

(Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Maine (Ms. PINGREE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. PINGREE of Maine addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SCHIFF addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. ELLISON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. ELLISON. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am here to tonight to claim the time on behalf of the Progressive Caucus. The Progressive Caucus come to the floor every week to talk about a progressive vision for America, to discuss what America is and could be, to embrace the idea that everyone does better when everyone does better, to embrace the idea that we should look at the world with courage, not with fear, that we believe in dialogue, we believe in discussion. We believe in people doing well, and we believe in radical abundance, not fear of scarcity, a progressive vision; yes, even a liberal vision of an America which is doing well because everybody is working. We are promoting broad-based economic policies that allow for a higher quality of life for all Americans.

Yes, the Progressive Caucus comes to the floor every week to talk to the American people and with our colleagues about these critical issues.

Tonight we have a great topic, but before I announce tonight's topic, I just want to say we are very, very happy and pleased to be joined by a dynamic advocate for the cause of human justice, none other than Congresswoman GWEN MOORE of the great State of Wisconsin.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Thank you, Mr. ELLISON.

I would start out by acknowledging all of the tremendous work that the 9 to 5 Organization, founded in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has done around the issue of the importance of providing sick pay to workers.

People may not realize it, but workers nationwide have no sick pay. That is particularly relevant right now when you consider the beginning of this global pandemic, the swine flu. We had school closings all across the country.

Parents were forced to take off work to take care of their children because of the quarantine conditions that were ordered by health departments. Not only did they do it because they were responding to a potential health crisis, but families living on a budget now have to deal with the decreased wages they are experiencing.

And, of course, when children become ill, parents can't afford to miss work so they go to work anyway and infect other people at work. They send their kids to day-care and infect other children. And, of course, employers suffer, many of them who are small businesses because they find that there is a loss of productivity.

One of the greatest losses of productivity for an employer are employees who are sick. And they become sick because other workers are unwilling to lose a day's pay because of a little cold that turns out to be either the swine flu or maybe even worse, the regular flu that is quite deadly and quite contagious.

This drives up medical costs, and God forbid that a spouse or a child falls gravely ill or is seriously injured because that worker then has no choice but to immediately seek medical help and take the loved ones to a doctor or hospital, and more absenteeism occurs and they maybe end up losing their jobs because small businesses cannot really afford to have their businesses shuttered while people are ill.

In my district, 51 percent of the African American male population is jobless, and it is the largest racial disparity in unemployment and poverty in the country. Forty-three percent of the city's workers earn less than \$20,000 a year, and many are among the 122,230 Milwaukeeans, which make up 47 percent of the private workforce, who do not have sick days.

Last year in my district, the city of Milwaukee approved a binding referendum on the 2008 ballot that called for private employers in the city to provide paid sick leave for all workers, and this was due in part to the diligent effort of the unions and the community groups led by the National Association of Working Women, 9 to 5. And so now, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is one of only three cities in the country to require private employers to provide paid sick days.

It is smart economically because the lack of paid sick days is hurting Milwaukee's economic development.

Mr. ELLISON. Congresswoman MOORE, is that why it might be a good idea to support the Healthy Families Act, which is H.R. 1542, which is critical to guarantee workers up to 7 paid sick days a year?

I yield to the gentlelady.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Thank you for yielding.

This is a very important piece of legislation offered by the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO). I am so proud to be an original cosponsor. This makes so much sense.

Let me tell you what happens. The reality is when people don't have paid sick time, they cheat. They lie. When they are really sick, they don't come to work anyway. And worse, they neglect basic health care needs. They don't get their kids vaccinated. They don't take care of their teeth. They don't catch diseases and get basic health care like mammograms. They don't get them and catch these diseases early when they don't have built-in sick days. There is no employer on this planet that would wittingly deny someone basic health care knowing that an early detection of cancer would have saved their lives but for the fact that they didn't have paid sick days.

Mr. ELLISON. I quite agree with the gentlelady from Wisconsin who pointed out that the Healthy Families Act is a great piece of legislation, something that is progressive, something that makes sense for America, much like legislation of the past which supported workers' rights. What this piece of legislation would do for Americans, it would allow Americans to recover from short-term illness, it would allow Americans to care for a sick family member, it would allow Americans to seek routine medical care, or to seek assistance related to domestic violence.

Some people might think, "Oh, my God, that's going to cost us a lot of money." If people are that sick or in serious dire straits, they're taking the time off anyway. You're not planning for it, it's not in the schedule and there's no accommodation. If somebody can come in and say, look, straight up, I've got to take the day off because I'm sick and I have 7 days I can take, then what happens is you have greater productivity because workers are taking the time off they need to get well; workers are taking their kids to get the immunizations they need; workers are now actually engaging in preventive health care which means that they are not going to have to take extended periods of time off and thereby cut productivity.

By expending the money that it would take to provide the 7 sick days that are called for under the Healthy Families Act, businesses would save money. Businesses would be better off because we would have greater productivity and a healthier workforce over time. It's what my mother would call being penny wise and pound foolish to deny this legislation. But it would also be what my mother would call an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure if we were to have a great piece of legislation like the Healthy Families Act.

As you pointed out, as fear of the missed and inaccurately called swine flu is going around, and it should be called the H1N1 virus—not as catchy but it's more accurate—the fact is that such legislation at this time, so people could get the flu shots and checkups that they need, in times like this would be a great idea.