

tragedy of Columbine High School? We have still not acted and Americans are asking us to act.

I believe the commemoration of the Selma to Montgomery march, the March 7, 1965, Bloody Tuesday, or the Bloody Sunday it was called at that time, where we turned people back because they wanted the right to vote, out of that act the Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Does America have to wait for more violence and more bloodshed to pass real gun safety laws? I would hope not.

Frankly, I hope America will come together with people of good will, put the snickering aside, the snide remarks aside, and get the good people of America to join us and encourage us to pass real gun safety legislation.

MINIMUM WAGE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

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

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, I want to first mention to the gentlewoman from Texas who just spoke, it was in fact a senior member of the Democratic caucus that may have derailed the efforts on gun safety that she claims today on the floor.

I would also like to strongly suggest that we keep talking about the NRA as if they are somehow responsible for the deaths around this country. Last I checked, none of the crimes committed were perpetrated by a member of the NRA. Now, we can have different positions on this issue, but how anyone can think for a minute that that crackhead, where that gun was found and that young innocent life was snuffed out by a gun, would have put a trigger lock on their gun, is beyond me.

Mr. Speaker, that is not what I am here to speak to, however. I do not want to talk about this issue. We do need to debate it in fairness. We will have an opportunity to have this debate, but I want to strongly urge Members once again not to point fingers or accuse groups, whether it is the NRA or Hollywood, for the decline of values in America. Let us talk constructively on trying to make something that will work, that people will obey and abide by. Let us construct a law that will have some teeth for those criminals who are violating the law.

I applaud the President on his efforts to increase funding for ATF, to increase the outreach to find out who is selling guns illegally. There are a lot of things we can do. But let us not sit here and point fingers and say it is the Republicans or it is the Democrats, it is that or that. It is too serious of an issue.

Let me also rise today to talk about an issue that is coming to the floor tomorrow, and that is on minimum wage and the economic growth act that we will be discussing tomorrow.

The President said clearly today that it should be a clean bill and it should not have amendments. But I would urge the President once again to at least tone down the rhetoric and discuss this in a very fair manner.

I can assure all of America that members of the Republican Party have in fact been meeting in good faith to try to structure a bill that will in fact increase the minimum wage. I commend people like the gentleman from New York (Mr. QUINN), the gentleman from New York (Mr. LAZIO), the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS), and others who have been working constructively to find a way to increase incomes for those at minimum wage.

I was involved in a restaurant. I owned a small business. I understand full well the impact of increasing expenses, such as payroll, through minimum wage increases. But at the same time I recognize that with rising gas prices, insurance costs, health care, it is probably timely that we look to seek to raise the level of people who are in fact working at minimum wage.

Let me also suggest to the President that we can in fact come to some kind of agreement here today or tomorrow and discuss this with some clarity. Raising the minimum wage will in fact cost small businesses money. What is the solution? Offset the cost with some benefits that we could structure, that are targeted, that are reasonable, that will be effective to not only assisting the low-income worker on minimum wage but helping the business owner meet the obligation of continuing to provide things for his community, his family.

We could accelerate the increase in the self-employment health insurance deduction to 100 percent. That would help insure more people and provide a good write-off for that business owner. We could increase section 179 expensing. We could raise the business meal deduction. As a restaurant owner, raising meal deductions would in fact incentivize people to come to eat in a restaurant, would increase income, and would allow the employer to increase minimum wage through that effort.

Real estate tax relief is in the bill tomorrow that we can talk about. Tax credits encouraging the move from welfare to work. Getting people off of welfare into the workplace. This is something that would extend work opportunity tax credits. So there are some very, very good things in this bill. Tax relief for America's farmers and ranchers. Death tax relief.

The bill is constructed in such a way that I think, if we can talk logically and fairly, we can find an increase in minimum wage over 3 years, we can provide some relief and incentives for small businesses, and we can go away making a lot of people happy.

Regrettably, though, I hear the word bipartisan used around here a lot. If they would only work in a bipartisan manner, we would solve this issue. But that only assumes that one side agrees

100 percent with the other side's argument. Nowhere can we disagree without being accused of being obstructionists, stalling or doing those types of things. I would suggest to my colleagues that we could in fact work very clearly and quickly on this very, very important issue.

We want to help Americans, but I will also say that 1.2 percent of the American work force is at minimum wage. Those that are on minimum wage are usually just starting their job, or teenagers seeking their first jobs. Yes, I agree, and I said it before, I will vote to increase over 3 years a dollar per hour because I think it is important and it is warranted. But make no mistake about it, those people who are successfully fulfilling their jobs in the workplace are exceeding minimum wage because employers need employees and they will pay in order to retain good qualified workers.

SUNDRY MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sundry messages in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Sherman Williams, one of his secretaries.

LAWSUIT ALLEGES VIOLATION OF EQUAL PAY ACT BY ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

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

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor to report to my colleagues something that I am certain is as much of a piece of embarrassment to them as it is to me, and that is that on February 29 a Federal Court declared a class in a lawsuit against the Architect of the Capitol, our agent, that is to say the Congress of the United States, alleging that there has been a violation of the equal pay act; that we have been paying women less for doing the same work as men.

The women I am talking about are the women who clean the offices of Members, who keep this Capitol clean, and who, in fact, are responsible for the maintenance and cleanliness of the place where we work.

This was the first class action under the Congressional Accountability Act, the new act we passed, in order to hold Members and Congress itself accountable in the same way that we hold others. May I say that it should not have been necessary for this case to go this far. I am a former chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and I have to tell my colleagues that when a case that looks like this is filed before the commission today, and for years now, they simply get settled out before they get this far.

This case not only did not get settled out when it was in our own administrative process, in the Office of Contract

Compliance, but it has now had to be filed in Federal Court against our own Architect of the Capitol. Now they are about to embark on costly interrogatories, which of course comes out of our budget, or the funds that we allocate to the Architect of the Capitol.

This body needs greater oversight of the Architect of the Capitol and of the new Office of Compliance when a suit can get this far. Apparently these people were willing to settle. And when a party is willing to settle, it is usually on the basis that they may not get everything that they want, but what they certainly are entitled to is to have their work reclassified so that they are paid for doing the work they are performing. And, of course, in any such case there would be back pay.

What we are talking about here, to make myself clear, is that laborers who are men make more money for doing the same work as custodians, formerly called charwomen, who are women in the House.

When the President of the United States in his State of the Union message for the last several years has gotten to the part where he talked about equal pay for equal work, all Members rise as if to salute in majesty the women of America. And yet right here, in the House where we work, the first class action certified has been a simple equal-pay case of the kind rarely found in civilian society today. If this case goes much further, it will become an open embarrassment to this body.

As my colleagues are aware, there is no disagreement among us when it comes to the Equal Pay Act, passed in 1963. We all agree that if women are doing the same work as men, they should not be paid less, and in this case perhaps as much as a dollar or more less, by classifying them by some other name. Whether we call her a laborer or a custodian, we must pay her under the act for the work she is doing.

I regret that the case has gone this far. I feel it is my obligation, as a former chair of the EEOC, to bring this matter to the attention of Members. Because I am certain that Members on neither side of the aisle understand or know or have reason to know this case has gone this far, and that when we go home into our districts women are likely to ask us how in the world have we allowed ourselves to be sued by our own employees for not paying them the same wage as men for doing the same work.

It is time that we rectified this situation. If not, I can assure my colleagues, I have spoken with the plaintiffs, I have spoken with their lawyers. There is no turning back now. They are not afraid that it is the Congress of the United States that is involved. After all, we said in passing the Congressional Accountability Act that we wanted to be treated the way civilian employers are treated. Please treat the women who clean our offices the way we would want always to have people treated under our jurisdiction.

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

(Mr. COLLINS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extension of Remarks.)

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

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

TRIBUTE TO THOSE WHO SERVED IN THE KOREAN WAR

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

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, at 22 years old, a young man, a loving husband, with yet an unborn child, was called to serve the United States Government in the Army. He served 21 months active duty, 11 months in Korea. During that time in Korea, his first son was born.

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He served and returned home. Upon his return, he continued being a model citizen, raising seven children. The young man in this story is my father. He is emblematic of all our Nation's heroes who served and then went home.

I voted "yes" commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Korean War to thank my dad and all those dads and granddads in our country who laid down their lives for the cause of freedom.

Well done. We will not forget you, and we will not forget your sacrifice.

HMO REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TANCREDO). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GREEN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank our Democratic leader for allowing us to take the first hour tonight to talk about the Patients' Bill of Rights.

I know that we have been talking about this for many years now it seems like, not only the last Congress but also last year and this year. We actually have a conference committee that is meeting now and had their first meeting. The concern has been expressed. It took that conference committee a good while to meet since it was appointed last year, and the concern was that the conference committee was not reflective of the final vote on the House floor.

But be that as it may, that is the way life is. And so now a number of us are trying to make sure that we continue the effort to have real managed

care reform in this Congress, not next year, because the issues are so important.

American people support the need for real HMO reform. In fact, last year, with the bipartisan support of the Norwood-Dingell Patients' Bill of Rights bill, I think most Americans felt like we were going to see some Federal consumer protections. And yet, what we have seen is a bill passed in the Senate that was much weaker even than current law but that the American people supported.

The Kaiser Family Foundation shows that 58 percent of Americans are very worried and somewhat worried that if they become sick their health care plan will be more concerned about saving money than providing the best treatment.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, a full 80 percent of Americans support comprehensive consumer protections. That is up from 71 percent last year. So the support is building; it is not decreasing.

The Dingell-Norwood bill is so strongly supported by Americans, by moderates in both political parties, because it holds five principles that are so important. A person that buys insurance should get what they pay for, no excuses, no bureaucratic hassles. A lot of people think bureaucracy is just a function of the Federal Government. That is not the case. We can have insurance company bureaucracy that just cause hassles for people.

What we need is an appeals process, independent external appeals, that if an insurance company or HMO company decides that you should not have a certain procedure, then you should be able to go to someone, an outside appeals process, that will work and be swift. Because if it is not swift, then they will just delay the coverage; and health care delayed is health care denied, Mr. Speaker.

In an experience in Texas, and we have had an outside appeals process since 1997, so we have had over 2 years of experience in Texas with an independent appeals process, and frankly a little over half the appeals are being found for the patient.

My constituents in Texas say, well, we would rather have better than a chance of a flip of a coin when somebody is making a decision on our health care. So we need to have an independent external reviews process that is timely.

And again, the Texas experience shows that it is not that costly. In fact, it has actually cut down on lawsuits; and I will talk about that later. But it is being found in favor of the patient over half the time. And that is what is important, the people are getting their health care that they deserve quickly.

The second issue is that we need to eliminate gag clauses from insurance policies, that physicians can communicate openly and freely with their patients. A lot of companies are already doing that. And that is great. I want to