

care costs, and total health care expenditures are a significant portion of our gross domestic product.

The good news is people are living longer with better technology and better drugs. That is excellent news. America has one of the best health care systems in the world. Yet everyone knows, because everyone is affected, that rising health care costs are a growing challenge to families, to businesses, and to the government. We need to look at this system, and I believe that simple new approaches can make a huge difference, as the gentleman has pointed out.

It is estimated that improvements in health information technology, quality patient management and wellness programs themselves promise to save up to 20 to 40 percent of costs. Personal ownership of health care decisions may minimize the wasteful overutilization of services. Incentives to medical providers, as well, to better target expensive and excessive testing are all areas that we need to aggressively explore in order to appropriately use our public and private health dollars.

Mr. Speaker, today I wish to focus on one aspect of how the rising cost of health insurance prevents entrepreneurial individuals from pursuing good opportunities. I think we must take the opportunity to think creatively, to update outdated approaches, and put consumers and families in charge. I have a keen interest in reducing barriers for small entrepreneurs. The vast majority of new jobs in our country are created by small business. This is where most people are working hard to get a little ahead in life and secure their own long-term economic well-being.

I have seen how the lack of available health insurance and rising health care costs decreases productivity and distorts social and economic decisions. For instance, in my district it is not unusual for a spouse in a farm family to drive very long distances to have a job simply for health care coverage. The rising cost of providing health care coverage for employees is a growing obstacle for small business owners or those who may wish to join their ranks.

It is not surprising that only 63 percent of smaller companies can afford to offer health care insurance. This is a primary reason why three out of five uninsured persons in our Nation are small business owners, their employees or their families.

Recently, the Committee on Small Business held a field hearing in my district. It was an extraordinary turnout. One of the reasons was because it was on the issue of small business and health care costs. During this forum, we examined the increasing cost of health insurance and possible solutions. The hearing emphasized one important aspect, the underutilized tool for small businesses known as health savings accounts, which were established as a part of Medicare prescription drug law.

These tax preferred accounts, coupled with high-deductible health insurance, help alleviate the ever-increasing cost of traditional health insurance premiums and empower families to take better control over their own health care dollars.

While the number of individuals using these accounts is increasing, I believe we need to do more to give small business owners and entrepreneurs the ability to take advantage of this very important policy innovation. In fact, of the new policies, 37 percent were taken out by individuals who were previously uninsured, and 27 percent were taken out by employers who previously did not offer health care insurance to their employees.

Now, one concern regarding health savings accounts is the initial funding. I have introduced legislation that will allow individuals to roll over portions of their retirement accounts into health savings accounts. This rollover would not subject the retirement account to the usual 10 percent penalty for early distribution. Moreover, all individuals with retirement accounts would be eligible to take advantage of this opportunity.

I believe this will help meet important public policy objectives of increasing access to health care coverage and overcoming a major barrier that small businesses face.

HSAs, as they are known, are just one of the many simple new approaches that can make a huge difference in our health care system by providing positive incentives for those who use the system.

Again, I would like to thank the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) for undertaking this important discussion about health care and health care costs in our country; and I look forward to continuing our dialogue about innovative approaches to both save lives and save money.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I thank my good friend from Nebraska for joining us today. I want to thank him for pointing out health savings accounts and also the incredible importance of this discussion to small business.

When I go back to the district and I visit businesses all across the district, one of the things that they say, whatever you do up there in Washington, please, please, make it so that we can afford to provide health insurance for our employees.

So many of the things that we are doing right now as it relates to the model in which we are delivering health care make it more difficult for them to be able to provide that. So I thank the gentleman for his perspective and for joining us today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a very, very short period of time and just close by saying that the model that we currently deliver health care under in this Nation is one that is not patient friendly; it is not efficient; and it does not spend anybody's money, be it tax money or personal money, wisely.

We need a new model, a new model for health care. A transformation of our health care system is what is needed: more choices, more control by patients, higher quality and lower costs. What that does is make it so that we would have better care, more patients in power, and more responsibility and opportunity for patients to receive the kind of care that they so richly deserve.

Again, I would like to say that I look forward to working with Members on both sides of the aisle who want to work positively and productively to bring about a system of health care in our Nation that allows patients, that allows patients to be the ones making decisions that give the highest quality of health care that they need and that they deserve.

WORKING-CLASS FAMILIES BETRAYED

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GOHMERT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the betrayal of working-class families and the people on the bottom who need the safety net most. In this year of disaster, in this time of disaster, the people who need the help the most and who are the weakest in our society have been betrayed by the leadership.

Involved in this matter is the recent set of decisions made by the President to suspend Davis-Bacon in Louisiana where on the gulf coast we have a tremendous amount of construction work going on, opportunities for jobs to be created for those people who have been thrown out of work and have no income, no homes, no reasonable future. It is an opportunity for them to be employed. And yet interference by the White House has cut the wages there by suspending Davis-Bacon. And I will explain more about Davis-Bacon in a few minutes.

They have also suspended any Federal regulations on affirmative action. And that, of course, will hit hard because evacuees, the people who had to leave New Orleans and who are expecting to come back, 60 percent of them were African Americans; and their opportunities to get those jobs that are going to be created in the process of rebuilding the reconstruction are lessened by the fact that the contractors are not required to follow Federal regulations and affirmative action.

Those are just two of the things I would like to discuss. There is a broader range of issues related to leadership, competency in leadership, preparedness in terms of the huge amount of money we have invested in our armed services and our military apparatus and why we cannot have the dual preparation of the same body of people who are prepared to fight wars also be trained to take care of natural disasters of any kind.

However, before I commence to discuss this betrayal of the people on the bottom, people from working families by our leadership, I would like to yield to the gentleman from Detroit, Michigan (Mr. CONYERS), who has a set of items that he would like to discuss on his own.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) for his discussion, a very important one that I am very pleased to associate myself with.

I rise to use this part of the Special Order to discuss the health care crisis in America, the uninsured, and the need for universal health care. It strikes me as unacceptable that America remains the only country among the developed nations that still does not have a universal health care system. It is time for this body, the Congress, to pass a universal health care bill now.

The biggest problem in this country is that our health care is run like a business; and the profits of private health insurance companies, health maintenance organizations, and pharmaceutical companies are more important than whether or not working families and senior citizens and small businesses in this country and their employees have access to affordable and high-quality health care.

So I rise to discuss this serious health care crisis and the fact that it can no longer be ignored. It is my belief that the time has come now for bold and decisive leadership by the Congress to address the growing crisis of the uninsured, the skyrocketing costs of private health insurance which is hurting working families, and non-working families all over this country.

How many more horror stories must we read in the newspapers across the country, day after day, that painfully describe the plight of the uninsured and the underinsured before we act to pass universal health care legislation that guarantees once and for all that all of us, all Americans, regardless of income, employment, regional demographics, or race have access to the highest quality health care possible.

□ 1515

Recently, in *The New York Times*, op-ed writers are reminding us and calling for national health insurance that covers everybody, everybody in, nobody out, as the best way to solve the crisis of the uninsured. In an October 17 *New York Times* op-ed, which highlighted the plight of uninsured workers in America, that article pointed out that 9,000 Wal-Mart workers needed public insurance in Wisconsin alone. And the op-ed concluded with the notion that the problem of uninsured cries out for a Federal solution and that Washington lawmakers have done nothing to solve the larger problem, the crying need for national health insurance.

Polls reveal that the majority of the American people support the concept of

universal health care. The majority of American people support universal health care, yet we have failed to pass health care legislation. According to a recent Kaiser Foundation poll, 64 percent of Americans favor expanding Medicare to all Americans. A Pew Research Center for the People and the Press survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates on July 14 through August 5 of 2003 nationwide. And cities across the country, Boston, Pittsburgh, New York, and Detroit, have sponsored universal health care hearings where hundreds of citizens are demanding from their Members of Congress that they fight for passage of universal health care legislation because they are tired of the high cost of private health insurance, and being uninsured, sick, or broke due to our profit health care system is no longer something that they can deal with.

So on behalf of the 49 other Members of the House of Representatives, the gentleman from New York included, I am proud to say, we are happy to propose and set forth for examination and discussion House Resolution 676 that supports the idea and how we get to a national universal health insurance that allows everyone to be covered no matter where they are from, no matter what their illness. We want to put an end to a system which really is so threadbare that we cannot fix it up any more. There is no more mending that we can do. There are no more ways we can patch it up.

We have now come to the point in time where not only the people but a number of our friends in the labor movement are supporting universal health care. Twelve international labor unions and individual local unions across the country now support single-payer universal health insurance. This includes the United Automobile Workers, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the United Steelworkers of America, Service Employees International Union, SCIU, and the National Education Association.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, I would just like to note that on today's front page of *The New York Times*, today, Thursday, October 20, there is an article which talks about, and the gentleman mentioned patching up, we should no longer try to patch up the system. There is an article which says that Jeb Bush, the President's brother, who is the Governor of Florida, has been given a waiver to revamp the Florida health care system, the Medicaid system.

The essence of what Jeb Bush is proposing is that they will establish a certain amount of money to be spent on each Medicaid patient, and when that runs out, that is it. They die. By implication, they will spend that amount of money on the health care of that person and when that amount of money runs out, then they are on their own. And if it is some procedure, of course,

which they cannot afford, they would have died.

Would the gentleman care to comment on that?

Mr. CONYERS. Well, it is this cold-blooded bottom-line economic business approach to health care that makes us rank number 37 among the nations in the world when they examine how this health care is being delivered. The fact of the matter is that you cannot ration health care if you want a strong nation.

If you really need to go to the doctor, if you really need treatment now before it becomes worse or uncorrectable or fatal, as the gentleman suggests, we cannot send out an arbitrary amount of money because we are doing other things in the world or we are building new weapons of mass destruction or we are doing anything else. We have to have a health insurance system that is flexible to the needs of the people.

And one of the first things that we would come to, I say to the gentleman, is that we are catching up to people who have needed ample health care for a long time. One of the great things about health insurance, at least our program, is that health insurance would be working in a preventive mode; that when you get sick and get well, you will then be treated and you will come back for annual checkups and you will actually reduce the cost of providing the American citizens with health care.

So it is incredibly important that this debate start here and now. And I have been told that other Members of the Congress were talking about this subject today, so I will be anxiously reviewing their comments so that we can continue a broad discussion of this matter.

Right now there are 45.8 million people with no insurance. They are not underinsured, they have none whatsoever. And then there are any number of million who have insurance but they are underinsured. They do not know that what they may go to see their doctor about is not covered in their plan until they find out the hard way.

So I want everyone in our body to know that this is the beginning of a discussion that I am prepared to deal with on every issue, every aspect, because we want to make it clear that this is not just something for some group of people. This is going to benefit our economy. Goodness knows General Motors and Ford and Daimler Chrysler in Detroit all are struggling with the legacy costs that they have to carry because we have an employer-based system. And many of our automotive competitors have national health insurance systems, so they do not have to carry those additional costs.

So this is the beginning of a discussion that we will welcome as many as would join in as we sort these issues out and move toward the time when America will enjoy a universal health coverage system that cares for everybody in this country, from shore to

shore. And I want to thank the gentleman for participating in this discussion, and I yield back to him.

Mr. OWENS. I thank the gentleman and would like to say that the remarks I am going to continue making are very much in concert with the general theme of what the gentleman has said.

Every American, every human being, certainly every American citizen deserves to have the entire society involved and engaged in trying to guarantee that they get the best health care possible. There can be no second class, bargain basement health care.

Our leaders have failed us by making us believe that it is impossible, and these proposals that are being made today on the front page of *The New York Times* about Jeb Bush in the State of Florida are just beginning, but Kentucky is in line and a couple of other States want to do the same thing, which is to put a price on health care. You get \$1,000 a year for your medication, for your examination, or for whatever, and after that you are on your own. Now, the \$1,000 is hypothetical. They do not quote a figure. But they are saying there should be a figure for each individual, and after you run out of money in your account you are on your own, that the State will only go so far and that is it.

I think that is cruel and unnecessary. We are the richest Nation that ever existed in the history of the world. If Canada, Germany, Spain, France, and all kinds of nations can have a decent health care system with a volume of income much less than that of the United States, we certainly can afford to provide health care for every individual.

The attitude regarding people on the bottom is what I am talking about. The attitude about the folks left in New Orleans to float and drown in the water, that attitude, and I know some people are saying we are beating that to death and let us get off of it, but it is so symbolic. It was visual. You could see it. When a set of leaders and a Nation decides that people are expendable, that they are not worth it anymore, they are not important, you can lead to that kind of cruel and inhuman neglect.

Too much of that mindset of cruel and inhuman neglect permeates the present administration. It manifests itself in so many different ways. Not that it is only this administration. There are other parts of the world where you have cruel and inhuman treatment by leaders also. Pakistan now has a serious problem with an earthquake. And I am going to try to limit my remarks because I want to go to a meeting with the ambassador from Pakistan to talk about what we can do to help deal with the suffering that is going on there. But one of their big worries in Pakistan, the worries of ordinary people, is that their leaders are so corrupt that they will never get the money that is being donated. It will not be used properly. They will never

buy the medicines or buy the cots and the equipment. Large parts of it will be drained off.

The great fear there is corruption. And, of course, Third World countries, developing countries have a major problem with corruption. We talk about it here in the United States all the time. We talk about denying the World Bank resources to certain nations because of the fact that they have corrupt governments, corrupt leaders. But the corruption goes on here also. In Katrina we have a graphic example of how that corruption can be cruel and inhuman and get out of hand.

Just two quick actions by the White House show the point that I am trying to drive home. They failed to properly provide for the people of New Orleans, and large numbers have suffered needlessly. Large numbers have died needlessly. Large numbers were trapped in a situation which was quite inhuman. They were in a dome, a huge dome, a sports dome with 20,000, 30,000 people. Imagine being in a convention center, a huge convention center and to have the lights out for two or three nights. Remember, it is summertime and it is smoldering in the heat, plus the darkness. The fact that those people did not go mad, that more of them just did not go out of their minds is a miracle unto itself. They all deserve to be awarded medals as heroes. Anybody who could come out of there and just keep their sanity deserves to be saluted as a hero.

And if you doubt that, why not experiment at the next basketball game we go to. Ask the managers and those in charge of the arena to turn off the lights for 2 or 3 minutes and have a moment of silence to meditate on what it would feel like if you were in the dark with people you do not know, in large numbers, for a whole night, say for three or four nights. What would it feel like? I think we ought to experiment with that and let Americans across the country have the lights turned off at the next basketball game and just sit there. Of course, they would know there is no flood outside, that nature is not running wild, but that you are just in the dark. You are in the dark with strangers for 2 or 3 minutes. Now try to project that on spending two or three nights in the dark like that.

Those people, the fact they did not lose their minds shows that they were quite strong and deserve to be awarded medals and not be looked upon as some people have chosen now already to look upon them; that they are now problems; that they are unworthy; that they should have known how to get out of the city and out of the flood on their own.

□ 1530

They are now a burden on the government because they have nowhere to go. They have been housed in shelters, and now we need to find trailers and shelter for them.

Our leaders let them down because the flood should never have happened

in New Orleans. The flood was not a natural disaster. The hurricane was over when the levees broke. The fact that those levees had not been taken care of is just one more example of how the leadership of this Nation, people on the top, are corrupted where they do not deal with problems as they should, and therefore they make the people on the bottom suffer unnecessarily.

As I have said on several occasions, the Netherlands, the Dutch, are a whole nation below sea level. As a nation, they have been contending with the same problem New Orleans has. They know how to hold the sea back; they know how to manage floods. They know how to deal with water. They have never been called upon to revamp the levees and deal with the situation in New Orleans.

It would have been easy to get that kind of expertise. If you cared about the people of Louisiana, they could have solved the problem. The technology and the know-how is there. They had scenarios in New Orleans which showed that terrible things would happen if the problem was not taken care of. Nevertheless, our leadership refused to appropriate the money. Our leadership refused to allow the engineers to deal with the problem or come up with people competent to deal with it. Or they could have called upon the Netherlands to provide experts. That is one solution. We lean on other nations when we need their technology in other areas, so why not call upon the people of the Netherlands to help New Orleans protect itself from the sea.

But getting back to the most outrageous actions by the White House, once we have gone through the problem of failing to protect the people of New Orleans from the flood, failing to protect a large portion of the population from unnecessary suffering and in some cases death, senior citizens dying in large numbers in hospitals and nursing homes, we have all heard the litany of personal disasters and family disasters that were suffered as a result of our failed leadership.

The Congress of the United States appropriates. It stands up and shows it is up to the task. It does not hesitate. It appropriates \$60 billion to deal with the problem right away. We are into removing the rubbish, cleaning up the problem of the floods, providing the necessary temporary shelters, and preparing to reconstruct. All of that will require money and we are spending the money. It requires the money to be utilized to hire contractors. We have hired the contractors. The private sector will make some profits. That is the way it is in capitalism. We do not want to see anybody gouging and making unnecessary profits, but they probably will. That is a fact of the way the world operates.

In the meantime, work that has to be done, that work should be done by the people who need to earn an income rebuilding the place destroyed because of the failure of our leadership. But they

get right away a terrible blow from the White House. Right away the White House acts with great speed, and we know there was no great speed with respect to meeting the rescue needs of the people of New Orleans; but in the process of granting contracts and beginning the cleanup and the restoration, the White House orders that Davis-Bacon should be suspended. Davis-Bacon is a regulation in existence since 1933, which requires whenever Federal money is utilized in any project, that project must pay wages to the people who are carrying out that task, pay wages which are consistent with the wages of that area.

If you are in New Orleans, whatever they used to pay plumbers in New Orleans, pay the plumber that amount. Whatever they pay the electricians, the bricklayers, in the process of cleaning up and restoring, they should pay the same wages.

Having looked at the amounts, they were not high at all compared to average wages across the country. Electricians, bricklayers, plumbers, everybody in New Orleans is at the lower end of the scale in terms of prevailing wages. The average wage for most people in construction jobs is higher in the rest of the country than it is in the southern part of the country and in New Orleans.

So why the President rushed to remove Davis-Bacon cannot be explained rationally because they already had a situation where wages were very low. But once you remove the requirement of Davis-Bacon, then contractors can pay less than prevailing wages. If the wages are low already, where are you going to find people who will work for less than they do in the average situation across the country.

You find them among illegal immigrants; you find them among people who must have a job and cannot complain if the working and safety conditions are bad. You find them among people who are frightened, can be pushed around, not paid when they are supposed to be paid, and jilted out of part of their paycheck. People who will never have any vacation leave or fringe benefits, any health care. That is what the contractors will find once Davis-Bacon is removed, you do not have to pay prevailing wages; you can go under that scale and get the cheapest people and make the biggest possible profit off the misery of people who suffered in this natural disaster.

President Bush and key cabinet members were all excruciatingly slow in responding to Hurricane Katrina and its devastating effects. The televised images of thousands of African Americans marooned without food or water in the New Orleans Convention Center and Superdome shocked the world, yet the President was slow to return to Washington, D.C. and was slow to respond to take charge in response to the disaster.

The one fast action taken by President Bush was when he moved to sus-

pend Davis-Bacon. In other words, the President acted as speedily as possible to cut workers' wages on all federally funded recovery and reconstruction projects throughout the gulf coast States. The President himself said in New Orleans that rebuilding the city of New Orleans alone will constitute the biggest reconstruction project in the history of the Nation. It will cost many billions of dollars. Congress has already appropriated some \$60 billion towards this end.

And in the corrupt tradition exploited by the Bush administration already in the Iraq war, the President then proceeded to no-bid and cost-plus contracts for billions of dollars, and they have been granted to a favorite set of contractors, which includes Vice President CHENEY's former employer, Halliburton, and its branch subsidiaries such as Kellogg, Brown & Root. Halliburton has not been told to watch its spending carefully or restrain its profiteering because in a cost-plus contract, it is designed to give the contractor every leeway and maximizes opportunities for making extraordinary profits.

But the Bush administration, hiding behind a fig leaf, asserts they had to suspend Davis-Bacon, which provides a modicum of protection for workers on these Federal projects. They said they had to suspend it because it requires paperwork and that will cost the contractor money and waste time. But the people on the bottom, the people cleaning up the rubbish and the hard carriers and the bricklayers and those folks, their income and protection for them, the provision of decent wages for them was of no concern.

Now the prevailing wages in the Hurricane Katrina-affected regions are lower than ever before. They were never that high by national standards. Under Davis-Bacon, a pipe layer in Mississippi would earn \$7.45 an hour. I cannot imagine, given what a pipe layer earns in New York City, how you could find anybody to do that job for \$7.45. A pipe layer in Alabama would earn \$8.21 an hour. A pipe layer in Louisiana would earn \$9.84. All of those are very low wages for those jobs if you know anything about plumbing and the high cost of it across the Nation.

Such wage rates are hardly earth-shattering by anyone's standards; but under the Bush plan, skilled workers, many of whom lost their homes and all their belongings in Hurricane Katrina, will only be paid the Federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour. We hope that they will be paid the Federal minimum wage, because as I said before, the only workers that you are going to get to work for such low salaries are usually illegal immigrants, people who cannot fight back, who cannot report you when you fail to live up to the requirements of the wage and hour act, and who are at your mercy. That is the pattern where we are finding large numbers of illegal immigrants are being used.

The question of illegal immigrants is certainly one that I do not want to be recorded as being backwards and not sympathetic on. I favor what was proposed by the AFL-CIO last year. Let us look at all of the immigrants who are in the country now who are undocumented and who have been here for a while, who pay their taxes and are working, and through an amnesty create a situation where they may begin the process of becoming citizens. They can then begin the process to become citizens. They can join unions or associations. Or if they want to stand as an individual, they know they have rights and cannot be intimidated or cowed by an employer. They will help to raise the standards by working for decent wages, wages consistent with the cost of living in this country.

I do not like the exploitation of illegal immigrants. I do not blame the illegal immigrants for being exploited, and we can get out of this situation and allow them the opportunity to work without being exploited if we will act on amnesty as soon as possible.

As we have discussed at length on this side of the aisle, certainly with Democrats' policies, the Federal minimum wage also at present will not allow anyone to climb out of poverty. That \$5.15 an hour, assuming that the contractors will at least pay that and that they will not go below the national minimum wage, that Federal wage will not allow anyone to climb out of poverty.

A person working full time year-round at the rate of \$5.15 an hour will merely earn \$10,400 a year. If that is a parent with two children, he or she will earn \$4,500 below the poverty line designated for a family of four. This suspension of Davis-Bacon protections, especially for those who have lost everything in the wake of Katrina, is an utter disgrace.

The White House is not through with the people on the bottom. They are not through with working families. They decided to go further; and through the Department of Labor, they also suspended the affirmative action guidelines. The affirmative action requirements are quite simple. They do not have much enforcement mechanism in terms of making employers or contractors hire a diverse group of workers. They do require that they report what efforts they make toward diversity.

There are a few pieces of papers that say in the process of hiring people, you should take certain steps. But even that, the Bush administration decided that should be thrown overboard. And as I mentioned earlier, in the process of doing that, large numbers of people who lived in New Orleans, 60 percent of whom were African American, were denied priority in seeking the jobs that would allow them to return and start rebuilding their lives since they, as minorities, would have had to have some consideration made by the contractors; they would have a greater possibility of getting a job if they returned to New Orleans and tried to work there.

□ 1545

The message that was sent by that affirmative action suspension was do not come home. Go somewhere else and look for a job because you do not even have the protection of the simple weak affirmative action laws of the Federal Government that we had before. It was a message that sets up a situation which I hope is not true. Many of us, a lot of people, fear that we may have what was called in the 1960s Negro removal on a massive scale and that New Orleans will never be the same. The black population, the African American population, will never be allowed to return to New Orleans. They are spread throughout the whole Nation now in shelters. Most soon will be out of shelters, but they will not be in one place anywhere. There are 2,500 in New York City. I think another 2,500 are coming in to be put up in hotels and various places. There are some in Utah, some in Idaho, lots in Texas. All over they are spread. They have been removed.

During the 1960s, there were accusations that the big developers, the people who wanted to make a lot of money in the middle of the cities would come in with plans to redevelop the city, and the oldest parts of the city, although they were centrally located, would be the poorest parts in terms of buildings, so they would have tenants in them who were very poor tenants. In many cases in many cities, these people were people who were minorities, and the process of removing them made great profits for the developers. If they got them out, the new buildings that they built would not be for them. It would be for people with high incomes who could afford the kind of higher priced housing that was being built.

Here we have a situation where an act of nature is the beginning of the process. I said the flood in New Orleans was not caused by nature, by the hurricane. It was caused by poor leadership which had not maintained the levees and the dikes and the pumping stations, and that is the problem there. But, anyway, by that act we have had massive removal of people and now with the policies of this administration suspending Davis-Bacon, suspending affirmative action, making it clear that people are not welcome back, we will have permanent removal of a whole population.

Unprecedented in the history of the Nation. Of about 400,000 people, at least 200,000 of those people lived in the section that was heavily flooded. They will be there no more. It will change the politics of New Orleans. It will change the culture of New Orleans. Some people say, well, Disney can move in and they do not want to rebuild houses in the places that were flooded before because there may be another flood, but if they built an amusement park and they built it high up off the ground, it would not matter if it was flooded or not. And some folks said that is probably what is going to

happen, that Disney will come in and try to take over.

Well, Disney did not come in and try to take over. The Mayor of New Orleans announced that we have got to move our casinos off the river and move them inland. Where are they going to put the casinos? I guess they were going to put them in the same places where the poor people lived before. It would not be Disney, but it would be "casinoland."

So it is not exaggerating to talk about massive Negro removal, black removal, African American removal, massive removal of a population that was considered undesirable in order to give the marketplace the opportunity to really make tremendous profits.

One can imagine how the ancient Israelites felt when the Romans decided to do one of the most brutal and cruel things ever done. That is, they took the whole nation and moved them out, spread them out over the world, and there were 12 tribes. They broke it up into 12 tribes and moved them off their homeland, massive removal. We have something similar to that taking place in New Orleans. A whole mass of people is now in a situation spread out over the entire United States and not ever likely to be back in their home unless we have different policies by a different kind of leadership.

I want to yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) for her comments.

I want to point out, while she is taking the mike, that we had a massive earthquake in California during the Clinton administration. Nine billion dollars was appropriated by the Federal Government to rebuild the bridges and the highways that were destroyed by that earthquake. The President did not suspend Davis-Bacon. He did not suspend affirmative action, and the contractors completed that job 3 months ahead of time. We do not need to do those cruel things that have been done by this administration in order to guarantee that we are going to have the most effective production.

I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON).

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the health care crisis in America that relates to the presentation that the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) is giving now.

The United States Census Bureau reports that in 2004, 45.8 million people were without health insurance coverage and several estimates double that amount to include the underinsured. Moreover, the percentage of people covered by employer-based insurance declined to 59.8 percent of the workforce. Shamefully, there are over 8 million uninsured children in this country who do not even have the opportunity for employer-based coverage.

On the other hand, health insurance premiums have increased astronomi-

cally since the beginning of the Bush administration. According to Families USA, workers' costs for health insurance have risen by 36 percent since the year 2000, far surpassing the miniscule 12.4 percent increase in earnings since the President took office. In 2005 it is unbelievable that over 50 percent of insured Americans spent more than 10 percent of their income on health care. Over 10 million insured Americans spent more than 25 percent of their income on health care. And embarrassingly, over 6 million Americans spent more than 33 percent of their income on health care.

According to the World Health Organization, the United States ranks 37th in the world in overall health care quality. Thirty-seventh. This administration and this Congress must pay attention to the health of our Nation in order to improve on the wealth of our Nation. And when we talk about homeland security, we are not talking about the land alone. We are talking about the people who live in this land. Rising health care costs are forcing American businesses to lose their competitive edge and to consider relocating overseas. It is time for Congress to pass universal health care legislation now.

American humanitarian outreach dictates that we consider health care programs around the world. According to the Institute of Medicine, 18,000 Americans die each year because of being uninsured. America is the only country among developed nations that still does not have universal health care.

In a related matter, minority groups often encounter major obstacles in obtaining health care. Minority groups are less likely to have health insurance and are less likely to receive appropriate health care services. In the year 2004, the uninsured rate was 19.7 percent for African Americans, 32.7 percent for Hispanics, and 11.3 percent for non-Hispanic whites.

The "Healthcare Equality and Accountability Act of 2005" would go far in lifting the shadow of health disparities that fall not only on minority communities but on all Americans. H.R. 3561, sponsored by the gentleman from California (Mr. HONDA), would make quality health care more affordable, providing coverage for parents and young adults who are currently uninsured.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to act in a responsible way, to look seriously at health care reform, and we must, for our own prosperity, insure all Americans and ensure quality health care for all of us.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentlewoman from California for her comments.

The broad, overarching message today is the betrayal. We are protesting the betrayal of working families and poor people on the bottom by our leadership, and the health care crisis that was cited by the gentleman

from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) is part of that whole process. I want to thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) for sharing this Special Order that he had reserved for a discussion of health care with me in making the broader case that working families, people on the bottom, are being betrayed.

At this very moment, as I said before, there is a meeting of the Pakistani Caucus of the House of Representatives to discuss the disaster in Pakistan, the earthquake there which killed more than 40,000 people already and millions have been left homeless, and they are homeless in the mountainous region where the snow and the ice is now beginning; so millions will die as a result of not having the equipment and the materials that they need as fast as possible.

One of the big fears there is that their leadership has let them down and they are not prepared for this. Another big problem, of course, is the rest of the world, nations like the United States of America, should rally to their defense and provide faster and more aid.

But disasters, natural disasters, are not quite as frequent in most years as they are this year. We have another hurricane on the Florida coast right now. They seem to have gotten suddenly stronger, the hurricanes and storms, earthquakes, tsunamis. This has been a very disastrous year. As I said previously on this floor, these disasters are not so great that we do not have the capacity to deal with them as the world. Certainly this Nation could do so much more to help. If they really care about the people who are suffering, if our leadership really cared, these disasters can be handled rapidly with minimum loss of life. We have \$500 billion we spend on our military apparatus. That is without adding the extra money to fight the war in Iraq. A military of that size should be capable of dealing with disasters of any kind as well as fighting wars. The same is true of the army in Pakistan.

One of the things that some Pakistani citizens were complaining about was that army people arrived and were standing around doing nothing and, when they were questioned about why do they not help more, they said, We are waiting for our orders. They need specific orders how to help out in a disaster. They have been trained to aim, ready, fire, shoot and kill. Why can all the armies in the world not be trained to take care of these natural disasters as well as to provide defense for nations? Why can we not have leadership which ahead of time assumes that it is going to be our responsibility? It is the duty of a government, the duty of leadership, to take care of people in times of natural disasters. And our government apparatus in its entirety, including the military, should be available to do that.

Certainly, that did not happen in New Orleans, and we are very much

aware of what the consequences can be when we have this huge rich nation with all of these possibilities and all the material and personnel available but we have no leadership at the top that can do the job. Our leadership let us down.

The gentlewoman from California, I said before she spoke, is from a State which suffered a huge earthquake a little more than 10 years ago, in 1994. The Northridge earthquake in Los Angeles caused a tremendous amount of damage. Congress appropriated money, and as I said before, there are some lessons to be learned from what happened in that disaster.

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I am talking about a government in power, a regime in power, a White House leadership that seems to persecute those at the bottom at a time like this. Or, as this particular paper which is called: Lessons for Post Katrina Reconstruction, A high-road versus a low-road recovery, this paper talks about what happened in California at the time of the Northridge earthquake. It is written by Peter Phillips and was published by the Economic Policy Institute.

Foremost among those lessons is that competitive bidding and enforcement of labor standards such as the Davis-Bacon prevailing wage law can help ensure that work is done expeditiously, safely, cost effectively, and with maximum benefit to the local population. That is one of the lessons that this study points out that we learned at the time of that huge earthquake in California.

President Bill Clinton refused to suspend the Davis-Bacon Act in 1994, yet the Los Angeles highways were rebuilt at lightning speed. In particular, the Santa Monica Freeway was rebuilt in only 66 days, less than half the time that had been stipulated by the State of California.

The need to rebuild quickly is no excuse for suspending the Davis-Bacon Act or affirmative action requirements as President Bush has done. The lessons we have already learned are not being applied by this White House regime, because this White House regime governs for a few and cares very little about those on the very bottom. The few at the top are the preoccupation of the present administration, and that leads to great cruel and inhuman treatment to the people at the bottom.

We had a resolution that we proposed in the House Education and Workforce Committee this morning. It was a resolution requesting that the President transmit to the House of Representatives information in his possession relating to contracts for services or construction relating to Hurricane Katrina recovery that relate to wages and benefits to be paid to workers. We want the President to explain why he suspended Davis-Bacon. One of the explanations that was given by people in the committee who supported the

President was that it had been suspended before by other Presidents. President Roosevelt once suspended, I think it was for about 30 days that President Roosevelt suspended it on the conditions which are very different.

We are requesting that the President transmit to the House this information. And of course we had a lengthy discussion in the committee, and then the majority Republicans took a vote that they would report it to the House only with a recommendation that the House consider it unfavorably, and they voted to do that. So the report comes to the House with a recommendation that the majority, the Republican majority, the President's party considers the request that he provide information to Congress about why he suspended Davis-Bacon, they consider that report, that request to be a nuisance request.

It is most unfortunate that we cannot have information, simple information provided to the Members of Congress. After all, we are all elected under the same conditions and we come here. We want to do a job for our constituency. Why can we not at least have information?

We gather information from other sources. Immigrant workers exploited in the gulf coast are talking to newspapers. I have a report here which says that Gulfport, Mississippi you had a report from several immigrant workers that, first, of all, you have 32 immigrants housed in three mobile homes and they were being paid \$8 an hour to tear sheet rock for 10 hours a day. They were among hundreds of illegal immigrants who entered the United States hoping to find work in the aftermath of the hurricane. One of the big complaints that they have is that they were promised \$8 an hour, but they were not paid. They were not paid on time. And they were not paid in some cases at all, and other conditions in terms of they were told that they would get food and shelter but the food is quite sparse and, as I said before, shelter means they are putting 32 immigrants in three mobile homes in one case. And on and on it goes with respect to the kinds of conditions that contractors are taking advantage of in the gulf coast reconstruction.

Many of the same contractors in the gulf coast reconstruction are also the American contractors who operate in Iraq. In Iraq, they found that they could make high profits on the no-bid contracts, billions of dollars have been spent that we cannot even tell where it went. There is a \$9 billion question around money that was appropriated to reconstruct, and nobody is even asking questions in this administration about where the money went. We know it is missing, but nobody wants to deal with a hearing or an investigation to tell us exactly where that money went. So they certainly have made a lot of money in Iraq, but even with the tremendous profits they were making the security question is such that they

made less than they perhaps wanted to, less than they agreed, told them they should be making. So the same contractors have come back, and in the domestic situation of the gulf coast, of course, they do not have to pay for security. They do not have to worry about contractors being shot, bombs blowing up. So now they are poised to make all the money they could not make in Iraq in the gulf coast area by taking the contracts, hiring illegal immigrants at the lowest possible rates, and making off with the taxpayers' money.

One of the side products of this process is that experience has shown and several studies have shown that when you do not use Davis-Bacon you get workers who are less skilled, you get workers who care less about what they are doing, and you get an inferior product. Buildings have collapsed that have been built by workers who were not workers who were Davis-Bacon workers because they were not the usual workers that did that kind of construction in that locale. Buildings have collapsed and all kinds of projects have suffered as a result of shoddy work done by people who were being exploited by the contractors.

We would like to see not only Davis-Bacon, the President should restore Davis-Bacon requirements so that we have prevailing wages throughout the gulf coast region. We would also like to see that the President say that: Look, even when you have Davis-Bacon, you have low wages which are very difficult for people to live on, and beyond that you have a minimum wage which is the Federal Government's minimum wage which is also almost impossible for people to live on.

So along with restoring Davis-Bacon, along with restoring affirmative action regulations, we would like to see the President allow us and encourage his party to let us bring to the floor of the House the proposal that we have to increase the minimum wage. We want to increase the minimum wage as a way of demonstrating to the people who are on the bottom, to the working families of America that they have a leadership that cares about them. This leadership does not hesitate to demand that the sons and daughters of working families leave their last full measure of devotion on the battlefields in Afghanistan, in Iraq, or wherever else they may be needed.

Next, we demand that they do that, and they are doing that, and yet we do not want to give them a piece of our prosperity in our economy, not even \$5.15 an hour worth.

Despite huge improvements in the average educational level of our workforce, most American workers today still do not have jobs that pay decent wages and provide health care as we were talking about before and a pension. Only 25.2 percent of American workers have a job that pays at least \$16 per hour and provides health insurance and a pension, according to a new

study done by the Center for Economic and Policy Research. That is the level. \$16 an hour is the level you need in order to have a decent wage, and you must have that accompanied by a health insurance benefits program and a pension if you want to be called a person of sharing in the American economy as would be appropriate.

So I close with my opening statement: We need leadership at the top, in the White House, in this Congress that cares about working families, leadership that cares about the people at the bottom. Disasters come as a result of a plan by God that none of us may understand, and we should not trying to spend time trying to figure out what God is doing. What we should do is do what man does best, and that is have the most competent and most caring and compassionate people that we can in the leadership to take care of the needs of the people who are suffering on the bottom.

IMMIGRATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOUSTANY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 60 minutes.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, as a former judge and prosecutor in Texas, I spent most of my life enforcing the law. I know firsthand the cost of having laws on the books that are not enforced. To make law, whether it is on the State level or the Federal level, and then wink and ignore those who break the law is to live a lie. A government that tolerates law breaking surrenders its integrity, it surrenders its credibility, and it surrenders its self-respect. And right now, Mr. Speaker, America's immigration laws are not working. They are not even enforced.

We must secure the borders and reduce the number of people residing in the Nation illegally. And, of course, amnesty is not the answer to this. Those people here illegally have violated the law, and giving them amnesty is rewarding them for breaking the law. As a judge for 22 years, I never once gave a person amnesty because they got away with breaking the law for a long time. Those who have broken our laws must find themselves penalized, not rewarded, for the disregard for the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, we have anywhere between 11 and 14 million people here in the United States that are here illegally, and we cannot reward them for breaking the law. Many of them are here because several years ago this country adopted a plan, a plan that has not worked, and that is the plan of amnesty: Tell those people that are here it is okay, you can stay. And now we have encouraged people from all over the world to come to the United States illegally.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that I am a supporter of immigration, a supporter of legal immigration. I am

proud of the fact that my heritage is from Scotland and from Germany. But in this country we have now taken the policy of discriminating against people who want to come here legally to the benefit of lawless illegals. I will give you an example.

In my southeast district in Texas I represent numerous individuals who have come to the United States legally, obtained citizenship, and I recently talked to an individual who was from the nation of Mexico and became a citizen of the United States, and he has been trying to bring the rest of his family to the United States legally. He has a son that he has been trying to bring to this country legally for the last 15 years, Mr. Speaker. And yet because of bureaucracy, red tape, and incompetence, that has not been granted. He wants to do the things the right way, the legal way, and he has discouraged his son from just merely crossing the border illegally like 5,000 people a day do on the southern Texas border, come into the United States illegally by walking across our border.

We have developed a policy that is no policy. We expect our border agents to patrol the vast thousands of miles from Texas to California. And when they actually capture someone coming into the United States, here is what happens, Mr. Speaker: They are arrested, they are taken to a Federal magistrate, they are told that they are going to have a deportation hearing eventually. But the detention facilities are so crowded that over 90 percent of them are released on their word to show up for their deportation hearing 6 months away.

This defies common sense, the idea of this catch and release policy. Capture the people illegally coming into the United States, take them to court, and tell them: If you promise to come back for your deportation hearing, we will have a hearing in 6 months to determine whether you get to stay or you must leave. Are we not surprised that most of them do not come back for their hearings? This defies common sense, it wastes time, and it does not work to solve any problem with our immigration, or, shall I say, our lack of immigration policy.

And just so it is clear, Mr. Speaker, we now know that over 50 percent of the people illegally coming into the United States from the southern borders are not from Mexico. They are from all over the world. They are from China, they are from South America, they are from Europe, but they are not from Mexico. And the reason? Every country in the world knows the United States has open borders, that we do not protect our dignity, we do not protect our sovereignty. So people are coming into the United States illegally, over half of which are from other countries other than Mexico.

I will give you an example. Recently we had an individual arrested by the name of Samir Abdoun from Algeria. He was caught entering California from