

Bulgaria was admitted into NATO. Bulgaria has proven to be a true ally in the global war on terrorism and there are currently plans for three U.S. bases to be located within Bulgaria. Bulgaria has one of the fastest-growing European economies, and membership in the EU will accelerate its pace.

Congratulations to President Georgi Parvanov, Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev, Ambassador to Washington Elena Poptodorova, and my longtime friend and former ambassador to Athens, Stefan Stoyanov. I am grateful to serve with Congresswoman ELLEN TAUSCHER as co-chair of the Bulgaria Caucus.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and we will never forget September 11.

IT'S TIME TO RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE

(Mr. AL GREEN of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. It's time to raise the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, I love America, and I want to make real the ideal expressed in the Pledge of Allegiance, liberty and justice for all. Justice not just for those who make more in a day than a minimum wage worker makes in a year, not just for those who are in, those who are in charge, in control, included, but justice also for those who are out, who are left out of the economic recovery, who are without health insurance, who are locked out of an apartment because they cannot afford to pay rent.

Mr. Speaker, in the final analysis, the justness of America will not be determined by how we treat millionaires in the suites of life but, rather, how we treat minimum wage workers in the streets of life.

GO GATORS

(Mr. STEARNS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the University of Florida Gators for their win Monday night to capture their second football national championship. With the Gators' 41-14 defeat of the Ohio State Buckeyes, they become the first Division I school to hold the national championship in men's basketball and football at the same time.

Coming into this game, many of the so-called experts did not give the Gators any chance of defeating the previously undefeated Buckeyes. However, once they took the field, the Gators were not intimidated. In fact, the Gators held Ohio State to only 82 yards of total offense, the fewest number of yards in BCS history.

The Florida Gators are an excellent example of both the university and the great State of Florida in their tenac-

ity, spirit and, of course, their desire to succeed. I take great pride in representing the University of Florida and congratulate Coach Urban Meyer and the entire university on this great accomplishment.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. I wanted to ask my colleague to continue for another minute since I am from Florida.

IRAQI SURGE

(Mr. INSLEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, we need a surge of congressional action to stop George Bush's disastrous policy in Iraq. The country needs and is desperate for a change in policy in Iraq, and tonight President George Bush will continue his policy of failure, of giving us just more of the same.

It is clear that we need to insist on a political solution in Iraq rather than to insist on Americans continuing to pour billions of dollars and thousands of lives into this political chaos in Iraq. The President has refused to listen to the bipartisan panel calling for a change in Iraq. He has refused to listen to the American people. But he cannot refuse to listen to a Congress that fulfills its obligation under the Constitution to exercise the power of the purse to stop this misguided escalation.

The U.S. House should vote in clear and no uncertain terms to fund the troops that are there and to cut off funding for any escalation. It is our constitutional obligation. It is a commonsense policy to insist on Iraqis standing up. That is the direction and the change we need in this country.

STEM CELL BREAKTHROUGH

(Ms. FOXX asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate Wake Forest University's Institute for Regenerative Medicine for its recent medical breakthrough in amniotic fluid stem cell research. Using these specific cells does not require the destruction of human life at any stage.

This is tremendous news. Not only does this prevent the destruction of human life but these stem cells have amazing properties that show very promising results. Unlike embryonic stem cells, these remain stable for years without forming tumors and are easily retrieved for medical use. They also have the ability to grow into brain, muscle and other forms of tissue that could potentially cure diseases. In addition, since these cells are a genetic match to a fetus, they can be used to help cure birth defects or even be frozen over time to use as a personalized tissue bank for use later in life.

In addition to being a medical breakthrough, this gives hope to millions who support the sanctity of life that

curing diseases and the potential for regenerative tissue growth are possible in a moral and ethical way.

I am proud to recognize the truly amazing work of Wake Forest University's Institute of Regenerative Medicine and look forward to the promise of its continued research.

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RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE

(Mr. SCHIFF asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, today we have the opportunity to raise the wages of 13 million Americans, and we should take it.

Why raise the minimum wage in America? For the simple reason that men and women in the richest Nation on Earth should not work full time and still be relegated to living in poverty. What does it mean for the father or mother in a family of three to live on the current minimum wage? It means an income of \$10,000 a year.

Imagine living in Glendale, Burbank or Pasadena, or any city in America, and trying to get by on \$10,000 a year. A raise in the minimum wage will be an additional \$4,000 for that family of three. It will mean more groceries on the table and a greater opportunity to get health care. It will mean potentially pulling that family out of poverty. It is the right thing to do. We have the opportunity today to make that happen for millions, and we should take it.

REDUCING TAX AND REGULATORY BURDEN

(Mr. DREIER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak briefly about the issue that my good friend from Burbank, Mr. SCHIFF, did, and that is the issue of minimum wage.

I am well aware of the fact that 80 percent of the American people believe we should increase the minimum wage, and I am for everyone's wage being increased. I want those who are struggling to get on the first rung of the economic ladder to have every opportunity possible.

That is why I think it is very important that as we prepare to embark on this debate on the minimum wage, that we focus on the most important item that we face and that was raised by Mr. SCHIFF, that being the issue of our being the richest economy in the world.

Mr. Speaker, that is not by accident. It is because of policies that we have put into place that are doing everything we can to ensure economic growth. So that is why as we look at this issue of making sure that people

who are dealing with economic challenges, we need to make sure that job creation is priority number one. And that is why focusing on reducing the tax and regulatory burden on those who are creating jobs should be priority number one.

INCREASING MINIMUM WAGE

(Ms. WATSON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, as this session of Congress begins, one of the most important pieces of legislation is the one we have been discussing, and that is increasing the minimum wage. This bill is long overdue.

During the first 100 hours, this Congress will vote to extend economic prosperity to 7.3 million Americans who have been left behind for far too long. It has been almost a decade since the Federal minimum wage has been increased. Today, a minimum wage worker is trying to make due on less than \$11,000 a year. This is simply impossible; \$5.15 an hour is simply not a fair and livable wage for hardworking Americans. In fact, the minimum wage is at its lowest purchasing level in over 50 years.

It is time Washington stands up for the little guy and gives more than 6 million workers a much-deserved pay raise.

CHANGE COURSE IN IRAQ

(Mr. NADLER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, what a deaf President we have. The American people told him loud and clear on November 7 that we want to change course in Iraq. He doesn't hear them.

The Iraq Study Group told him loud and clear we must change course in Iraq and certainly not escalate; he doesn't hear them.

His generals tell him that more troops won't do any good, will simply increase American casualties; he hears them, but he fires them and gets generals that will tell him what he wants to hear.

There is nothing more clear today than that the civil war in Iraq is a civil war, that there is no function for the United States to try to help one side against the other in that civil war. Indeed, one could make the case we picked the wrong side, and that we must withdraw our troops. We must tell the Iraqis that we are withdrawing, and we are withdrawing on a timetable. You make a deal with each other, you live together or fight your own civil war, we are not going to do it for you.

Mr. Speaker, for that we should not escalate. We should pass legislation in this Congress saying funds that are appropriated can be used only to protect the troops and to withdraw them.

WORKERS IN NEED OF A PAY RAISE

(Mr. SARBANES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. Speaker, there are millions of workers in this Nation in desperate need of a pay raise. They work full time, struggling to make ends meet and support their families while bringing home a little more than \$10,000 a year in pay. These workers are currently making the minimum wage, which has not moved from \$5.15 an hour for almost a decade, making it the lowest minimum wage in 50 years when adjusted for inflation.

This is a national embarrassment. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said: In this rich Nation, it is a crime that any American should have to work for starvation wages.

Today we have an opportunity to come together and give American workers an urgently needed pay raise.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is one of the most fair and necessary bills we will pass during this first 100 hours of the new Congress. It provides all of us an opportunity to help our most vulnerable constituents improve their quality of life.

In America, we believe that if you work hard and play by the rules, you can make a decent living for your family. Let's demonstrate our commitment to that today.

WHY WE CAN'T WAIT

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, in this week of recognition and admiration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I am reminded of a book he wrote and the words "why we can't wait" which emphasized the urgency of the civil rights movement for the then Negro in the United States of America.

Today we rise to indicate to America we cannot wait for an increase in the minimum wage. We cannot wait for that waitress who asked me when she would be able to provide more for her children and have the opportunity for the American dream.

By raising the minimum wage today, we impact 7 million women, 3.4 million parents, and we raise it from \$5.15 to \$7.25 over 2 years. In 9 years, 10 years, we have not raised the minimum wage.

I say this in the backdrop of the President's speech tonight on Iraq, because that theme follows why we can't wait for a successful policy in Iraq, and why we can't wait to have the President change directions to ensure that we eliminate that failed policy.

We are going to stand for a new direction in Iraq, saving our soldiers and bringing them home with dignity. And we are going to stand for working families in America.

DEMOCRATS TAKE NATION IN NEW DIRECTION

(Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, this month Democrats will take action on a bold agenda that includes all Americans. During our first 100 hours of legislative work, we are going to expand economic opportunities to millions of Americans who have been left standing in need for 6 years at least.

Hardworking middle class Americans feel like they have been left behind. While CEOs see millions of dollars in bonuses and large pay increases, middle class workers have faced stagnant wages for well over 5 years. And while their wages remain virtually the same, they are trying to stretch every paycheck to better afford increasing education and health care costs.

This month, Congress will give these families some much-needed help. For families trying to afford a college education for their children, we are going to cut student loan interest rates in half, which should save the average borrower about \$5,000 over the life of the loan.

For seniors struggling to pay for high price prescription drug costs, we are going to lessen the burden by giving the Federal Government the ability to actually negotiate for lower drug prices.

Today we will give working Americans a minimum wage increase.

LIVABLE WAGE

(Mr. ELLISON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, today the hardworking men and women of America have reason to rejoice. Today from the people's House, the House of Representatives, we have heard the call of the people of America, and we will today say that labor has dignity and the working people of America deserve a raise in pay.

It has been a long time coming, about 10 years; too long in fact, too long. Fifteen million people will benefit. But the people who get the pay increase, they will not be the only beneficiaries. You and I will be able to claim a generous Nation that believes that all labor is dignified and must be honored with fair and decent pay.

Poverty has increased every year over the last 6 years. The ranks of the uninsured have increased every year over the last 6 years; and something else has increased over the last 6 years, executive pay.

An average CEO makes more before lunch than the average minimum wage worker makes all year long.

Today, the House recognizes that all labor is important; all workers deserve dignity.