prices for healthcare, gasoline, and other necessities are rising, making it even more urgent that we raise the minimum wage now. The minimum wage has been stuck at $5.15 per hour since 1997—$5.15 per hour. These days, a gallon of milk can cost half that much in some parts of the country. Imagine working for $5.15 an hour at McDonald’s. Over half of them are women; 59 percent are white; 13 percent are black; and 23 percent are Hispanic. Forty-six percent of them work full-time.

The inflation-adjusted value of the minimum wage has declined 20 percent since 1997. The legislation we are introducing today, the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2005, increases the minimum wage to $5.15 to $5.85 within 60 days; then to $6.55 1 year after the first increase; and finally to $7.25 1 year after that. I urge my colleagues to support this vital legislation.

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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006

SPEECH OF HON. LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2360) making appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes:

Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 2360, the Homeland Security Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2006. As a member of the Homeland Security Subcommittee, it has been an honor to work with Chairman H. ROGERS and our Ranking Member, MARTIN SABO, in drafting this bill. I would like to commend them both, for their efforts to address our Nation’s security needs despite the severe budget constraints forced upon them.

Mr. Chairman, this bill provides $30.85 billion for operations and activities of the Department of Homeland Security, DHS, in fiscal year 2006, an increase of $1.37 billion above the fiscal year 2005 enacted levels. Although the bill does not fully fund many initiatives critical to securing the homeland, I am pleased that this legislation does provide adequate funding for several programs of importance to urban communities such as my own in Los Angeles.

For instance, the State and local emergency managers will be happy to learn that although the President continues to zero out the funding in his budget request for the Emergency Management Performance Grants, the committee has appropriated $180 million for this grant program. Congress has rightly called this program a “backbone of the Nation’s emergency management system.” In California, emergency managers use these grants to develop plans to help prepare our residents for disasters such as earthquakes, fires, floods, or terrorist attacks.

The bill also provides $750 million for State-wide formula grants which are distributed on a per capita basis to first responders. The current population-based formula is under review by the Homeland Security Authorization Commission which is determining whether or not funds should go to States based solely on population. In lieu of any changes by the authorizing committee to the formula, this bill directs DHS to maintain a minimum allocation of .75 percent per State and to allocate the rest based on threats and need versus population.

I strongly agree that targets proposed on the assessment of actual vulnerability is a much more effective use of limited resources than population alone. Furthermore, the committee recognizes that DHS must still establish a national preparedness goal which will help our country develop appropriate homeland security funding goals.

Our firefighters were among the first to respond to the tragic events of September 11th, and they will likely be the first to respond in the event of a future attack. The fire grant program helps local fire departments deal with these and other needs by allocating funds for equipment and staff. Unfortunately, the President proposed cutting funding for these programs by $215 million, or 30 percent. This bill restores most of the President’s cuts by providing $660 million for fire grants and $50 million for firefighter staffing grants. This is critical funding because only 13 percent of fire departments are prepared to respond to a hazardous material incident and an estimated 57,000 firefighter’s lack personal protective clothing for a chemical or biological attack. I hope that by the time this bill goes to the President, these programs will be fully funded at last year’s level of $715 million at a minimum.

In addition, the bill strengthens the committee’s direction that port security grants, for the 55 ports of national significance, should be based on vulnerabilities. This means that limited resources for port grants will be used where they are needed most. While we are dedicating $150 million to both the port and the transit security programs, the Administration had proposed no funding for these critical programs. This is unacceptable. When the Department of Homeland Security and the transit industry have indicated $7 billion and $6 billion in security needs in their respective industries to improve security, I am also pleased that Congress dedicated $50 million for the security of chemical plants.

I thank Chairman ROGERS and Ranking Member SABO for including in the Homeland Security report several items I requested to address serious issues raised during subcommittee hearings with representatives of the Department of Homeland Security.

For example, the report expresses deep concern about reports that children, even as young as nursing infants, apprehended by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are being separated from their parents and placed in shelters operated by the Department of Health and Human Services while parents are held in separate jail-like facilities. The Committee’s report language directs DHS to release families or use alternatives to detention whenever possible, and when detention of family units is necessary, the Committee directs DHS to use appropriate detention space to house them together.

The report also addresses the need to expand the use of Legal Orientation Programs to additional ICE detention centers in the country. Legal Orientation Programs consist of legal presentations made by nongovernmental...
agencies to all persons in immigration detention prior to their first hearing before an immigration judge. This program saves on the costs of immigration detention, makes Immigration Court more efficient, and facilitates access to justice for detained immigrants in removal proceedings. Immigrants are better prepared to accept their removal earlier in the immigration hearing process when they have learned from organizations not affiliated with the government that they have exhausted their immigration relief options.

I am pleased that the report contains language I requested to improve the quality assurance standards at our ports of entry. The Committee urges Customs and Border Protection to consider expanding the use of videotape systems to record interactions between potential asylum seekers and border patrol agents at our ports of entry. These tapes should be reviewed and retained for a sufficient period of time to ensure that asylum seekers are treated equally and with fairness at all stages of the process.

The bill once again includes language I drafted to prevent the Department of Homeland Security from moving forward with the unnecessary and potentially dangerous privatization of their immigration officers at the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. These officers are responsible for handling classified information used to prevent fraud and the exploitation of our immigration laws. I am thankful that this inherently governmental work will remain the responsibility of trained and experienced federal employees directly accountable to the Department and not to the bottom line of a private company.

The report also includes language which I requested to address concerns about Customs and Border Protection employees who were required to participate in a six-day/week basic training, but who were not fully compensated for all of their days of work. The report directs the Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection to report on the number of employees who were not compensated and also on the steps the department is taking to resolve the problem.

Finally, the report directs the Transportation Security Administration to report on the status of their efforts to issue regulations for basic security of public transportation attendants. I am pleased we are keeping TSA accountable to this task, and I look forward to the timely completion of this report.

However, Mr. Chairman, despite the fact that this Homeland Security Appropriations bill addresses several of the issues I raised in hearings and increases funding levels in several accounts, I am concerned that this year’s bill continues the practice of underspending several homeland security recommendations as well as expanded programs mandated by Congress to ensure our Nation’s security.

As one of the largest cities and metropolitan areas in the country, Los Angeles is considered to be one of the most “at risk” areas for terrorist attacks. For this reason, I am disappointed that this bill continues to provide only $5 million for a program which allows States and local jurisdictions to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding, MOU, with Homeland Security to train local police to enforce limited immigration functions. I believe our limited resources should instead be directed toward identifying and deporting terrorist elements in our country.

In addition, although both the Patriot Act of 2001 and the Intelligence Reform Act of 2004 called for increases in specific areas such as border agents, customs and immigration inspectors, immigration investigators, as well as for additional detention beds, this bill fails to meet the established border enforcement benchmarks—by 500 border patrol agents (25 percent short), 600 immigration investigators (75 percent short), and 4,000 detention beds (50 percent short).

I am also concerned with the decrease in funding that the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services has continued to receive since the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. This bureau is charged with processing applications for citizenship, and certification and citizenship applications for immigrants in our country and yet this bill includes only $120 million for this important agency. This decrease in resources simply does not make sense given that over the last 4 years, the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services continuously fails to meet its 6 month goal for processing citizenship applications. These backlogs send the wrong message to our Nation’s immigrants who are eager to become full participants in our society, but must wait years before their applications can be reviewed and processed. Mr. Chairman, I hope that before we send this bill to the President we will appropriate the funds necessary to once and for all resolve the backlog problems which have plagued this agency for years.

I am disappointed that this bill’s report expresses support for expedited removal and recommends its expansion. Expedited removal means that Customs and Border Protection officers can immediately deport individuals they believe are not eligible for asylum. This year, a federally funded study issued by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom on the impact of expedited removal on asylum seekers found that expedited removal procedures are not being applied evenly across the country. The report found that where an asylum seeker enters our country, the country they come from, and which officer conducts their brief interview, impacts the decision on whether an individual is allowed to see an asylum officer or is deported without further review. Before expedited removal is expanded, as the bill’s report recommends, Congress should require the Department of Homeland Security to provide evidence that Customs and Border Protection is making progress in resolving the current and serious problems associated with expedited removal.

Lastly, I am concerned by the Administration’s seeming indifference toward protecting critical infrastructure, such as ports, transit and railroad facilities, and chemical plants. Not only have critical assessments not been completed, but the Administration has consistently underfunded or unfunded important infrastructure security programs.

For example, although Congress continues to fund aviation security and provides $30 million for air cargo screening, the Administration has continued to leave the aviation system’s vulnerabilities exposed. Despite Congress’ direction to increase the percentage of screened air cargo on passenger aircraft, the Transportation Security Administration has not fully implemented the law.

Additionally, the Administration has proposed no new funding to install inline baggage screening machines beyond the currently approved eight airports, and Congress has again decided to only fund the existing programs at 75 percent, rather than the contractually agreed amount of 90 percent. This creates an additional burden that our cash-strapped communities can ill-afford.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I will support this bill to provide critical resources to help make our country safer. However, fully addressing these concerns requires resources that the Administration simply did not propose and which the Republican majority did not provide in this bill. While this bill is an improvement over the Administration’s request, critical homeland security needs will still go unmet.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, earlier today I chaired the third in a series of hearings of my Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations, and other critical national security concerns requires resources that the Administration simply did not propose and which the Republican majority did not provide in this bill. While this bill is an improvement over the Administration’s request, critical homeland security needs still will go unmet.

U.N. PEACEKEEPING REFORM: SEEKING GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY, INTEGRITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
OF NEW JERSEY
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, May 18, 2005

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, earlier today I chaired the third in a series of hearings of my Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations, and other critical national security concerns requires resources that the Administration simply did not propose and which the Republican majority did not provide in this bill. While this bill is an improvement over the Administration’s request, critical homeland security needs still will go unmet.

At that hearing, the United Nations made available Assistant Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, Dr. Jane Holl Lute to brief the Subcommittee on steps the U.N. Secretariat and Department of Peacekeeping Operations were taking to address the problem. As Members of this Subcommittee may recall, Dr. Lute declared, “The Blue Helmet has become black and blue through self-inflicted wounds of some of our number and we will not sit still until the luster of that Blue