supporting the Colon Cancer Screening and Prevention Act.

OPPOSING THE MINIMUM WAGE IS BAD POLICY AND BAD POLITICS

HON. WILLIAM (BILL) CLAY

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, January 9, 1995

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, I am inserting in the RECORD a column by Gregory Freeman that appeared in the February 7, 1995, edition of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. I have long contended that if you want Americans to work, you must pay them a living wage. Inflation has reduced the real income of minimum wage workers by almost 50 cents since the last time the minimum wage was raised. Stated another way, minimum wage workers have seen wages decrease by 12 percent. A 12-percent reduction in real earnings, when one is only earning $4.25 an hour to begin with, raises the very real specter that, despite their best efforts, a worker will be unable to support his or her family. Two-thirds of all minimum wage workers are adults. Fifty percent of all minimum wage workers are providing half of their families' total income. Opposing an increase in the minimum wage will only serve to drive even more families deeper into poverty. That is bad policy. As the following article clearly indicates, it is also bad politics. I commend Mr. Freeman's article to the attention of my colleagues.

[From the St. Louis Dispatch, Feb. 7, 1995]

GOP STANCE ON WAGE IRKS WORKING WIDOW

(By Gregory Freeman)

Barbara A. is having second thoughts about her votes in November for the ''Republican revolution.''

Back in November, Barbara voted for John Ashcroft for senator and Jim Talent for Congress. She was thrilled election night when she learned that Republicans had taken over the House and the Senate.

''I was tired of the same old thing,'' Barbara said. ''Lots of promises, nothing getting done. The Democrats fighting the Republicans. The Republicans fighting the Democrats. I figured, 'Let's give the Republicans a chance. They can't do any worse.'''

But now she's wondering. The issues are starting to hit home. And Barbara's afraid the hitting's being done below the belt.

Barbara is a clerical worker for a parochial school. The job pays $4.25 an hour—minimum wage. It's not much, she realizes—her annual salary is below the poverty level—but it's a job and it pays the bills. A proud woman, she says she'd never even consider going on welfare.

Barbara likes her job because it's close to her home. On nice days, she can walk to work and save gasoline. She also enjoys her job because she gets to see kids each day.

But Barbara also laments that her job doesn't pay more. A widow in her late 20s, Barbara has difficulty getting by from payday to payday. When her husband was alive, the two of them were able to scrape up enough money to get by. But he died last year of cancer, and life's not easy without him. She's trying to save up so she can return to school, but it seems the harder she tries, the harder it gets.

That's why Barbara's puzzled by the Republican opposition to President Bill Clinton's proposal to raise the minimum wage by 90 cents an hour over two years.

''I'm working,'' she said. ''I'm not taking handouts. I'm not on welfare. I'm trying to get by. So I can't understand why these politicians don't want me to get 90 cents for what I do. The Republicans promised to be for the average person.''

It is bewildering, frankly.

A majority of the Republicans in Congress are against increasing the minimum wage—this time. There wasn't much opposition by Republicans to an increase in the minimum wage the last time it was proposed in 1990 by Republican President George Bush. Some of the same people now critical of the proposed increase voted for it under Bush.

The cost of living has gone up in five years. Why shouldn't the minimum wage increase as well?

Of course, it always seems that the people who oppose an increase in the minimum wage are people who don't work at the minimum wage. Those yelling the most—those in Congress—have voted themselves six-figure salaries over the years, yet they begrudge the working poor 90 cents.

Just who are these working poor who work at minimum wage?

Most are not teen-agers and minorities, as some might expect, researchers say. Instead, a majority of those in such jobs are people like Barbara—white women.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 70 percent of minimum wage earners are white and more than three out of every five are women. The center estimates that 4.2 million workers paid by the hour in 1993 earned minimum wage or less, representing 6.6 percent of all hourly workers.

The 90 cents an hour comes to $36 a week—less, once taxes are taken out. That may not seem like much to some. But for people in small towns making minimum wage at a factory, or department store clerks, or cooks, or folks like Barbara, that could make a real difference.

''I count my pennies every week,'' Barbara said. ''I try to be as frugal as I can. But an increase in the minimum wage would sure go a long way.''

Opponents insist that any raise in the minimum wage would hurt the economy, forcing employers to lay off workers. Proponents say that an increase could actually result in more jobs being created. Both sides cite studies that back their views.

Meanwhile, House Majority Leader Dick Armey, R-Texas, says the country would be better served by getting rid of minimum wage altogether.

For Barbara, life won't end if the minimum wage isn't increased. It will just serve as a lesson in politics.

''It seems like every politician wants to be for the working person when election time rolls around,'' she said. ''But as soon as it comes time for them to stand up for you and be counted, then they abandon you.''

INTRODUCTION OF THE ''FIREARMS SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACT OF 1995''

HON. MAJOR R. OWENS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, February 13, 1995

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, which product is virtually exempt from consumer regulation? Toasters, teddy bears, trucks, or guns? Most Americans would be surprised by the answer: handguns and other firearms for all intents and purposes are unregulated.

Almost every product sold in America comes under the health and safety regulation of a Federal agency. The Consumer Product Safety Commission regulates the safety of consumer products used in and around the house and in recreation. The Environmental Protection Agency is in charge of toxic chemicals and ensuring that pesticides which present unreasonable and adverse effects on the health and environment are not sold.

In contrast, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms [ATF]—the Federal agency with jurisdiction over the firearms industry and its products—only can issue manufacture and dealer licenses while enforcing the few Federal gun controls that are in place. The agency has no power to ensure that guns sold are safe for their intended use and lacks the authority to prohibit the manufacture or sale of current or new firearms technology that poses a significant threat to public safety.

The gun industry has taken full advantage of this laissez-faire environment. In the wake of a handgun sales slump in the early 1980's, the industry moved to take advantage of this situation with a new focus on firepower and technology. The industry also expanded its market base. Recognizing the saturation of its primary market of white males, the gun industry—just like the tobacco and alcohol manufacturers before it—has directed its niche marketing tactics at minorities, women, and youth.

The result of the gun industry's actions has been a literal epidemic of gun violence. Guns claim more than 38,000 lives a year. And contrary to public perception, most of these deaths are not crime related. The most common means of gun death is suicide (18,885 in 1990), and the most common scenario leading to a homicide is not felony activity, but arguments between people who know each other.

Additionally, it is estimated that each year firearms injure more than 150,000 Americans. The resulting monetary costs are staggering. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that in 1990, the total lifetime economic costs of firearm death and injury were $20.4 billion. What these figures reveal is that firearms violence has created a public health crisis of which crime is merely the most visible aspect.

Today, I am introducing a bill, the Firearms Safety and Violence Prevention Act, which takes the first step in beginning to reduce firearms death and injury in America by recognizing firearms for what they are—inherently dangerous consumer products. This comprehensive bill would give ATF the power to protect citizens from unreasonable risk of injury resulting from the use of firearms or related products. ATF would have the ability to set safety standards, issue recalls of defective firearms, and mandate warnings. Only if such measures failed to prevent the public from being exposed to an unreasonable risk of injury could ATF then prohibit the manufacture or sale of a specific firearm. The bill itself does not ban any firearms.

The firearms industry's assertion that guns don't kill you rings as hollow as the discredited promises of the tobacco lobby that cigarettes don't cause cancer. Fore more than a century, America's gun manufacturers have operated in the shadows, avoiding public scrutiny. It is time for Congress to look behind the gun store counter to the industry that manufactures these deadly products.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues on the Judiciary Committee to hold hearings on this important piece of legislation.