When President Clinton asked for relief for the Midwest floods just in the last Congress, it just took us 29 days, less than one half of the time that this bill has languished in this House and in the Senate. The other issue that the Republicans talk about as being a must add to the emergency relief for flood victims is this sampling issue. It is all about politics, because Republicans have been quoted as saying, ''If we allow sampling and the count that will result, we will find poor people, we will find minorities, and we are afraid that they will vote for Democrats and that will be to our political disadvantage.''

So the Speaker of the House, who two years ago said that he thought sampling made sense and ought to be pursued has changed his position. And who suffers? The victims of the rain and the floods are held hostage as this political dispute is engaged.

Mr. Speaker, a number of us have risen on this floor tonight, a number of us are rising throughout this city and talking to the press, talking to the public, and talking, yes, to our colleagues. We have a budget agreement. We sat down and for 5 months worked out a very tough problem. I supported it. That is the proper process, not to hold hostage, either Government employees or flood victims or some other group and say, we will hold their relief in abeyance if they do not agree with us.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we urge the leadership of this House and the Senate to bring to this floor a clean, continuing resolution, relief for flood victims, support for our troops in Bosnia and around the world. Pass that, the President will sign it. We can pass it by 12 noon tomorrow and the President will sign it by tomorrow afternoon. That is what we ought to do. Let us be about the business of giving relief to the victims of these floods.

REPUBLICANS PLAY POLITICS WITH DISASTER RELIEF BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. ROTHMAN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROTHMAN. Mr. Speaker, what would my colleagues think of someone who stood by watching while a neighbor's house was burning down? What if that person refused to call the fire department for help unless he or she got something in return? We would not think much of that person.

□ 2130

Yet that is exactly what the Republican majority in Congress is doing with the flood victims in North Dakota as well as the victims in 35 other States.

The President of the United States and many of us in Congress have been trying to pass a $5.5 billion disaster relief bill for these families. But the Republican majority, much like they did with the government shutdown last year, is putting extremist ideology and partisan political maneuvering ahead of the relief for these needy people. Instead of giving these families the needed relief that they so very much deserve, they are holding the disaster relief bill hostage by trying to attach highly partisan legislative riders that have nothing to do with disaster relief. They know that these highly partisan extremist Republican riders would never pass the Congress if voted on separately. So what did they do? In very cynical judgment, the Republican leadership decided to tack these partisan riders onto a disaster relief bill, saying in their own political calculus, well, maybe we will embarrass the President of the United States into vetoing this, or maybe he will be so embarrassed he will not veto it and then we will get these partisan goodies for us, the Republican party.

They underestimated President Clinton who said loudly and clearly that he would not be put in the position of having the Republican majority hold these victims hostage and let them get away with it. The Republican majority would have to put forth a clean disaster relief bill. Otherwise, he would not sign it. If they want a debate on these other partisan issues, fine, let us debate them in the Congress. If they are right, we will pass them. If they deserve support, we will support them.

Last week, the Republican Senate majority leader is reported to have said that he would happily provide more trailers for these disaster victims to stay in while they, the Republicans, try to wear down the President to get their legislative goodies. If such reports are true and those remarks were in fact uttered, they are morally reprehensible. Such a position is unfair to these needy American families. Thousands of American citizens are homeless. They just lost all of their worldly possessions and are sleeping in shelters. They await Federal disaster relief funds to finance the rebuilding of their homes and their cities and helping each other in times of need. Is that not the essence of what it means to be an American, being part of the American community?

If the Republicans really believe that their highly partisan political riders are worthy of support, they should remove them from the disaster relief bill and have the Congress take them up separately once the disaster bill, the clean disaster relief bill, has been passed by the House tomorrow. Then we will take up whatever riders they want.

I urge my colleagues and my friends on the other side of the aisle to tell their leadership, the leadership of the Republican party, to stop playing politics with the lives of these thousands and thousands of disaster victims. Put forth a clean disaster relief bill. We will pass it in Congress. Our President will sign it. And let us help these people. Then we will take up your political stuff.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOB SCHAFFER of Colorado). The Chair must remind all Members that under the rules and precedents of the House, it is not in order to cast reflections on the Senate or its Members individually or collectively.

NAFTA IS A FAILURE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. LIPINSKI] is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor tonight deeply concerned, deeply concerned about our failed trade policies, deeply concerned about the plight of American workers, deeply concerned about the future of America.

Four years ago in this Chamber we had a long, long debate on NAFTA. NAFTA proponents pushed hard for its passage. They promised that NAFTA would create 200,000 American jobs. They warned that NAFTA was critical to the American economy and that American jobs depended on its passage.

After 40 months under NAFTA, we can clearly see that the reality is vastly different. The reality is that NAFTA worsened our trade balance with Mexico and Canada. Since NAFTA went into effect, our $10 billion deficit with Canada turned into a larger $23 billion deficit. Our $1.7 billion surplus with Mexico slid into a $16 billion deficit. Our growing trade deficits with Mexico and Canada mean that we are buying more than we are selling. It means that American jobs are being lost.

The reality is that 90 percent of the companies that promised to create jobs have not. Allied Signal, General Electric, Johnson and Johnson, Mattel, Procter & Gamble, Zenith and Exxon. The list goes on and on and on. They promised NAFTA would create American jobs. In a sense, they signed a promissory note to all the working men and women of America. The note was a promise that working Americans would be better off with NAFTA.

It is obvious today that these multinational corporations have defaulted on this promissory note. NAFTA is a complete and utter failure for working Americans.

Four years ago, in 1993, we all heard the mantra of 200,000 jobs over and over again. Guess what? It is now 1997 and we have lost an estimated 400,000 jobs. This is a net loss. It is a staggering sum. Bear in mind that this is not just another number. There are real people behind the statistics, real people with real families and real problems.

In their blind devotion to free trade, NAFTA proponents lost all contact with reality, and in so doing sacrificed 400,000 American jobs at the altar of free trade.

Some folks want to expand NAFTA to Chile and other Latin American nations. I am absolutely shocked. Can

they not see what they have already done? It is plain to see that NAFTA has failed. Yet these blind free trade advocates want to extend it to other nations. How many more American jobs do we have to lose before these people come to their senses? NAFTA is a broken trade agreement. It is an agreement that just does not work.

If we continue to use this framework for future relationships with Chile and other Latin American countries, it will make a lousy situation even worse. The working men and women of America have suffered enough.

Mr. Speaker, I am thinking today of the working men and women of America, men and women who are proud to give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, men and women who work hard to put food on the table and clothes on the backs of their children, men and women who struggle to make their mortgage payments, men and women who work longer hours for less. I am thinking today of the people who make up America. I am talking about Main Street, not Wall Street. I am talking about people who care about Medicare, Social Security, crime and education, not leveraged buyouts, not corporate takeovers, and not stock splits.

I am talking about people who put in a full day's work, attend PTA meetings, go to church, work a second job, and still see their family incomes fall, while CEOs sit in their boardrooms and watch stock quotes with the knowledge that they will get their raises anyway.

I grow tired of hearing empty promises, lofty oratory and abstract economic theory. I want to see results. I want to see the jobs they promised us. Instead, I see the 400,000 American jobs that were lost. Instead, I see a trade surplus slide into a huge trade deficit. Instead, I see broken promises.

Unfortunately, for us the bottom line is that these huge multinational corporations focus only on the accountants' bottom line. To them American workers are an afterthought. I see a mentality where gold is God today, and that deeply concerns me.

Mr. Speaker, when I graduated from high school in 1956, the world was a much different place. Thanks to the policies of FDR and the efforts of the organized labor movement, there was a burgeoning middle class in America. The New Deal especially brought a higher standard of living to American working men and women. Jobs were plentiful, workers were treated well and people were happy and optimistic about the future. The American dream was alive and well.

Nowadays the average American worker changes jobs several times during the course of a lifetime. Jobs are scarce and people are insecure about the future. Pessimism and cynicism rule the day. Things have really changed in the last 4 decades. Where has the American dream gone?

I understand that the world has evolved. It is a world economy now, and we cannot shy away from that. But we must make the world market our market. We must make it work for all Americans, not just the multinational corporations who care only about the bottom line. We must make it work for the plumber in Chicago, the fisherman in Maine, the assembly worker in Detroit and the taxicab driver in D.C.

Let us rebuild the American dream for working men and women. Let us begin by establishing free and fair trade relationships with foreign nations and ensure they play by the same rules as we do, rules that cover labor, environmental and human rights issues that must be included in core trade agreements, not as an afterthought.

We must treat these issues as importantly as businesses treat intellectual property rights and rule of law. We must level the playing field and get away from the ''gold is God'' mentality that some folks cling to so fervently.

Let us put people before profit. What happens to the American middle class happens to America. Let us do all we can to make sure that the working men and women of this country can live out the American dream.

As I mentioned earlier, there are proposals now to expand NAFTA to other countries, such as Chile. To do that, they will need Congress to grant the administration the authority to negotiate trade agreements and submit them to Congress under expedited procedures for an up-or-down vote.

Article 1, section 8 of our Constitution vests Congress with an extremely important responsibility, and that is the responsibility to regulate commerce with foreign nations. It is our responsibility to the American people as well as to the people of the world to enter into fair, responsible trade agreements that respect labor, the environment and human rights.

Proponents of free trade argue that placing such restrictions on trade is counterproductive. The rallying cry of laissez faire economists may be tempting to the ignorant and the blind, but not to those who remember and understand our history.

Let us not forget the numerous social upheavals, economic crashes and depressions that the U.S. has experienced. Let us not forget the lessons learned through those times that government regulation has played a vital and necessary role in the free market. Do we so quickly forget that it was because of government intervention that the social abuses of the late 19th and early 20th century were ended, child labor, sweatshops, substarvation labor wages, widespread pollution and atrocious working conditions?

□ 2145

Thanks to the government and labor unions, we were able to stamp these abuses out.

Some folks have been misled into thinking that government regulations must be bad. History is supposed to provide us with valuable lessons. How quickly some forget.

Mr. Speaker, NAFTA is a failure. It failed because it put profits before people, multinational corporations before families. It failed because NAFTA does not adequately address industrial relations, the right to strike, the right to organize and the right to freely associate. It is clear that Mexican workers do not enjoy the same level of labor rights as we do here in America.

To make a bad situation worse, their wages are essentially capped under an agreement known as el pacto, and a large number of owners also privately set minimum and maximum wages so that they do not compete for workers on this basis.

All of these factors combine to create a downward pressure on wages in Mexico. Since NAFTA began, the wages and living conditions of Mexican workers have not improved. In fact, the exact opposite has occurred. They have declined. The percentage of Mexicans considered extremely poor rose from 31 percent in 1993 to 50 percent in 1996. Real manufacturing wages have declined 25 percent since NAFTA went into effect. Environmental conditions have deteriorated. Instead of moving into the 21st century, they are sliding back to the dark ages.

The unfortunate end result of all this is that Mexican workers are viewed simply as a source of cheap labor by multinational corporations, which creates a serious problem for us in America. With a large pool of cheap labor a short distance away, multinational corporations have a great deal of freedom and incentive to move manufacturing facilities to Mexico, and fewer environmental regulations there means even more money saved. Moving production to Mexico results in low overhead which means higher profits for corporations.

Here is a case in point. During the NAFTA debate in 1993, Zenith Electronics Corp. denied the report that they would transfer all of their production facilities to Mexico as a result of NAFTA. On the contrary, Zenith said NAFTA offers the prospect of more jobs at the company's Melrose Park, IL facility. Needless to say, Zenith announced late last year that it was laying off 800 of its 3,000 workers at the Melrose Park facility.

Not only are companies moving their facilities to Mexico, leaving hundreds of thousands of hard-working Americans in their wake, it is now commonplace for them to use it as a threat. They use it as a scare tactic in order to undermine the efforts of workers to improve their wages, benefits and working conditions through collective bargaining.

A recent Cornell University study found that a significant number of companies threatened to move work to Mexico as part of their efforts to intimidate workers who want to unionize. I find it morally reprehensible to resort to such tactics. It undermines the legal right of American workers who want to form unions. It

undermines the basic right of American workers who want to provide a better living for themselves and their families.

Proponents of NAFTA touted it as a win, win, win situation. It sure has been a win, win, win situation. It is a win for big business in Mexico, it is a win for big business in America, it is a win for big business in Canada. It is the working families who lose.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important and complex issue. As the world economy becomes increasingly interwoven and trade continues to grow as an important part of our national economy, we must ensure that we enter into trade agreements that are fair and equitable to the American worker. We must evaluate trade relationships from this perspective. As such, we have got to take a long hard look at NAFTA and what it has done to the working men and women of America. We must think about granting fast track authority to the administration and what it will mean for the American middle class. We should closely examine the arguments for the expansion of NAFTA to Chile and other Latin American nations.

As the gentleman from Michigan, DAVID BONIOR, noted, there are more people in this Congress who voted against NAFTA 4 years ago than voted for it, and many of those who voted for it say they would never vote for it again. The evidence against NAFTA is growing, and it is becoming just too hard for folks to ignore.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to yield to the gentleman from Vermont [Mr. SANDERS] who is going to engage me in a colloquy about NAFTA trade and numerous other issues that affect the American working man and woman. Mr. SANDERS.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I applaud the gentleman's remarks, and I especially congratulate him for focusing his thoughts on what is happening to ordinary working people rather than just the very wealthy and the very powerful.

One of the aspects of modern life which concerns me very much is that when we turn on the television or we read the newspapers, as you well know we hear about the booming economy; do we not? We hear about how some Wall Street folks tell us that the economy has literally never been better in our lifetimes, and they wonder just how long it will continue to be so good.

And then I go back to the State of Vermont, and I talk to working people from one end of the State to the other, and I say to them tell me about the booming economy. And what they say is, BERNIE, I am working two jobs or three jobs, and my wife is out working long hours just to pay the bills. So we do not have too much time to consider the booming economy. We are just working hard to keep our heads above water.

And the reality is, according to the official statistics, that in the midst of all of this great boom, what is going on for the average working person? Well, I do not hear this too much. Yes, we know recently, we read recently, that the CEO's of major corporations are now earning over 200 times what their workers are making, so we can see for the CEO's, the chief executive officers of major corporations, things are booming. That is true.

And we also read recently that compensation for the CEO's last year was 54 percent higher than the previous year. We concede that too. If you are a CEO of a major corporation, I guess the economy is booming.

But when you read through the fine print, you find that for the average American worker last year, wages went up on average by about 3.8 percent. Inflation is about 3 percent. And we know that low-wage workers got a bit of a boost because we raised the minimum wage a little bit. We know that the higher income workers generally do better than the middle-class workers.

So you add it all together, and what you discover is that in the midst of this great boom the standard of living of the average middle-class worker continues to decline, and if the standard of living of working-class people declines today in the midst of a boom, I wonder very much what will happen when our boom ends, as it is sure to end.

I am also concerned that in the midst of all of this so-called boom, the United States continues to have, by far, not even close, the most unfair distribution of wealth and income in the industrialized world. We do not talk about that too much; we do not see this too much on the corporate media's television stations or in the newspapers, but the facts are pretty clear. The wealthiest 1 percent of the population now owns over 40 percent of the wealth of America, and the richest 1 percent owns more wealth than the bottom 90 percent, and we have the greatest gap between the rich and poor of any other country in the industrialized world.

What kind of boom is that? We know that during the last 20 years, while we have seen a significant increase in millionaires and billionaires, 80 percent of all American families have seen either a decline in their net income or, at best, economic stagnation. In fact, adjusted for inflation, the average pay of four-fifths of American workers plummeted 16 percent in 20 years. Twenty years ago in the United States of America, as you well know, the United States led the world in terms of the wages and benefits we provided our workers. We were number one. And now in the midst of the great boom, we are down to 13th place.

In Germany, for example, manufacturing workers there earn over 25 percent of what manufacturing workers in the United States earn. In 1973 the average American worker earned $445 a week. Twenty years later, with inflation adjusted dollars, that same worker was making $373 a week. People today are working far longer hours than they have to, than they were 20 years ago. So you are seeing people working two jobs, three jobs, over time, women who would prefer to be home with their kids being forced to work in order to pay the bills.

Where is the boom for the middle class or the working class of this country? It is not there. And one of the reasons, as you so aptly pointed out in your remarks, is the disastrous and failing trade policy which this country is currently experiencing. And in my opinion it is not just NAFTA, it is GATT, it is Most Favored Nation status with China, it is the huge trade deficit that we have.

And as I think you indicated, the issue is not too complicated. If an American company is forced to choose between paying an American worker a living wage of $10 or $15 an hour providing decent benefits, having to protect the environment, or run to Mexico where you can get a good worker there for 70 or 80 cents an hour, you do not have to worry about the environment, you do not have to worry about unions, what choice is that employer going to make? And the evidence is pretty clear, the choice that that employer made, which is why we have lost hundreds of thousands of jobs.

So I would just say as we begin our discussion here, I know in my State of Vermont, and I suspect throughout the country, there may be a boom, but it certainly is not applying to the middle class or the working families of my State.

Mr. LIPINSKI. I appreciate the gentleman's remarks, and I want to say that we do not necessarily agree with everything that this man had to say, but for me one of the highlights of the last presidential election was when Pat Buchanan was running, and he was running on the issue of insecurity, the economic insecurity of the American middle class, the American working class. He spoke about it a great deal, he articulated it very well, and he forced President Clinton and Senator Dole to talk about it also. And I think they got wide dissemination; a lot of the media picked up on it. Unfortunately, when he went out of the race, President Clinton stopped talking about it, Senator Dole stopped talking about it, and the issue has just drifted away.

And I say to you, you know, I do not understand why the issue drifted away. It is the most significant, important issue facing this Nation today.

I said that when international communism ceased to exist, the Cold War was over and we were in an economic war. And by that, I meant a war to improve the standard of living of the American working and middle class, and to me, I believe we are losing that war, we are losing it more each and every day, each and every week, each and every month, and no one in this Nation, other than a very few voices, seem to have anything to say about it.

What is your opinion on that?

Mr. SANDERS. I think you raise a very, very important point, and I tell you that it is a very—the theme that you are talking about suggests to me very frightening and dangerous times, and this is why.

The average worker reads in the paper that the economy is booming; right? That things are going well? And he says to himself or herself: What is the matter with me? Everybody must be doing well except me. My wages have gone down, I do not have health care, I cannot afford to send my kids to college, I am working longer hours, and I do not see it on the paper. So it must be me; right? I must be the only person in America who is suffering economically.

And as you indicate, of course, it is the vast majority of the people who are hurting.

Now you raised the question: Why is it not talked about?

□ 2200

Well, let me offer the gentleman a suggestion on another issue equally important that we also do not discuss. Where do we get our information from?

Mr. LIPINSKI. From the news media.

Mr. SANDERS. Yes, we turn on the television. Let us look at that for a moment. Who owns NBC? Well, General Electric Corp., one of the largest corporations in America. The gentleman mentioned them, among others.

Mr. LIPINSKI. Yes, I did.

Mr. SANDERS. General Electric is one of the companies who is busy running to Mexico, I think they have been investing in China, they have laid off significant numbers of workers. They come before this body every day trying to figure out a way not to have to pay taxes, leading the efforts against organized labor.

Well, great shock of all shocks. NBC does not have a feature on the decline of the middle class. They do not talk about it too much. O.J. Simpson, we can get thousands of hours. Every airplane crash that ever happened, we can see the great visuals. But the fact that the average American worker has seen a decline in their standard of living, struggling just to keep their heads above water, somehow that story, gee, they just did not get it.

Well, what about ABC? We flip the dial and maybe ABC will give us the story. But who owns ABC? Why, that is the Disney Co. The Disney Co. is busy running to China, they are in Haiti, they are paying people in those countries pennies an hour to produce products that come back into America. I do not recall seeing too many features on their station about the trade issue, or about the exploitation of Haitian or Chinese workers. I do not recall that.

Maybe we will go to CBS, we will get a better story. Well, I guess not. That station is owned by Westinghouse, or maybe we will go to the Fox network that is owned by that strong, progressive Rupert Murdoch worth many billions of dollars. No, I do not think we will see it there either.

So I would argue that one of the reasons that the American people are not seeing the pain of their lives being reflected in the media is that the media is owned by very large multinational corporations, many of whom are taking our jobs to Mexico and China, and the media would rather, what is the word, obfuscate, perhaps, rather give us a lot of entertainment and game shows and soap operas rather than discuss with the American people the important issues, and that would be one reflection I would have on the gentleman's question.

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, that certainly is a very interesting reflection. I will have to take that under consideration and I will certainly do that, and perhaps I will come to the same conclusion that the gentleman has come to.

But I want to say that I admire the fact that the my colleague the gentleman from Vermont [Mr. SANDERS] and the gentleman from Michigan Mr. BONIOR] and the gentleman from Oregon [Mr. DEFAZIO] and the gentlewoman from Ohio [Ms. KAPTUR] and the gentleman from New York [Mr. OWENS] and a number of other people come down here on Tuesday night and try to get this message out to the American people. I think it is a wonderful effort and I applaud my colleagues for it. I am very happy to participate with the gentleman from Vermont [Mr. SANDERS] tonight in that effort.

But I have to say to the gentleman in all candor, we need to get a much bigger microphone. We have to have these conversations amplified significantly, I believe, in order to have any real impact on this Nation. I believe that we have to find ourselves a presidential candidate who is willing to articulate the issue about economic insecurity in this Nation, because I do not think there is any other way we can once again get this issue back to the front burner, make the American people aware of the fact that we know what their problem is.

There are some people willing to jump into this battle and try to aid and assist them, but I think the only way we get them motivated, mobilized, is by having someone running for President in this Nation who is going to articulate that issue.

I ask the gentleman his opinion on that.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I think that would be of enormous importance, and I think as the gentleman knows, I am an Independent.

Mr. LIPINSKI. And I am not asking the gentleman to support anyone here tonight.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons that I am an Independent is that I feel that to a large degree, both political parties are dominated by big money interests and it would be very hard for that candidate who is prepared to stand up to the large multinational corporations who have so much influence over our economy and over the politics of what goes on, it is no great secret.

I mean as the gentleman well knows, we hear a whole lot of discussion about the influence of big labor on the political process, the gentleman is aware that corporate America puts in seven times more money than labor does.

Mr. LIPINSKI. Absolutely.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is aware that when we talk about NAFTA or MFN with China that there is a massive lobbying effort going on by corporate America trying to influence the Members of this body. They will put ads in newspapers throughout this country telling everybody how good these trade policies are. Whether or not the two-party system can give birth to a candidate who is prepared to take on these moneyed interests I frankly have my doubts.

But one of the things that does concern me is that what does go on here in this body is, instead of addressing the real issue of the fact that in many ways this Nation is becoming an oligarchy dominated by a relatively few large corporations and wealthy individuals, instead of recognizing that reality and trying to deal with it and develop policies which address that problem, what we see is a lot of scapegoating. What we see is black being played off against white, native versus immigrant, gay versus straight, everybody against everybody, rather than figuring out how we can come together as a people to try to address the difficult problems that the gentleman articulated about the global economy, can we create, with all of this new technology, every day we hear about the information highway, right, how important the computers are.

Well, if all of that stuff is so valuable, as I expect that it is, why are we not seeing increased wealth going to the middle class and the working class? Why are we not seeing people working fewer hours rather than longer hours? Why are we not seeing more people covered by health insurance rather than fewer? Why do we have by far the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world? Why are we in the process right now, as some would have us, cutting Medicare by $115 billion, lowering the quality of health care for our senior citizens?

So the issue becomes how do we come together as a people, black and white, immigrant and native born, woman and men, gay and straight, all of us come together and say how do we create decent jobs for our people rather than seeing jobs going to China where workers are being paid 20 cents an hour? How do we use technology to lower the workweek rather than to put American workers out of their jobs?

We are not doing that. We are not addressing that. I think the reason is that we need to begin to come up with some of the answers to those questions by challenging big money interests and to a large degree, and my feeling is in this body it is almost an issue people

feel uncomfortable talking about. We are just not allowed to talk about the power of the wealthy.

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, that seems to be the case. A lot of people are very uncomfortable talking about it. I am a capitalist. I believe in the free market system. But I also believe that an economy should be run for the benefit of the overwhelming majority of the members of that society, and that really should be the principle that guides us in all the legislation we put forth here, in the other body, in legislation that the President signs into law. Do what is best for the overwhelming majority of the American citizens economically and in every other way.

It may sound very simplistic, and perhaps it really is. But that is the way the country should be governed; that is the way the legislation should come forward. Unfortunately, the longer I am here, the less and less I believe that is happening.

So I would say to the gentleman, I would like the gentleman to conclude if you have any concluding remarks. I am finished for the evening. I hope to be back next Tuesday, but does the gentleman have anything to say in conclusion?

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I would just certainly agree with the gentleman that clearly the task of Congress is to represent the vast majority of the people and not just the very few who are wealthy and powerful. But I think that that is very often not the case.

Let me just point out one example of that in terms of tax policy. In fact, we are debating that right now in terms of the budget that was recently proposed by the gentleman from Texas [Mr. ARCHER], which would give huge tax breaks to the wealthy while at the same time we would cut back on Medicare, certain Medicaid programs and very significantly, by the way, on veterans' programs.

In terms of tax policy what has gone on in this country people should know that from 1977 to 1990, the Social Security tax was raised nine times, and today, people are paying, if one is self-employed, one is paying 15 percent before one pays any income tax and a FICA tax. And yet during that same period, while taxes on working people through the FICA tax went way up, taxes for the wealthy and the large corporations went way down, and the Federal Government ended up collecting significantly less money, which helped cause us the deficit problem that we are trying to address right now.

I would just conclude by saying that the gentleman is absolutely right in suggesting what I think the vast majority of the people would agree with at a moment's notice, and that is the function of this institution is to represent the overwhelming majority of our people who are not wealthy, who work hard, who are struggling to keep their heads above water.

Unfortunately, that is not the case now. The people have the money, have enormous power and enormous influence over this institution. What I would hope is that in the towns and cities all over this country, people begin, must begin to get involved in the political process, must study the issues. What is our trade policy? Is it working? Is it not working? Why is it that we have such an unfair distribution of wealth? What about our tax system? Does it favor the corporations and the wealthy, or the middle class and working families?

I would hope that ordinary people begin to study the issues, get involved in the issues, and play a much more active role in the political process, because God only knows, we certainly need their strength and their energy in order to influence what goes on here.

I thank the gentleman very much for allowing me to join him in this special order.

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman joining me tonight.

AMERICAN HERITAGE RIVERS INITIATIVE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentlewoman from Idaho [Mrs. CHENOWETH] is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mrs. CHENOWETH. Mr. Speaker, I am here tonight to talk about the White House and its Council on Environmental Quality's latest flight from democracy, embodied in the so-called American heritage rivers initiative.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many things that are wrong with the American heritage rivers initiative. But tonight I would like to focus on just three of those things. Its procedure, States' rights and water rights, and the separation of powers.

The initiative purports to establish a mechanism by which President Clinton will designate as American heritage rivers 10 rivers per year. It establishes undefined, fictional governing entities known as water communities. These governing water communities will then determine the scope and the size of the designation area, which can include the entire watershed. There are no safeguards for a D designation and no safeguards for private property owners within the area who object to this inclusion in the designation.

I will discuss this in detail later, but first, just before Memorial Day district work period, the Council on Environmental Quality, an unauthorized agency existing on misappropriated funds, I might add, published the American heritage rivers initiative in the Federal Register. It is in the May 19, 1997 volume, page 27253, and I urge my colleagues to read it.

Although CEQ has in the past been the primary overseer of the National Environmental Policy Act process, in this instance CEQ appears to have totally abandoned NEPA's threshold requirements. As the administration knows very well, an environmental impact statement, an EIS, is required any time a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment is contemplated. When CEQ proposes to control our Nation's waters, this, Mr. Speaker, is a significant action. Yet, to my knowledge, CEQ has not even bothered to address NEPA's threshold question.

Where is the environmental assessment? How about an EIS, or, at the very least, the very barest recognition under NEPA of finding of no significant impact?

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But nothing from the administration. Mr. Speaker, what CEQ has given us is a mere 3-week public comment period, the May 19 date of publication to the June 9 closing of the public comment, with no NEPA documentation.

The Administrative Procedures Act, the APA, applicable to any agency action, requires a minimum of 30 days' public comment period. In general, unless there is an emergency, NEPA's environmental impact statement requires a 90-day public comment period. Yet, here CEQ blatantly violates its own rules and the rules and requirements of the Administrative Procedures Act and offers a mere 3-week comment period.

I am not aware of an emergency. Why the rush? This violates the Administrative Procedures Act and totally ignores the National Environmental Policy Act. Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Alaska [Mr. DON YOUNG] of the Committee on Resources and the gentleman from Oregon [Mr. BOB SMITH] of the Committee on Agriculture, along with myself and other resources subcommittee chairmen, sent a letter to Katy McGinty strongly advising CEQ to extend the comment period to at least another 90 days. She would have been wise to follow our advice. I entered that letter into the RECORD here on Wednesday, June 4.

Additionally, I am aware of no fewer than 35 other Members making similar extension requests of CEQ. It would certainly be in the best interests of everyone involved in CEQ if that agency would extend the public comment period, and I urge them to do so.

Mr. Speaker, CEQ's comment period closed today. Today I have yet to hear if its counsel has decided to extend its comment period to even the legally required minimum. I read a news account of how baffled CEQ is by the concerns we have raised. Perhaps if the comment period were extended, enlightenment might follow.

The chairman of the Committee on Resources, the gentleman from Alaska [Mr. DON YOUNG] has also called an oversight hearing for June 26, 1997 in our committee. I have at least a glimmer of hope that we will then have some of our questions answered, but I will not hold my breath.