents. Over the course of a few years she was able to change jobs to a department store, where she eventually earned \$10 per hour. At that wage she was able to contribute to her family's household expenses and start a savings account for her son. We all hear stories like this often. It's why we must raise the minimum wage—so that hard working families have a chance at building a better life for themselves and their children.

Some critics claim the minimum wage will cost jobs. The CBO report looked at old studies and not the latest research. Just last week, a Goldman Sachs report said the CBO estimate of 0.3 percent job loss is too high because raising the minimum wage would actually increase demand. Minimum-wage workers spend that money right away, at local businesses in their communities. A survey of small business owners found that three out of five supported raising the minimum wage. They said a higher minimum wage would increase consumer spending on their goods and services. The Goldman Sachs report said that States which raised their minimum wage in 2014 actually created more jobs than other states.