

and if you have ever been in a sugar cane field where a 4- and a 5- and a 6-year-old kid is covered with soot and has a cane knife in his hand that is as big as him, but he needs to be there because it is income for the family, where the average family 4 years ago was earning \$275 a year, and look, that is not right. That is morally wrong, but there is a need in that country. We ought to be helping that country, but we should not be giving them every job in America.

The gentleman spoke earlier about fast track, trade promotion authority. In the previous administration, the Congress did not want to give that authority, but it has given it in recent administrations, but it is not fast track as it was purported to be. It is actually slow track.

As the gentleman indicated, there were several agreements, there were the Jordan agreement and others that were negotiated, signed, brought to the public for public display and comment and then brought for a vote in the Congress. If, in fact, we are going to do something, let us be consistent and let us be consistent all the way across the board.

What has happened with the CAFTA is that the multinational corporations and this administration know right now they do not have the votes, and I have been in this city when it gins up over an issue, and it scares me to death to think that we are going to be selling America down the road if we pass this CAFTA.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman from Louisiana's (Mr. MELANCON) comments, especially what happens when these trade agreements get real close to the date of the vote.

I remember during the China trade agreement that when that came to this Congress, a friend told me there were more corporate jets at National Airport than any other time they would have ever seen. There were corporate leaders that were walking the halls of this Congress telling people they wanted access, telling the Members of Congress they wanted access to 1 billion Chinese customers when, in fact, they really wanted access to 1 billion Chinese workers of all ages, of both genders, of all kinds of people that were going to work at a few cents an hour, in some cases, almost slave labor, too often child laborers, and always underpaid workers, and this is really what these trade agreements are all about. It is pretty clear.

He talks about the immoral value of children in the sugar cane fields, and I have seen the same in coffee fields in Nicaragua, and I have seen the same on the Mexican border where workers are badly treated, underpaid, and as a result, we are not getting what the whole point of trade agreements is which is to lift workers up in other countries so they can then buy American products. We create a middle class in Mexico, we create a middle class in Honduras, and

then they buy from our workers and our companies back and forth, and that simply does not happen in these trade agreements because it is all about low income workers.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to read one of the statements of the bishops that I think sums up what the gentleman has been saying.

The moral measure of any trade agreement should be how it affects the lives and dignities of poor families and vulnerable workers whose voices should receive special attention in this discussion.

□ 2200

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for that. I will close with those very appropriate comments. Thank the gentlewoman from Illinois. Thank our new freshman colleague, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. MELANCON), thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE), and also the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SOLIS) and the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) for their leadership in opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement, and for everyone here in pointing out what has happened to our trade policy and how clearly when you go from a \$38 billion trade deficit to \$617 billion in a dozen years that this is not working. We need to strike out in a new direction.

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, I join with many of my colleagues today in expressing my opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

United States trade policy must put American workers first. I voted against and have been a vigorous critic of NAFTA, and I am concerned about efforts to further expand this bad policy through CAFTA or other harmful free trade agreements. NAFTA has been terrible for American workers, because it encourages corporations to abandon the United States to exploit weak labor and environmental standards in other countries. CAFTA will only further this destructive behavior.

Of vital importance for stopping CAFTA is ensuring that the domestic sugar industry is not being severely damaged or destroyed. Stopping CAFTA could help prevent the loss of hundreds of thousands of U.S. jobs and family farms in sugar producing states across the country. My home state of Michigan is the 4th largest producer of sugar beets in the nation. We have roughly 2,100 sugar beet farmers producing more than 3 million tons of sugar beets. The Michigan sugar industry supports 5,000 jobs and generates an estimated \$500 million of economic activity. Michigan's Saginaw Valley and Thumb area produce more than 90 percent of the sugar beets grown east of the Mississippi River. The Michigan Sugar Company plant located in Caro in my Congressional District, has roughly 350 year-around and 1,000 seasonal employees.

CAFTA will flood U.S. markets with foreign sugar and we should not be using this industry as a bargaining chip during trade negotiations. Our sugar program provides the only effective way of dealing with the unfair predatory trade practices in the world dump market for sugar. Without it, the U.S. sugar program cannot be

sustained and the domestic industry will certainly collapse. CAFTA unfortunately undermines this important program.

The United States is a world leader, and we must enter into trade agreements that encourage positive standards and quality of life for both the United States and foreign nations. Otherwise, corporations will be allowed to exploit foreign workers while abandoning American workers, who are the most productive in the world. I will not support any trade agreement life CAFTA that continues the United States down this misguided path.

SOCIAL SECURITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DENT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity, and also Democratic Leader PELOSI, for one more hour, one more week for the Democratic 30-something Working Group.

As you know, over a period of time, from the 108th Congress now to the 109th Congress, we have been coming to the floor sharing information, not only with Members of the House and the other body, but also with the present administration in the White House and with the American people about what is happening for America and what is happening to America.

I must say that it is discouraging to hear some of the things that are coming from the majority side and also coming mainly from the White House on Social Security. And we come to the floor week after week to give voice to those Americans that are educating themselves through the survivor benefits, through Social Security, and also those Americans that are 20, 30, 40, and 50-something that are looking for Social Security to be there for them when they retire; and to make sure that they can get the maximum benefit, especially for those that are in their 50s and 40s, as they start to think about retirement, making sure that Social Security is there for them when they are eligible.

I must say that during the break, as you know, we were on the Presidents' break for some time. And many House Democrats, and some enlightened Republicans, I must add, went back home and started asking their constituents how they felt about Social Security. And many of them came back with positive responses. In fact, they want the maximum benefits out of Social Security, and they want to make sure that it is not privatized. And that was overwhelmingly the message during the Presidents' break. It is not what I am saying; it is what the press reports are saying, either via print or TV media.

And the House Democrats have been out in America and united about opposing the privatization, in opposition to the privatization of Social Security. And over the past 2 weeks, 160 House

Democrats have held over 300 townhall meetings, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make sure that that is definitely a note. Not only with the Members, the Members note that that is the case, but to make sure that the American people that we are here to serve understand that we are trying to do all we can.

And in the minority, I must say, here in this House, I want to remind the majority party that if we had the power to call a committee meeting, if we had the power to look into things that may be questionable as it relates to some of the decisions that are being made and some of the abuse of power that is taking place on the executive branch end, then we will have better accountability.

But as it relates to Social Security, we are fighting the good fight. We are working with what we have to go out to the American people to let them know what is going on here under the dome.

Once again, 160 Democratic House Members have gone out and had over 300 townhall meetings in their districts and around their States. And I think that is so very, very important.

Mr. Speaker, we have the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) here, who co-chairs this 30-something Working Group with me, who I must say that it is just a pleasure being here with the gentleman from Ohio just one more week. I am looking forward as we continue to hit the road and share the information about Social Security and why it is important to many young people throughout the United States of America. But it is just once again a pleasure to share this hour with him.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Pleasure. Same here, my good friend. I would also like to just make a couple of opening comments before we get into the nuts and bolts, into the meat of the issue here.

The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND), who every now and again I join down here doing an Iraq Watch or something on the veterans, he and I held a townhall meeting in Youngstown, Ohio, last week. And we had chairs set up for about 125 people. And the room was packed with 200 people. We had to turn people away at the local library, Boardman Public Library.

It was just amazing because of the amount of concern regarding this issue and how many people want to try to understand what the President's plan is. And as you put it a couple of weeks ago when we were here, we really do not have any of these details. And we do not know exactly what the President's plan is. And he is talking in these very broad concepts, because once you get down to the nuts and bolts of implementation of the privatization accounts, it gets very, very hairy and very, very scary.

And one of the main concerns at the townhall meeting in Youngstown was the concern of having to borrow money to try to implement this system. And when you look at what we have here,

and average people understand this, we are running close to a \$500 billion deficit just this year. And so we have to go out and we have to borrow that money, and we are borrowing it primarily from the Japanese and the Chinese, which puts our country in a position of weakness.

The one thing the President has said that he wants to for sure do is he wants to have these private accounts, the side accounts. So instead of putting money into the Social Security trust fund, you would put it in this private savings account.

Because the money is getting diverted into the accounts, and we want the current beneficiaries of the program to get what they deserve, we have got to go out over the next 10 years, the first 10 years out from this plan, and we have to borrow \$1.4 trillion just to cover the cost of the transition in the first 10 years.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague to please repeat that.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Yes, certainly. I said that \$1.4 trillion must be borrowed in the first 10 years of implementation of a Social Security reform package that includes the private accounts. And, again, I am 31, the gentleman from Florida is 30—

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Something

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Something. And the money we do pay in, because Members of Congress do pay into the Social Security system, the 6.2 percent that we are putting in now that goes into the trust funds, the President is saying we will be able to take maybe all of that, maybe a portion of that and put it in a side account. In order to make up the difference, so that our grandparents and parents can get what they have put into Social Security and they get the full benefits, we have to borrow \$1.4 trillion over the next 10 years. But the massive figure is \$5 trillion over the next 20 years.

Now, that is \$5 trillion we have to go out and borrow and pay interest on, which I think is probably the best argument for not doing this. We should not implement a program that is going to strap our generation with massive tax increases to pay for this, the \$5 trillion, the interest on the \$5 trillion, and then end up with a benefit that is not guaranteed. I think when you add all that together, it is a recipe for disaster.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Well, I can tell my colleague that I am at a loss for words when it comes down to all the Federal jet fuel that has been burned on the U.S. taxpayers' dollars on the flying around the country with no plan and talking about privatization of Social Security.

There are millions of Americans that are benefactors of Social Security. We cannot break our promise to them. For anyone to go and say we will privatize and everything will be fine, the evidence, which we will talk about later on in this hour, is leaning towards ben-

efits being cut as it relates to the privatization. We will be talking about that a little later on.

I am glad to have my colleague, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ), who was here with us in the past. She had a townhall meeting, a couple of them I think in her district, and so I will now yield to her.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Florida for yielding to me. It is a pleasure to be here with my 30-something colleagues once again.

I did have townhall meetings in south Florida last week. I had three townhall meetings, and more than 500 people attended those meetings. Other than two, two out of those 500 hundred, every single person left with the feeling that they were completely opposed to the President's privatization plan. They understood first and foremost that it is incredibly disturbing that the privatization proposal he has put forward does not even solve the problem.

We, I think, have tried to stress as Democrats that we are not saying there is no problem, that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. But, for example, and one of the examples I used in my meetings, was that the earliest that we have a problem where we are taking in less than we are paying out is in 2042, and many of the studies show that it really could last until 2052. Our generation, when I talk to my friends at home and ask them whether they think Social Security is going to be there, they do not think it will.

Let me just throw out an example. I am 38 years old. In 2042, I will be 75. I will be 85 in 2052. So that shows you that Social Security will be there for our generation. What we need to do is we need to make some changes to Social Security, shore it up, help preserve the safety net; but we need to take the time to do it right. We do not need to perform the radical surgery the President is proposing, and that was the overwhelming message I got from my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I want to be able to share with my colleagues here, and our other colleagues, Mr. Speaker, that this is important. As I explained earlier in this hour, maybe 5 or 6 minutes ago, we do not have the power within this institution, within the House to be able to agenda committee meetings, or agenda meetings or inquiries, or whatever the case may be, although we look forward to that day. Do not get me wrong, I look forward to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) one day becoming Speaker Pelosi. Because some of the things we talk about here on this floor we want to be able to use the power of this House to be able to make things right on behalf of the American people.

Now, we are not just talking about Democratic American people. We are

talking about Republican American people, Libertarian, what have you, the Green Party, Democrats, on and on and on. We are talking about the American people in general. But I wanted to take about 4 minutes sharing about what happens when we move in haste.

The President wants us to move in haste. The majority party wants us to move in haste. The majority of the other body wants us to move as though there is some sort of Federal emergency. But there is not a Federal emergency. Social Security will be here. It will not collapse tomorrow or the next day or 10 years from now or even 20 years from now, thanks to the Democratic Speaker and the Republican President Ronald Reagan making sure that Social Security was sound.

I can see the gentleman from Ohio is right there. He is ready. But let me just make my point. I am not giving a locker-room speech; I am just letting our colleagues know that there is not a Federal emergency as relates to Social Security.

Now, here on this floor, and I pointed this out a couple of weeks ago and I want to point it out again, because maybe some of the Members that are watching us now might have missed it. During the Medicare debate here on this floor, when we were locked in this Chamber, well, I would not say locked, I do not want to sensationalize it, we were held here in this Chamber and the vote board was open for over an hour and some change, maybe getting close to 2 hours while the majority side went around twisting arms.

And here, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend some of my colleagues on the majority side that stood on behalf of their constituents but had to break because there were a lot of arms being twisted on the other side.

□ 2215

During the Medicare debate as relates to prescription drugs, the majority hid the true costs that it would cost to deal with prescription drugs. First they said it will only cost \$350 billion. That is a lot of money. We were all taken aback by that because that is borrowed money. That is money on a high-interest credit card. That is money that the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) talked about earlier, about knocking on the bank of China, saying, Please buy more of our debt.

Then as we move down the road a little bit, it moved up to \$400 billion. This is not \$4, not \$400,000, this is not even \$400 million, it was \$400 billion. After the debate, the cost jumped up to more than \$530 billion. But still that was not enough because when we move in haste, we make mistakes. It is important that we move in a way that not only Members can pay very close attention to what is going on, and that Members will have an opportunity to analyze plans and legislation. And I must add, as the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) knows, we do not have a plan from the President or the major-

ity, and I will talk about that later. Now just before we left, just a week before the President's District Work Period, the cost went to \$724 billion. Where are we headed? This is borrowed money.

We have that going on, let alone the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are about to have an \$80 billion supplemental. The majority side here in the House would like for the American people to believe that there is a Federal emergency and Social Security will collapse if we do not act now.

I will tell Members we have a lot on our plate right now. Members heard the gentlewoman from Florida talk about the fact that she will be 84 and still look the same in the future. I am making fun of it, but this is a very serious situation.

I had this on my chart the last time we were here on the floor but I thought I would blow it up because some of the Members I saw said I want a copy of that. I want to make sure Members can see it. There are people running around saying where is the Democratic plan? Our plan is already institutionalized in Social Security. The benefits that people are receiving, the survivor benefits Americans are receiving, that third rail when the Enrons of the world go south on America workers that have been paying into a retirement plan, Social Security is the safety net. And Democrats, our position, is making sure not that we have a Democratic plan, shoring up and making sure even beyond those years far out that Social Security is here for a long time, a bipartisan plan between Democrats and Republicans, and that is what the Democratic leader, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), the Democratic whip, are talking about constantly.

In 1998, President Bush was quoted as saying that he wanted to privatize Social Security as a solution to the financial problems. Chairman Greenspan on the House and on the Senate side said privatization alone will not solve or will not resolve the issue of Social Security. As a matter of fact, if they were to deal with that, then they would have to have tax increases and also cutbacks in traditional programs.

In 2000, during his campaign, Governor Bush basically said he wanted to privatize Social Security. Then in 2001, now President Bush appointed a commission to develop a privatization plan for him.

In December 2001, they followed their charge, and if you were on that commission, you would have had to have made previous statements that you were in favor of privatization, so of course you are going to get recommendations from this commission.

In 2001, the commission gave the President three options for privatization of Social Security.

From December of 2001 through 2004 when the President came here and walked down and spoke in front of us,

he was silent on the issue of privatization. Absolutely nothing. No statements, nothing. Did not talk about it. And now in 2004, while running for reelection, there was some mention but no plan. No plan came about after the three options. Members would assume the plan would come the year after, nothing.

Then days after the 2004 election he thought he had the political clout to be able to privatize Social Security. That did not happen. January of this year while at the White House, once again he talked about it and said there is a plan. Now the budget was submitted at the beginning of February, no privatization plan was included. When I say the President said nothing, he is saying nothing because he is not putting forth a plan. Now press accounts say it is not clear if the President is going to offer a plan this year.

Now for all the American people that are sitting at home watching us now and for all those individuals concerned about their benefits, I want to let you know right now it is important that you call your Member of Congress, it is important that your Member of Congress pay very close attention to this.

In closing, I want to let the Members on the majority side, for those that are not with the President, and I must add there are some, there are some from my State, that I commend for their courage and for their standing up to the majority and the President saying they will not sell out their constituents on a hasty plan saying we have to move it through.

Remember I talked about the Medicare issue and how that ended up going all of the way to \$724 billion from \$350 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN).

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, that is a phenomenal outline of a consistent approach on what the plan was, has been, continued to be and now getting closer to try to implement. I think it is an ideological bent that is pushing us because as the gentleman said, we are going to have to go out and borrow the money. I think it is important that we mention what happens when the public side is out in the market borrowing money. The more money we are borrowing, there is less money to be borrowed by private interests which will drive up interest rates because there will be less money out there because we have to keep going out there and borrowing it for our own purposes, whether it is Social Security or running a deficit of \$500 billion. That means increased interest rates, for those at home, who want to go out and get a car, get a house, want to go out and borrow some money for whatever reason, interest rates are going to rise if we keep going down the path we are on right now.

One other comment I wanted to make that the gentleman brought up, the administration is trying to say crisis, crisis, crisis. The sky is going to

fall in if we do not do something immediately. They used the word "bankrupt." I think the President used the word in the State of the Union address. I am almost positive.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. The gentleman is correct.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. He said bankrupt. To me bankrupt means there is nothing in the bank. It is belly up, zero. That is how I interpret bankruptcy. Nothing left.

The problem is Social Security will never, ever, ever, go bankrupt because there will always be workers putting money into the system. Now it may not be, if we stay like we are now, it may not always be at the levels we want. Down the line, it may only pay 80 percent of the benefits, but there will always be money in the Social Security system so it will never be bankrupt.

So when the President says bankrupt, he is misleading the public because the gentleman from Florida and I will be paying in for the next 30 some years into the program. So even if you and I are just paying in, it is not bankrupt. It may not have enough funds, but it is not bankrupt.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that came up in my town meetings, talking about the debt and privatization would add to in America, the gentleman from Florida and I served with a wise Republican member of the Florida Senate, Senator Jim King, whom when we were engaged in a debate with our House colleagues and it was the State Senate versus the State House and our position in the State Senate was we should not be adding to debt and we should not be continuing to borrow to pay for our needs, he likened that concept to using our MasterCard to pay off our Visa.

Mr. Speaker, that is really the policy that the President is advocating. He appears to think it is okay to add to the debt, make our deficit much more significant, to overrely on nations like China and Japan. I feel an overwhelming sentiment coming from my constituents, and just by applying a little logic, why would we want to leave our constituents' future retirement security in the hands of the economic whims or decisions of foreign governments. That is essentially what is being done when we talk about privatizing Social Security.

The other really big issue that the President has tried to stress and underscore and use to try to relieve the concern that senior citizens may have over his plan, he is saying do not worry, people over 55 and over, we are not going to touch your benefits, nothing is going to happen.

Well, as neutrally as I possibly could, and some people might chuckle about that, I presented that argument in my town meetings last week. And overwhelmingly, my constituents, the constituents of the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK), understood when we have a massive program like we have

in Social Security in America, and we are talking about the kinds of numbers and the impact that privatization would have on that program, \$1.4 trillion cost to privatize in the first 10 years, and another \$3.5 trillion in 10 years after that, when we apply a radical surgical procedure to a program that size, they understand there is no way you are going to avoid impacting them. It is not possible. They are smarter than that.

The other reason for the answer to the question of why senior citizens care about this, assuming they believe the President, say they take the President at his word and believe it will not affect people 55 and older, the reason they care is they understand that our generation, their children and their grandchildren, we are not the generation of savers that they were. They were the generation of savers. We are the generation of racking up our credit card bills and trying to have as much as we possibly can. There is nothing wrong with that, but it needs to be recognized that is a policy where Americans continue to add to their debt and there are eventually consequences to that.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. It is not a good way to run the government. Although a person may be able to get away with it longer and file personal bankruptcy without the ramifications to society as opposed to privatizing Social Security.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Exactly. And what the gentleman said about debt in general and making sure that we continue to have sound public policy when it comes to Social Security, these senior citizens understand that because we do not have the savings in generations following them, we have to make sure that we adopt an approach to fixing Social Security that recognizes that the emphasis should be on encouraging savings. There is a way to do that without moving to a radical proposal like privatizing the program.

Chairman Greenspan testified before the Committee on Financial Services and was pretty unequivocal in his testimony before our break about what he believes the direction we should take is.

□ 2230

His focus was absolutely on any policy change that moved away from encouraging a national savings was not a sound one. Almost every one of the comments that he made undermined the President's arguments. He testified in front of our committee that the overriding long-term retirement issue facing the Nation is increasing national savings. Before I yield back, I want to tell my colleagues a really telling story. The thing that I think is important to stress is that Social Security was created in 1935. It was created by Democrats, it was sustained by Democrats, it was improved by Democrats and that has generally been virtually without any Republican support for Social Security. It was not created

with Republican votes. It has not been fixed by Republican leadership. The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK), our ranking member on the Committee on Financial Services, asked Chairman Greenspan this question:

Mr. Chairman, in 1935 if you were a Member of Congress, would you have voted for Social Security?

The chairman's response was: I can't answer that question.

I think I will just leave it at that and allow that to underscore where the support for Social Security is. It certainly has not been on the administration's side of the issue.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I think that is a telling point and I appreciate her sharing that story because I will use it to further make a point on this. What we have to realize is that this is a program that helps a lot of people, too. It is not just the 70 percent of the program that goes to the retirees. This also has survivorship benefits in it. It also helps people who are disabled, blind, deaf, whatever the situation may be. This is something that brings a lot more value to our society than just the numbers that we put up on boards here in the House Chamber. There is more to this whole deal here than just money. This is about helping people and this was about bringing dignity to people so that they would not have to work until they died. It lifts seniors out of poverty. All our parents and grandparents recognize that. I think if the President says, like he said, 55 and over, you are fine, you are all right, which implies that if you are 55 and under, you better look out because we are not sure what is going to happen. If we really wanted to help kids, students right now, and that is sometimes how he pitches this, hey, these young people would be able to go save in a private account. If you really want to help these college students, increase the Pell grant more than \$100 a year for the next 5 years. Let us help these kids reduce their college debt. They are graduating from college on average with about a \$20,000 debt already which takes away from our national savings. Why do we not help them with that, as long as they put the money into some kind of long-term pension fund for themselves? There are ways we could get creative here and do this, but to say to dismantle the greatest social program in the history of mankind, I think is pretty foolish. The gentleman from Florida looks as if he has something very important to say.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I literally could not wait to get here tonight, even though we are here after supper and many of our Members are probably cracking their toes now getting ready to go to bed. But I will tell you this, that it is important. This is so important, not only do I have this notebook, but I have two other notebooks on this issue. This is not, as far as I am concerned, an attack on a Democratic program. This is an attack on the American people. It is our responsibility to

make sure that we inform the American people what is going on. Once again, I am not saying that the President is not telling the truth. I am not saying that the majority side is not telling the truth. I am just saying they are inaccurate as it relates to the facts. It is important that we share these facts.

I just wanted to share with the gentlewoman from Florida when she shared that the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK), the ranking member who is a respected Member of this House and has been here for a very long time on the Committee on Financial Services as the majority side and the chairman of the committee and he could not answer the question if he would have voted yes or no.

Forty-eight million Americans receive Social Security. Forty-eight million. Not 4, not 48, not 4,800, not 48,000; 48 million Americans. These retirees and 33 million retired Americans that are already retired receive this information. It is not the Kendrick Meek report.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. How many people in poverty? Did the gentleman say that?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. No, I have not. I was on my way. Seniors who are living in poverty, that are receiving the benefits, 48 percent of those individuals, of the 43 million, receive Social Security.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. So they would be in poverty if it was not for Social Security?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Forty-eight percent of the 43 million.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. So what is your philosophy on life when you say that you are okay with those people going back into poverty?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. No, I am not okay.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I did not say you were okay. I know the gentleman is not okay with that.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. But that is the reason why we are here. People are asking for the Democratic plan. I am asking where is the President's plan? Where is the majority plan? I do not want to go back to 1978 again. We are still talking about philosophy, but if I can just for a second, I have said this and I will say it again verbatim, for the last 3 weeks we have talked about Social Security. Democrats want to strengthen Social Security without slashing benefits that Americans have earned. Private accounts makes Social Security's challenge worse, makes the challenge worse, the private accounts do, we will talk about that in a minute and we have been talking about that, as far as massive benefit cuts and it will increase the national debt. Already in the projection, \$427 billion. Who is counting? I am.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I do not even think that counts the war.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. That is not even the war. So we are saying, not the Democratic plan, that we know all and

we know best. We are not even advocating that. It is the majority side in this House that is saying, oh, we can figure it out because we have the majority and we have stacked all the committees and we can get it through the committee and we can get it to the floor, and if we have to do a Medicare move again, keeping the voting board open for over an hour while we walk around here and put pressure on individuals that have already made a sound decision on how they are going to vote, then we are going to do everything we can as Democrats.

I commend our leadership, need it be in the Committee on Ways and Means, need it be in the Committee on Financial Services, need it be our Democratic leader the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), all the way to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) and our Democratic Caucus, and also the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CLYBURN) who is our Vice Chair, to let the American people know that this will not happen and that with the President and with the majority side, they are talking about theory, not a plan. And so our plan is to make sure that we do not make life worse for people under 55. Even the President said, if you are over 55, you don't have anything to worry about. This is the same President, with all due respect to my Commander in Chief, that said it would only be \$350 billion for Medicare prescription drugs and now we are way up to \$724 billion. I am not saying he is not telling the American people the truth, I am just saying that it is inaccurate information. And inaccurate information, when people feel that they have the power to do whatever they want to do, is wrong.

That is why it is important that we take this time out and that is the reason I commend my Democratic colleagues that are here saying, no, having over 300 town hall meetings, and I commend my Republican colleagues, in the minority in the majority, that are saying, no, Mr. President, who I campaigned for, I am not with you on this one. So we want to make sure. That is the reason why we do not have a plan yet, because there is no real plan. I would much rather the President say "thank you" and just move on to another issue because we have a war that is going on right now. Until we are ready to work in a bipartisan way, we should not approach Social Security, until we sit down at the table and to be able to hear both sides and that we can move together. The gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) would be at the White House right now as ranking member of the Committee on Ways and Means if we were hammering out a real bipartisan plan.

The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK) would be at the White House right now as we speak hammering out a real bipartisan plan. Leader PELOSI, when she goes to meet

and you know the American people at least once a week, they come together, majority and minority and the leaders come together at the White House, if she were included in that process of hammering out a Social Security plan, maybe, just maybe the American people will benefit. But that is not the case.

I am going to yield to the gentlewoman from Florida, and I hope she will explain at least some of the charts that she has there to be able to share what we are getting ourselves into if we allow the majority side to carry us down, not a yellow brick road but some other color brick road in making Social Security solvent for years and years and years to come.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I just want to expound on a couple of the things that the gentleman said. Given from the three of us, me being from the opposite gender from the two gentlemen I am here on the floor with, I think it is important to note the effect that privatization would have on women. We have talked about this before but just to give you an idea of what women face when it comes to the comparison to men. In 2003, the average monthly Social Security benefit for a woman was only \$798. That is \$241 less than the average man's monthly retirement. Women's earnings are still 77 percent relative to men in 2002 dollars. Women who reach retirement age live on average at least 3 years longer than men. So this is a female problem, to say the least. Social Security is the only source of retirement income for one in three unmarried retired women. That is a really significant number.

Without Social Security, 52 percent of white women, 65 percent of African American women and 61 percent of Hispanic women would live in poverty upon retirement. It provides more than half of the total income for female widows and single women. The other thing I wanted to expand upon that the gentleman from Florida talked about is the issue does arise, where is the Democrats' plan? Do my colleagues remember, I think it was a Wendy's commercial, the really famous Wendy's commercial, "Where's the beef?" That is what I would like to know, and my constituents want to know about the President's plan, where is the beef? It is very nice to talk about vague outlines of what you would like to see happen, pie in the sky concepts, but generally in my legislative experience, when a President or a governor in my experience makes a proposal, they usually send the legislative body a bill. They usually get a Member to sponsor it. And then we have an opportunity to dissect it and debate it and then the minority party offers their alternative. It is time. It really is time. It is the President that has laid out that this is a crisis. We call it a long-term challenge. We would be happy to sit down and discuss our approach to that long-term challenge but we are in an apples-to-oranges situation here.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We want to be a part of this. I do not want anyone at home sitting there listening to us to think that we do not want to be a part of solving this problem. Not crisis. Problem. Long-term problem. We all have long-term problems. My family has heart disease. I have a long-term heart disease problem, long-term.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I have some credit card debt.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We all have problems. I think this shows really where we are at philosophically, too. I have a school district, Youngstown city school district, over 50 percent of the kids in that school district live in poverty. Seventy percent qualify for free and reduced lunch. That to me is a crisis, immediate, needs to be addressed. Cuts in Medicaid and food stamps, that is a crisis. We need to fix that now. This is long-term.

There are a couple of points I want to make. Let me get to this chart here. This is the U.S. trade deficit with China. This is the country we are borrowing all this money from. It is about \$163 billion, maybe a \$165 billion trade deficit. We are buying more than we are selling. I just want to show this because I think as we look at the big picture with the \$420 billion or \$430 billion annual trade deficit, this is all U.S. investment going over to China.

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A lot of these job that were in the United States are now in China. Fewer people paying that 6.2 percent into the system, which would certainly help, as opposed to making 8 bucks an hour. The good high-wage jobs that were 18, 20, 25 bucks an hour, 6.2 percent of 25 bucks an hour is a lot more than 6.2 percent of 8 bucks an hour, which is the rate we pay in. So I just wanted to put this up to give everybody some perspective.

And we talked about Alan Greenspan and his testimony. I just want to read a paragraph from Bloomberg News. It is pretty interesting: "Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan's testimony yesterday before the Senate Banking Committee," a couple weeks ago, "undermined virtually all of the Bush administration's arguments for diverting some Social Security tax payments to fund private retirement accounts. If the hole left in Social Security finances by the diversion were filled by added government borrowing, as proposed by President Bush, creating the private accounts would not add to national savings, and for Greenspan national savings is the overriding long-term retirement issue facing the Nation." Greenspan says we need more national savings. The administration's plan is borrow \$5 trillion. Two complete opposite ends of the spectrum.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, let me just say the list is endless for those who are opposed to the President's philosophy and the majority side's philosophy on this. I mean, it is not just House Democrats.

It is not just the Democrats of the other body. It is not just Democrats that are out there hopefully wanting to be President one day. I mean, we have a number of individuals.

I just want to name a few while we are here to let them know that we are paying attention to what they are doing. Along with the 300 townhall meetings that House Democrats had, we had a number of other groups that were out there and still out there doing good things and sharing with the American people. I just want to start off with an organization that is out there of retirees, the AARP. They are opposed to the President's plan. And to be a member of the AARP, one has to be kind of middle-aged, I must add. I have been elected a long time. I am not going to call anyone old. But let me tell my colleagues this: one has to be at least middle-aged.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Fifty.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, one has to be at least middle-aged, and one would have to have experienced life. So they are opposed to this plan, this philosophy of a plan. Nothing is concrete, but what they have heard thus far as it relates to privatization of Social Security they have a problem with. So does the A. Phillip Randolph Institute. So does the African American Ministers' Project. So does the Alliance for Retired Americans. So does the American Association of University Women; American Baptist Churches, USA; the AFL-CIO; the Association of Community Organizations for Reform. Also we have the Campaign for America's Future, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the Center for Economic Policy and Research, Children's Defense Fund, Coalition on Human Needs.

I mean, I can go on and on and on of these groups, and I have pages and pages and pages. Older Women's League. The "wiser women's league," let us put it that way.

But all of these groups, the League of Rural Voters, I have pages upon pages, and they would fall on the floor if they were not in this binder, of groups that have said it is not a plan; but from what we hear and from the individuals that are saying that they are trying to serve up something to young people, trying to get them to believe that it is cool, that it is okay to gamble on their retirement, they do not agree with it.

A. Phillip Randolph Institute.
African American Episcopal Church.
African American Ministers' Project.
Alliance for Retired Americans.
American Association of University Women.
American Baptist Churches, USA.
AFL-CIO.
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN).
Call to Renewal [Faith].
Campaign for America's Future.
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP).
Center on Economic Policy and Research (CEPR).
Children's Defense Fund.
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU).

Coalition on Human Needs (CHN).
College Democrats of America (CDA).
Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF).
Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities (CCD).
Economic Policy Institute (EPI).
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA).
League of Rural Voters.
League of United Latin American Citizens.
The Links, Inc.
MoveOn.org.
NAACP.
National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL).
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc. (NCBA).
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare (NCPSSM).
National Congress of American Indians.
National Council of Churches.
National Council of La Raza.
National Farmers Union.
National Organization for Women (NOW).
National Puerto Rican Coalition.
Older Women's League (OWL).
People for the American Way.
Progressive National Baptist.
Rock the Vote.
USAction.
Women Investing in a Secure Retirement (WISER).

Young Democrats of America (YDA).

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to expand on something since we are going to try to focus on young people in our caucus. A really good example of what impact this proposal would have on younger people, a 20-year-old who enters the workforce today, over the course of their career would experience a \$152,000 loss in their Social Security benefits that they would have otherwise received. It provides disability insurance that young families need. There is no private insurance plan today that can match the disability benefits that Social Security provides. For a worker in her mid-20s with a spouse and two children, Social Security provides the equivalent of a \$350,000 disability insurance policy. Most young people cannot afford or obtain that kind of coverage outside of Social Security.

And let us say, God forbid, a young parent dies suddenly. I heard the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CLYBURN) today talk about a person who came to one of his townhall meetings whose spouse died when she was 35 years old and Social Security provides the survivor benefits that are left behind for those kids.

To such an extent, most people do not realize Social Security's survivor benefits will replace as much as 80 percent of the earnings for a 25-year-old average-wage worker who dies, leaving two young children and a spouse. That is the equivalent of a \$403,000 life insurance policy. And the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CLYBURN) talked very poignantly this morning about the gentleman that he has known for years, and had never heard this story, that his 35-year-old wife, when she

passed away, could at least rest in peace knowing that her life and her work had provided for her children's future benefit even in death.

And that is the type of rug that we are pulling out from under people if we go in this direction.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a comment on the AARP. These attack ads, the same consultant groups that attacked Presidential candidate KERRY, the same groups that did the Swift Boat ads are now attacking AARP, and they are saying that AARP is for gay marriage and against the troops. And the reason I want to comment on that is because their reference is to the Ohio AARP chapter, which was against an issue that was on the ballot in Ohio, and I believe it was Issue 1. The issue was to ban gay marriage, but it was written so broadly that it eliminated civil unions between men and women who were older, who were senior citizens. And I have people in my district, friends of mine, who were married and their spouses passed away and they were senior citizens and they were 70-something-years-old and they had families on both sides and kids and grandkids. They did not want to get married, but they wanted a legal binding contract. So the AARP, obviously, was against that because it took away the civil unions for senior citizens. Now all of a sudden here come the attack ads against AARP just to try to slam them because they are not for the President's proposal.

So I just wanted to clarify that to the folks in Ohio. That is why AARP was against Issue 1 because it is eliminating the ability for two human beings, American citizens, to write a contract between each other, man and woman, a contract not allowed in Ohio.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I guess as we really start to look at this and as we wrap up in the next 3 or 4 minutes, I just want to say tomorrow one of those groups that I did not mention, Rock the Vote, will be having a townhall meeting with some Democratic Senators and will also have a college campus tour as they start to go around and talk about this issue, and Republican Senators that have spoken out against this.

And I must add that the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and I join, in the single digits, I must add, members of the Florida delegation in this House that are opposing the President's philosophy at this time, rightfully so, because their constituents are not with them on this. And that is the way democracy is supposed to work.

We are not up here to fly up here every week and walk around with congressional pins on and showing our card, walking in and out of this Cap-

itol, and saying that we are here to represent ourselves. We are here to represent the people that have sent us here. And believe me, if I were walking around here saying I support the President's philosophy and the majority's philosophy, my constituents, and the gentlewoman from Florida knows them well, would be up in arms. So I am a representation of what they voted for. So that is the reason why we are here.

I want to just add a few more things, and then I will yield to my colleagues to make closing comments. I must say I want to share with the American people again that 48 million Americans are receiving benefits of Social Security; 33 million are retirees already. That is the AARP group, and the AARP is against this. We also have seniors that would be in poverty if it were not for the 48 percent of those are within the 48 million. The average monthly benefit is \$955. And Social Security will be solvent, will be there at what we see at present levels for the next 47 years-and-some-change.

So I just want to make sure that people understand there is an issue, but there is not a crisis. There is a concern, but it is not an emergency. So it is important that we realize we have a war going on in Iraq, as a matter of fact, two of them, in Afghanistan. We have this other little thing that we are calling, which is a big issue, \$724 billion in the prescription drug plan, and then we also have, and I must add, this supplemental. We have an \$80 billion supplemental that is coming before us, and the Department of Homeland Security to protect the homeland is only \$40 billion. So when we look at it in the big scheme of things, sheriffs, mayors, elected officials on the local level, they are looking for the dollars to come down, and they can see where they fall as it relates to receiving their fair share of protecting the home front.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentlewoman from Florida.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, actually what I want to close with is I want to quote the President because the President has said that leadership means not passing problems on to future generations and future Presidents. And I take him at his word, and I am hopeful that we do not go forward with this proposal because this plan to privatize Social Security flies in the face of his stated belief that we need to exercise some leadership and make sure that Social Security is preserved into the future for our generation and for our children's generation. And I look forward to working with both gentlemen.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I hope we continue this discussion. It is nice because it is not a 30-second ad. We can actually talk about the facts and get into a little more discussion.

I want to do this before we go. If there are any 30-somethings or 40-somethings or 20-somethings or anyone out there who wants to e-mail us, it is 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov, or they can get us on our Web site democraticleader.house.gov/30something, but they can send us an e-mail if they have any comments or stories that they want us to share, and we will pick a few next week and maybe read them on the House floor here.

But I think it is important that we recognize that this is long term and bad for our generation for all the reasons that we stated and I think most significantly \$5 trillion that we have to borrow primarily from the Chinese.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure coming to the floor. We want to thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), and we appreciate the opportunity to address the House.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Ms. CARSON (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of personal reasons.

Mr. FARR (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for February 17 on account of a family emergency.

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and part of March 2 on account of congressional business in the district.

Mr. GILLMOR (at the request of Mr. DELAY) for today and the balance of the week on account of illness in the family.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Ms. WOOLSEY) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Ms. WOOLSEY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. CUMMINGS, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. DEFazio, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. LEE, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. PALLONE, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. STRICKLAND, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. OSBORNE) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. MORAN of Kansas, for 5 minutes, today and March 2.

Mr. OSBORNE, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. KING of Iowa, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. MIKE ROGERS of Michigan, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. FORTUÑO, for 5 minutes, March 2.