

term average of President Clinton was 11.3 percent. It is 9.9 percent today. The unemployment rate for Hispanics during the first term of President Clinton was 9.7 percent. It is 7.2 percent today. America's standard of living is on the rise. Real after-tax incomes are up nearly 10 percent since December 2000, substantially better than the comparable time period in the previous business cycle. Consumer confidence continues to be substantially high. The national home ownership rate was at an alltime high. Minority ownership has set a new record of 51 percent in the second quarter and is up 2.1 percentage points from a year ago. Core inflation remains low. Mortgage rates remain at historic lows.

There are challenges in this economy, but to draw a comparison to the Great Depression is a little excessive. The reality is, we do have things to do. But I urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle: Set us free. Let's get an energy bill passed, an energy bill that had 44 Republicans voting for it, 13 Democrats. The reality is that if the minority leader wanted to get this done, it could get done.

I represent the State of Minnesota. We are neighbors of the folks in South Dakota. I know they want an energy bill. Within that energy bill is a renewable fuels standards that would double the production of ethanol and will bring to life the soybean biodiesel industry, a great opportunity for our communities. If you want to grow jobs, get an energy bill passed. Give us the number of votes we need to get through cloture.

Let us have class action reform. We came within a few votes of getting that done. You want to grow jobs, talk to the manufacturers in this country, talk to the small business people. They will tell you what they need. They need class action reform. Our friends on the other side won't give it to us.

We need asbestos reform. We need medical malpractice reform. We couldn't even get welfare reform done. Again, those on the other side of the aisle were filibustering, saying: We will not allow it to happen. There is no work requirement today in welfare, if the welfare reform change that was previously passed expires.

We have a lot of work to do. There is a plan and a vision out there. The vision is to make American business competitive with businesses all over the world. We do that by cutting taxes. We don't do that by raising the tax on small businesses, many of which are subchapter S corporations or sole proprietorships that pay taxes at the rate of the highest level. They pay more than large corporations pay. Yet my friends on the other side of the aisle talk about rolling back that tax cut, which would have a devastating effect on small business.

In Minnesota we sometimes talk about the Scandinavian who loved his wife so much he almost told her. As I listened to the distinguished minority

leader, I got this sense that folks care so much they will almost do something.

We have a path to do something. It lies through an energy bill. It lies through medical malpractice reform. It lies through class action reform. It lies through getting the FSC/ETI JOBS bill through. Right now American manufacturers are paying a double-digit tax, in effect, because of a WTO violation.

We can lower that. We can change it. Instead, we find it blocked. No, it is not the Great Depression. There is more work to be done. There is a path, but the path doesn't lie with obstruction. I know the people of Minnesota and of South Dakota need an energy bill, and they want one.

In the last few minutes I have, because I want to give some time to my friend and colleague, the Senator from Pennsylvania, I want to talk a little about what is happening in the war on terror and in Iraq.

This week, the forces of freedom won a major battle. We reclaimed the city of Samarra. We reclaimed it by working with the 5,000-member joint force of Americans and Iraqis liberating that city from insurgents and foreign fighters. The fact is that we are not out there by ourselves, and the reality is that we need the Iraqis to step forward, and they are doing so. Yet the Prime Minister of Iraq came here and addressed a joint session of this body and the House. He then was disparaged by the Democratic nominee for President; the Iraqi sacrifice was disparaged.

Last night, we heard the Democratic Vice Presidential candidate simply dismiss the sacrifice of our strongest ally. We are not in this alone. We are not going to win it alone. But we can win it. We are not going to win it if we take an attitude that it is simply a diversion, if we take an attitude that things are so messed up that nothing will come together. We are not going to win it with folks who don't have the resolve to see this through or have the consistency to say, yes, it is a good thing that Saddam is no longer in power. We are not going to win by dismissing the contributions of our allies—the Polish, the English, the Italians, the Salvadorans, and on and on. We are not going to win it if we dismiss the sacrifice of the Iraqi people. We need them to step forward. We saw in Samarra what happens when you come together: You can liberate a city from insurgents.

Mr. President, we have a lot of work to do. The situation is not perfect, but we can get it done with the leadership of this President.

I yield the floor.

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, how much time is remaining?

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. There is 1 minute remaining.

GOOD SAMARITAN VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER ASSISTANCE ACT

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, I was going to talk about the Kerry

health plan, but I will do that later. I want to talk briefly on the Good Samaritan Volunteer Firefighter Assistance Act. We have been trying to clear a provision that would allow more equipment—used equipment—to go to volunteer firefighters from companies all over the United States by giving a slight change in the liability standard for companies that donate this equipment.

We have done this in the area of the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, which resulted in billions and billions of dollars in additional food going out to hungry people in America. Nobody has been sued, by the way. What was sued under the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act—we were not taking money out of anyone's pocket with lawsuits. No one, to my knowledge, has been sued by donating firefighting equipment. Nobody is going to lose out—no lawyers—from lawsuits by this donation. It is an opportunity for companies that waste a lot of resources to be able to give back.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST— H.R. 1787

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 748, H.R. 1787, the Good Samaritan Volunteer Firefighter Assistance Act.

Mr. DURBIN. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, I might say to the Senator from Pennsylvania, it is a very good bill and one I may be anxious to support. I think one Senator has a problem, but I am told it is very close. I will object at this moment, but I encourage the Senator to work actively because I believe we can clear this bill quickly.

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, we have been working for several weeks on this bill. I know both Senators COLLINS and LIEBERMAN have been helpful. We are getting to the end of the bill. It is vitally important to be able to get this passed so we can get this help on the way. It only had three negative votes in the House of Representatives. This is something we should be able to do for our first responders.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. There will now be a period under the control of the minority leader for 15 minutes.

The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

VICE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last night, I was in Cleveland, OH—I got back in the early hours of this morning—to be present at the Vice Presidential debate between our colleague, Senator EDWARDS, and Vice President CHENEY. It is an interesting responsibility and assignment that I had, along with several of my colleagues on the Republican side, to provide the so-called spin after the debate. You would think that voters could reach their