

make families toil even harder to provide their children with life's necessities. That is why I am so proud to introduce the Working Family Child Assistance Act to permanently set the amount of earnings necessary to qualify for the refundable child tax credit at \$8,500.

Last October's change to boost the refundable child tax credit took a significant time to materialize, and although the road was long, it was a worthwhile journey. Indeed, our work began in 2001 when I pushed to make the child tax credit refundable for workers making around the minimum wage. As enacted in 2001, a portion of a taxpayer's child tax credit would be refundable—up to 10 percent of earnings above \$10,000.

Not resting on our victory in 2001, in 2004, Congress passed the Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2004, which increased from 10 percent to 15 percent the portion of the child tax credit that is refundable. Although the legislation increased the amount of the refundable child credit, it failed to increase the number of families eligible for the benefit. The reason was that it did not reduce the amount of earnings a family must have to qualify for the incentive. Worse still, the earnings threshold rose each year because it was adjusted for inflation. The consequences were serious for low-income Americans living paycheck-to-paycheck because it meant that tens of thousands of low-income families were left completely ineligible for a credit they should receive.

To ensure that low-income families could get the benefits that they so rightly deserve, I worked with my colleagues to introduce legislation in both 2005 and 2007 to reduce the earnings threshold for the refundable child tax credit to \$10,000 and to de-index that amount for inflation. As I mentioned, we were more successful than that last year when Congress lowered the earnings threshold for 2008 to \$8,500.

Unfortunately, we cannot rest on our laurels and must get right back to work. This year, because the incentive we passed last October was effective for just 2008, only taxpayers earning over \$12,550 are eligible to receive the refundable portion of the child tax credit. Low-income families earning less than that amount are shut out of the child tax credit completely.

As an example of how crucial it is to enact our legislation to permanently set the threshold for the refundable credit at \$8,500, let's look at the following example. A single mother who earns the current minimum wage of \$6.55 per hour and works a 40 hour week for all 52 weeks of the year would earn \$13,264. Accordingly, under the law effective for 2009, her refundable child tax credit would be \$161. In contrast, if the earnings threshold were set at \$8,500, her refundable child tax credit would jump to \$715. Thus, if Congress does not change the law, that mother will have 554 fewer dollars in her pocket

this year than she did last year. Put another way, she won't have the money that is so necessary for her to clothe her child and put gas in the car. What is even more regrettable is that the \$554 amount will only grow next year because the \$12,550 she needed to earn this year is adjusted for inflation and will increase.

Let's do the right thing and make permanent the sensible change Congress made last year to set the earnings threshold for the refundable child tax credit at \$8,500. Our families and our country are better off when Government lets people keep more of what they earn, particularly the most vulnerable among us. Parents deserve their per-child tax credit, and this bill rewards families for work.

In conclusion, I would note that President-elect Obama was a stalwart supporter of our efforts as a Member of the Senate, and I hope that he will work with Congress so we can help an additional 1 million children, whose parents and guardians struggle every day to take care of them.

IDAHOANS SPEAK OUT ON HIGH ENERGY PRICES

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, in mid-June, I asked Idahoans to share with me how high energy prices are affecting their lives, and they responded by the hundreds. The stories, numbering well over 1,200, are heartbreaking and touching. While energy prices have dropped in recent weeks, the concerns expressed remain very relevant. To respect the efforts of those who took the opportunity to share their thoughts, I am submitting every e-mail sent to me through an address set up specifically for this purpose to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. This is not an issue that will be easily resolved, but it is one that deserves immediate and serious attention, and Idahoans deserve to be heard. Their stories not only detail their struggles to meet everyday expenses, but also have suggestions and recommendations as to what Congress can do now to tackle this problem and find solutions that last beyond today. I ask unanimous consent to have today's letters printed in the RECORD:

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Thank you for asking about our story and giving us an opportunity to help. Me and my wife are students at BYU-Idaho and have one child on the way. The situation that we are in requires us to drive to school and work. We use about 2 tanks of gas a month and that is just business travel and does not include any enjoyment travel such as going to see family which has been very limited lately. My job consists of working at a Thai restaurant as a waiter for only 10 hours a week because with my heavy school load; that is all I can do. My wife does not work and is 37 weeks pregnant and attending school. Luckily we have received government financial aid for school, which consists of Pell grants. This money helps but we find that instead of using that money the government gave us for education, we are using it to pay for gas.

We are grateful for the aid the government is giving us but sorry that it is not used for what they meant it for but instead find ourselves using it to pay the oil companies. To try to limit the use of such fund we tend to stay home more and visit family less but even with that sacrifice we still see the money slowly seeping out due to gas prices.

Thank you for your efforts,

BLAKE.

Our government's inaction in this energy crisis is in my view the greatest act of treason by a group of Americans in recent memory. Inaction and pointing fingers at each other is unacceptable behavior by a government who is "supposed" to be looking after the best interests of the American people. We have every ability to provide for our energy needs with our own resources while we work to conserve and provide the energy responsibly in our environment. The fact that our government is allowing the American people to be held hostage by the world on this issue is tragic and has enhanced my view that the corruption is not with our industries but with those that we are electing.

JAY.

Trucks move the nation and the price of diesel is hurting everyone.

MARGE.

I see my married children struggle to buy gas for their cars—money that should go to food, medical, and housing costs.

Two years ago, in my construction business, it would not have mattered whether a job was 3 miles away or 30 miles away, but now I cannot bid a job without adding extra for fuel for added distance. All of our construction materials are going up also. How long will the economy stand this?

It is frustrating to see the congress do nothing to help relieve the pressure of this on the nation. Raising taxes will not help. Just doing something about the environmentalists will help. Stop the government controls and get drilling for oil and build some refineries.

Thank you for what you do, Senator Crapo. I know that you are for drilling because I watch your voting record. I also listen to you on "Probing America". The United States needs more people like you.

ALLAN, Shelley.

Living in Southeast Idaho with its wide open spaces can be both a blessing and a curse. As an educator and a proud parent, I am deeply concerned about the rising energy costs. I work fifteen miles from where I live. That translates to thirty miles round-trip. I choose to work in a rural school district and am proud to do so as I believe every district deserves quality teachers. As you are well aware, educators are already some of the poorest paid in this great state. I fear that I may not be able to afford to keep my job, but I can also not afford to lose it. One thing I am sure of and that is that Washington does not know about the special needs of our state as far as transportation is concerned. I am glad that you can present our situation to them.

STEPHANIE.

Our business is ATV Alternatives, LLC in Caldwell. Our product is a fantastic utility vehicle imported to the USA from abroad that gets nearly 40 MPG and is increasingly popular to businesses (especially dairies, farms, ranches, recreational users) who see value in using a smaller vehicle that can carry a variety of things along with a second passenger in an enclosed cab. It gets 2-4 times better mileage than other products

being used (pickups being underutilized 10 MPG, ATVs getting 15–20 MPG, UTVs getting 20–25 MPG, or tractors getting 4–12 gallons per hour.

Increasing prices for fuel is increasing demand but commuting to the office, delivering vehicles, and overall shipping costs (especially over the ocean, on rails and by truckers) have dramatically gone up as well. Further, increasing international competition for the same used “Kei” class Mini Trucks along with the drastic decline of the U.S. Dollar versus the Japanese Yen have also dramatically increased product costs (upwards of 75–100% increase versus 2006). The margin is now too thin to really let this business generate the income we need it to . . . it looks like a great little business needs a buyer; know anybody interested in a great opportunity that can easily and synergistically combine with another Farm Equipment, Vehicle, or Recreational Vehicle dealership? We are going broke commuting for this single product company . . .

Oh, Customs wants to tariff these as if they are road legal an extra 25%, but DOT and DEQ does not want them here at all (ATV manufacturers pay lobbyist and lawyers well).

We are open to offers, ideas, and customer orders (for now).

ROY and ARLENE, *Caldwell.*

I have a beautiful wife and four handsome boys. Gas prices are really hurting our family. Last November (2007), we were lucky to have twin boys born to us three months and a week early. The doctors gave them a 50% chance of living. They were in the hospital for three months and a little bit. We have insurance but with doctors asking for money and continuous doctors' appointments, my little paycheck is having a very rough time trying to afford rising gas prices, doctor bills, house mortgage, car payment, and student loans. I bring home about \$1,250 a paycheck. I have one house with a mortgage of \$1,260 a month, one car with payments at \$244 a month; we do not have internet, cable, magazine subscriptions, cell phones, or any of the other extras that this wonderful life can afford. If you really start adding the number together, I do not really make that much. And the gas prices are really hurting me and my family, not to mention all the other young families around me. Some people in life are just starting out, they do not have the high paying job, let us think twice before we raise the price of gas. We do not want to be the cause kids not being able to go to the doctor's office because we cannot afford to drive there.

ANCLE, *Idaho Falls.*

Recent gasoline price increases have induced my wife and I to spend more time on our bicycles. I am feeling better, she's lookin' good, and we have each lost 10 pounds. High pump prices have motivated a healthy self examination of our lifestyle.

Metaphorically speaking, the nation could benefit from the loss of a few pounds. The current gas crunch will be good for the nation insofar as it motivates introspection and reasoned change in our national energy habits.

I fear, however, that the nation will choose political expedience instead of the changes that will assure our country's long term health. Rather than wean ourselves from petroleum, we will be tempted to increase domestic oil production. Such an increase, however, would be gobbled up by the global market, and do little to ameliorate conditions at home. To be sure, domestic petroleum development might be a part of a comprehensive energy policy, but relying on domestic production as the centerpiece of the nation's energy plan would be foolish.

High gasoline prices are due as much to a weak dollar as to increased global competition for the world's petroleum. Our nation's industrial and technological base is rapidly eroding, both in real terms and relative to the rest of the world. As a consequence, we have less to offer in exchange for the petroleum and other products we import.

The nation's 20th century rise to power coincided closely with its ability to dominate the world's energy market. We exported the lion's share of the world's petroleum and, importantly, we manufactured the automobiles and machines that used it. For the United States, both literally and figuratively, energy has been the source of power.

Today's high petroleum prices signal a window of opportunity for the United States. As the world's largest energy consumer, we are in a unique position to define the alternative energy technology that the entire world will use for decades. We can, as a nation, choose to regain our preeminence as the world's largest energy supplier by developing and manufacturing the energy production, distribution, and storage systems that the world will use. This will decrease our dependence on foreign petroleum, revitalize our industrial base, and rid us of the trade deficit that is sapping our buying power.

MICHAEL, *Boise.*

One good step toward actually doing something about gasoline prices would be to realize that the oil “prices” quoted daily in the media do not represent the oil companies' costs for their raw material. They are taken from the commodities futures trading markets, and have no bearing upon what it costs an oil company to pump oil out of the ground. The oil companies do and will use the futures markets as cover for increasing their prices, but the fact is that when the price in the commodities market goes up that does not mean the gasoline producers' costs go up too. It is obvious to any thinking person that, in fact, the oil companies do not get their crude oil through the futures markets.

If Congress wants to do something worthwhile, it could require that oil futures trading be confined to buyers who will take actual physical delivery of the oil “purchased.” As it is, quoted oil futures prices are merely analogs for the general value of the dollar, not for the true cost of oil or the decent price of retail gasoline.

JAMES.

Senior citizens can either buy gas or groceries but not both so the groceries win out of course and we stay at home. Do something!

ANNETTA.

I wish to respond to your email concerning current energy prices. The current energy prices have had a profound effect upon my retirement. In May, we turned off our propane powered furnace for the summer and fall. The price of propane has increased from \$1.09 per gallon four years ago to \$2.59 per gallon a month ago. Also, we turned off the pilot light to our gas fireplace.

Our family is spread from Oregon to Georgia. The current price of gas has resulted in our inability to afford trips to visit our children and grandchildren. Our children cannot afford to visit us. We now make sure that trips to town are fewer and with more errands accomplished per trip.

Our government needs to (1) open all areas to oil drilling, (2) Increase development of solar power technology to include vast solar collection arrays in the unused desert areas, (3) consider nuclear energy power development, (4) do not overtax our energy compa-

nies, (5) develop policies that will curtail energy speculators from driving up prices and (6) provide incentives for non oil based powered automobile production.

JAMES, *Bonnors Ferry.*

Thanks for your concern in this matter. I am a soon-to-be 67 year old, retired, on a fixed income. My wife and I live approximately 20 miles NW of Couer d'Alene. I am thankful for our wood stove as it allows us to keep our heating costs reasonable. Not so when it comes to gasoline. The prices in Rathdrum are near \$4 per gallon, and it looks like prices will continue to rise. We do need four wheel drive vehicles around here. My truck is indispensable in so many things I do, including a logging ministry that a friend and I are engaged in. Yes, we cut trees and give the proceeds away. Keeping nothing for ourselves. With our grandchildren on the coast, the cost of traveling is now being considered more and more. Where does it end?

What I have been asking for years is why, when we have been blessed with oil and natural gas reserves that will provide this economic engine to our country, are we still choosing to allow our energy policy to be dictated by people who want to prohibit our energy independence and prosperity. It makes no sense. As is being reported regularly, food costs are rising at an alarming rate due to the cost of transportation. I challenge you and others who we elected to represent us, to begin setting the stage for oil exploration/drilling, and to promote the use of nuclear energy, among other sensible items.

I hope this is not in the “for what is it worth” category, but that you are indeed deeply concerned about this self-imposed dilemma. And a self-imposed, and totally solvable problem it is.

JOHN.

With my household, it has been a bit hard. When I first bought my Dodge neon, I was putting about \$15 in my tank every two weeks. But that was back in 2004 when my husband and I could buy a house for close to nothing. Now I easily spend \$40 every two weeks and that is if I do not drive anywhere but school and back. Then add on our house bills which is \$1,000 with utilities, then food which is \$200 a month, phone is \$50 a month, the internet which I need for school is also \$50 a month, and my husband only makes \$700 every two weeks. My husband was also asked to step down by Micron and they docked his pay. I am 26 years old and cannot seem to find a job so I went back to school to enter the medical field. So that leaves the only one working is my husband and he has to work 12-hour shifts three to four nights a week. Now he is forced to work almost five nights or six nights a week just to pay for food, bills, and maybe Oreo's if we are lucky for luxury. Plus we have to pay for my school bills, which means sometimes our phone is shut off or we miss a house payment. I was a stay-at-home mom but now I am forced back into the working world. And all I can do at the end of the day is cry alone at night and hope we can get through the next week. We have thought about moving but that would mean renting and they will not allow our dogs to go into the rentals. And I am not about to give up my dogs. The only thing keeping me going half the time is I will be graduating next year with an associates degree in medical specialist. And that will hopefully help me to find a job to help my family out.

DANIELLE.

High energy prices are taking a toll on not just me, but my community. Because of the rise in gas prices, I can no longer afford in

my budget to do something that I love to do—volunteer. I have volunteered with Family Services Alliance of Southeast Idaho for a year, but as the price of gas got over 3\$ a gallon, I had to stop. One part of the job is to be able to drive to homes of victims of domestic violence when the police ask for an advocate. The best way to help a victim of sexual assault or domestic violence is to empower them by showing them that they are not just victims, they are survivors. But to do this, you need to go where they are and intervene immediately. It requires taking a car. While it pains me to have to cut this out of my activities, I have already cut back in other ways and it was a hard decision to make.

DIANA, Pocatello.

I have been a small business owner, (one that pays taxes and one of the thousands of small businesses that support this country) for over thirty-five years. I am amazed and deeply troubled by the political chaos in our country and the energy crisis that is bankrupting this country. Our raw materials have raised three or four fold over the last few years and the energy situation is driving many small businesses out of business. I see the effects trickling down to food and other essentials. Many families are in deep trouble and I see it becoming drastic if something is not done in a short period of time. I do not mean in a few years. If Congress does not take steps immediately to put a stop to this runaway disaster, America will never recover and we will never have a quality of life again in America.

I hate to seem gloomy but I see business and families everyday that are panicked. When we let OPEC and other foreign governments support the so-called "Greenies" and other environmental groups in America to the extent that we cannot take care of our own needs here at home, then we of all people are to be pitied. America is rich with raw materials and coal and oil. It is completely insane to let governments that hate us hold us hostage. My fourteen-year-old grandson has more sense than that. Oil companies are getting filthy rich while the American People are suffering. If there is going to be anything left for our children and grandchildren, then we better quit worrying about the owl or the snail and start worrying about our children and grandchildren. I do not know one American that I associate with that does not care about the environment and wildlife etc. But it is ridiculous for us to govern ourselves into non-existence.

I urge you to take a stand against this corruption and turn us back to common sense. I am very concerned and I vote.

DANNY.

I am a 63-year-old woman who is disabled. I am on SSI when I get a cost of living raise, my rent goes up and eats it up. So for me this is really rough; I run out of money before the month is out. The cost of food has doubled mostly and it goes on and on. thank you.

JUDITH.

High gasoline prices are really putting a damper on our monthly budget. My wife and I are in our 50's and we do not have a high income. I am partially disabled and working for low wages. We do not feel that we are going to be able to drive much longer. We have parked one of our cars. In my driving of over 30 years, we have seen the 1973 oil embargo and so called shortage and many other price hikes. But this is beyond comprehension. I am not one for government control but in this case I feel that the government must take over the oil. Otherwise it is going to put a huge damper on the economy. We

have only seen the beginning. OPEC has held America hostage with these prices.

LARRY.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO DEBRA BROWN STEINBERG

• Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I commend Debra Brown Steinberg, an extraordinary woman who I have had the honor of working with for the last few years.

Debra has been a tireless fighter for the families of 9/11 victims. While continuing to work fulltime as a partner at the law firm of Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP, Debra spearheaded her firm's pro bono efforts to assist the families left behind.

The cases she handled were complicated, involving myriad issues. Many families faced social service, financial and immigration complications. Rather than addressing simply the legal aspects of each case, Debra worked to connect organizations, agencies, and policies to tackle cases in their entirety.

In May of 2002, New York State passed the September 11 Victims and Families Relief Act, large portions of which Debra helped draft. She also contributed to the Federal September 11th Family Humanitarian Relief and Patriotism Act, which was introduced by Senator LAUTENBERG in the 110th Congress.

Debra's outstanding work has already been recognized by numerous current and former Members of Congress, Presidential candidates, authors, activists, religious leaders, the New York State Bar Association, and many distinguished publications. She has received the Ellis Island Medal of Freedom and commendations from the New York City Fire Department and Chief of Police. No one, however, can better speak to Debra's service than the families themselves. In a thank-you note, a sister of one of the victims wrote:

[Debra] held us, offered her shoulder, and made us feel that it is still worthwhile to continue this passage. Thank God for this Angel.

For the last 7 years, Debra Steinberg has fought for justice for a group of people forgotten in the shadows of this terrible tragedy. She has given selflessly of her time and expertise to help those in need and is an example to others and a credit to our country. I am proud to call her my friend.●

TRIBUTE TO STELLA MAY BROWN WEACO

• Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, all of us in Massachusetts who knew her or knew of her were saddened to learn of the death of Stella May Brown Weaco at Massachusetts General Hospital on New Year's Eve.

Stella was born in Mississippi, but she called Boston her home for the last

26 years of her life and she became a legend in our city. She lived on the streets, but her plight never deterred her gentle spirit. She found a home and a family in the volunteers and the fellow guests at the Women's Lunch Place, the famed daytime shelter in the city for poor and homeless women. She went there every day after the shelter opened in 1982, and she became a familiar face and beloved friend to many other members of the community.

Stella had an amazingly positive impact on every person she met. She is very fondly remembered as very grateful, very amicable, and very kind. Year after year, the Women's Lunch Place tried to persuade her to accept housing, but her indomitable spirit led her to decline such assistance. Finally, when the pressures of daily living on the streets became unbearable even for Stella, she graciously accepted the help of those around her and spent the last 2 years on her life in the Pine Street Inn.

Even then, Stella unfailingly came back to the Women's Lunch Place as often as she could, to seek out the familiar faces and friendships she cherished so much there. Sadly, Stella passed away on New Year's Eve, in the company of those who loved her for the joy she had given to their lives. In many ways, Stella exemplified the power and the spirit of giving and the extraordinary importance of human kindness. She'll be deeply missed, but the impact she had on all who knew her is immeasurable, and the lessons she taught will never be forgotten.

Mr. President, I ask that the obituary of Stella written by Women's Lunch Place Executive Director Sharon Reilly and an eloquent column about Stella by Rachele Cohen in the Boston Herald may be printed in the RECORD.

The information follows:

STELLA TAUGHT US ALL ABOUT GRACE,
DIGNITY

(By Rachele Cohen, Jan. 5, 2009)

We lost Stella on New Year's Eve.

Even as the city prepared to usher out this year that nearly everyone agrees they couldn't wait to see end, this woman who had little and complained little died in the company of those who cared about her and for her.

For at least a quarter of a century Stella lived on the streets. And we only know that much because she was there when the Women's Lunch Place, a daytime shelter for poor and homeless women, first opened its doors 26 years ago.

For all those years she'd come for breakfast, a shower, to do her laundry, maybe take a nap and stay through lunch. For all those Thanksgivings and Christmases she had found a warm, accepting place.

She was there when I reported for my first stint as a volunteer, by then Stella was an undemanding kind of queen bee—occupying her favorite spot against the wall in the dining room. She was engaging and gracious, accepting a pancake with butter and syrup as if it were a special gift.

Stella became the ultimate challenge for Lunch Place staff over the years. The confusion that reigned in her head—which often