

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.