

pass through angst and anxiety and pain and suffering and all the other things, it tends to make an open and democratic society make tough, thoughtful decisions about its future.

We have abolished slavery. We have survived depressions. We have defeated Hitler. We have cured polio. We have sent people to the Moon. I mean, we can talk a lot about what this country has endured and what this country has done.

My only point is, I do not think any of us ought to at this point in time be discouraged about democracy and about Congress and about our Government and about the press and about all the institutions in our lives. It is a good place to be. I do not know of anybody who wants to go elsewhere. I do not know of anybody who wants to exchange it for some other location in the world.

We should not be discouraged. Our job, it seems to me, is to do our work for the American people. And there is plenty of work to do. I have mentioned some—education, health care, finish the job on fiscal policy, deal with highways, deal with campaign finance reform, and more. And that is just a start.

I am here and I am ready, and I hope my colleagues feel the same. We ought to join hands and say there are things that Democrats and Republicans believe in and can do together. And we will be persuaded to do that if we can just turn off the rap music, turn off the rap that one side is all wrong and the other side is all right, one side is big spenders and the other side is not.

I finally say this. I do not think there is a plugged nickel's worth of difference between the two aisles in the U.S. Senate—Republicans and Democrats—in terms of how much they want to spend. Is there a difference on what they want to spend money for? Absolutely. But I will guarantee you, for everybody who stands up on one side of the aisle wanting to spend money on one program, there is somebody on the other side standing there saying, "No. I want it spent on my priorities." What we need to do is join together and, through this process, find the right priorities for this country's future.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

#### EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended for 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator is recognized to speak for 10 minutes.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I thank the Chair.

#### ARTICLE BY ROBERT REICH

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that an article in this past Sunday's New York Times magazine, "When Naptime Is Over, The placid public mood is an illusion. Real Issues rumble beneath the calm and could soon send a wake-up call," by Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor, be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the New York Times Magazine, Jan. 25, 1998]

#### WHATEVER HAPPENED TO POLITICS?

(By Robert B. Reich)

There's no longer any political news, a reporter friend confided recently, explaining why "human interest" stories were oozing like syrup across his newspaper's front pages. We're in the Bland Decade now, a time when citizens march on Washington not to affect politics but to vow they'll be better people and when politicians speak out mainly to urge niceness: volunteer your time, enter into dialogues on race, hire someone off welfare, please. Apparently we need little more than charity, moral uplift and perhaps a modest program or two. Politics is dead, or so it seems.

The easiest explanation for this torpor is that the nation is fat, like an overstuffed bear starting hibernation. It's no longer the economy, stupid. Six years ago, a prolonged recession hurt white-collar workers, giving some urgency to the politics of "change." Prosperity, though, is a powerful sedative. Forget politics for now, we seem to be saying. Let's compare stock portfolios, banter about culture and identity and tut-tut over problems decades hence, like an insolvent Social Security trust fund or excessive greenhouse gases.

The great economic contests have been won. Communism vanished before it was even vanquished. The Japanese competitive threat is now a sorry heap of bad debt. European welfare states heave under double-digit unemployment. And here in the land of plenty we've never had it so good. Wealth is exploding, unemployment is at a 24-year low, inflation is quiescent (the Federal Reserve Board chairman, Alan Greenspan, publicly raised concerns about *deflation*), the stock market is riding high. American capitalism is the envy of the world.

But look more closely and the easy explanation falls short. Most Americans don't have it so good. They have jobs, but most wages and benefits are stuck or continue to drop. Wealth has exploded at the top, but the wages of people in the bottom half are lower today in terms of purchasing power than they were in 1989, before the last recession. This is in sharp contrast to every previous recovery in the postwar period. Corporate downsizing and mass layoffs are still the order of the day, which partly explains why so few workers demand raises in this tight labor market. They'd rather keep their jobs.

The reality is that Wall Street's advance hasn't been widely shared. The richest 1 percent hold more than 35 percent of the nation's wealth. The typical middle-class family has no more than \$7,000 in stocks and \$12,500 in mutual funds, according to a 1995 survey by the Federal Reserve and the Treasury Department. Even the recent market surge isn't likely to have changed this very much, given what has happened to wages.

Whatever savings Americans do have are imperiled by hospital bills. A growing portion of the public lacks health insurance—in 1989, 33 million Americans under age 65 were

without it; by 1996, 41.3 million. (The President's proposal to extend Medicare coverage to early retirees and displaced workers as young as 55, which would be the largest expansion in 25 years, is expected to add only 300,000 to the rolls.)

Despite the boom, inequality has widened. The nation's poverty rate is slightly higher than it was before the last recession. In 1989, 12.6 million, or 19.6 percent, of the nation's children lived in poverty; now it's 14.5 million, or 20.5 percent. The Conference of Mayors reports rising demand for food and shelter among the homeless. And the successes of the civil rights movement notwithstanding, today's urban schools are more racially segregated than in the 1980's.

So why, then, the prevailing political somnolence? Traditional politics has been all about who's gaining and who's losing. Yet it has lately become unfashionable, indeed in poor taste, to notice such things. In the present upbeat climate, downbeat data are slightly subversive. It is necessary to minimize all worry about the economy lest the public lose confidence, a perfect tautology. Bankers and business leaders have become cheerleaders in the nationwide pep rally. Onward! Upward!

Recent polls show, accordingly, high rates of consumer confidence. A record 40 percent of consumers queried in the Conference Board's December survey called jobs "plentiful," although, tellingly, only 28 percent expected their own wages to rise. These are the ones who have heard the distant roar of surging wealth and assume that the rising tide will lift them, too—which may explain the record level of consumer debt. Personal bankruptcies are also at a record high.

Will politics revive when the economic tide ebbs and hardships appear like shipwrecks on the tidal flats? Not necessarily. Even in 1992, with the nation mired in recession, political engagement was grudging. Americans wanted "change" to get the economy moving again. But there was no sense of moral urgency. It was simply time to replace old management with new. Most Americans had long before stopped believing in government as a force for much good in their lives.

Some people will say we don't need a vital politics to be a vital society. We can expand the circle of prosperity through grass-roots moral activism, spearheaded by community groups, socially responsible businesses, not-for-profits, religious organizations and compassionate individuals—perhaps all deftly linked by fax and modem, a "virtual" social movement. Commentators rightly stress the importance of such civic engagement. But they make a serious mistake labeling it as an alternative to politics. Throughout our history, civic activism has been the precursor, and the propellant, of political movements.

Almost a century ago, American politics appeared similarly listless despite growing social problems. As today, the economy was booming, jobs were plentiful and vast fortunes were being accumulated. Yet real wages had stopped growing, and the gulf between rich and poor was widening into a chasm. New technologies (steam engines, railway locomotives, the telephones, steam turbines, electricity) were transforming the nation, pulling families off the farms and immigrants from aboard and depositing many into fetid slums. Wall Street magnates were consolidating their empires. Government was effectively bought by large corporations, and the broad public was deeply cynical. William McKinley won re-election—legended has it, on a pledge to "stand pat"—and as the century closed, the nation seemed politically comatose.

Within three years, however, there was an outburst of reform: muckrakers like Lincoln