

It used to be in this country since World War II that when productivity went up, workers' wages went up roughly the same amount. And this is the key, that workers shared in the wealth they created for their employers. So productivity jumped up 90 percent, wages went up only 10 percent, profits skyrocketed for employers. Workers have not shared in the wealth they create.

An August census report revealed around the same time as Hurricane Katrina that in the United States the number of uninsured Americans has increased dramatically as has the number of families living below the poverty line; 1.1 million Americans dropped into poverty in 2004 alone, 2 million more Americans enrolled in Medicaid that year. Yet in the face of growing poverty and the rising number of uninsured Americans, this administration and Republican leadership are demanding that we cut \$10 billion, that is billion with a B, \$10 billion from Medicaid.

Think about that again. More and more people need Medicaid, not just because of Katrina but because of layoffs, because of plants closings like Michigan, in my State of Ohio, other places, because more and more employers are dropping their coverage. The congressional response is cutting Medicaid by \$10 billion so that the President and Republican leadership can give tax cuts to the wealthiest 1 percent of people in this country.

Think about that. That is a choice. We give tax cuts to the wealthy, more tax cuts to the wealthiest 1 percent. The way to pay for it is to cut Medicaid by \$10 billion. That is a choice that politicians and elected officials made. Give tax cuts to the wealthiest people. Cut programs like Medicaid that really matter for people who have lost their jobs, for the working poor, for people that have suffered from Katrina, for all the reasons that people have been down on their luck.

Household incomes fell for the fourth year in a row in 2004, something that has not happened since the Depression. In every segment of the American society except for the very wealthy, every segment has seen income decline in the last 5 years. America's men and women working full-time, the recent productivity is up; but they are not sharing in the wealth they create.

The number of people living in poverty increased by 1.1 million people. The infant mortality rate in this country is rising. The infant mortality rate in Washington, DC, is twice the infant mortality rate in Beijing. The infant mortality rate in this country went up last year for the first time since 1958. Our Nation cannot survive as a thriving democracy under policies that rely on trickle down economic theories.

Now, 2 weeks ago President Bush signed an executive order that will allow companies that win Federal no-bid contracts, Halliburton, Bechtel, some of the other friends of the Presi-

dent's and the Vice-President's, his executive order will allow those companies to pay less than the prevailing wage. We give them unbid contracts and huge profits, as they have had in Iraq. They will have these huge contracts in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama; and yet they are exempt from paying the prevailing wage.

When government should be in its most proactive to ensure the return of a thriving economy, this administration is actively working to lower wages. The community hit hardest by Katrina is the working poor. These men and women will literally do the heavy lifting and the rebuilding of Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi. Yet the President is saying, Cut their wages.

Cheating workers out of fair wages robs them of the ability to take ownership in their community. The goal should be to put wealth in those communities from people that are working and rebuilding those communities. One must ask why the President would depress wages for a community in crisis. Cutting wages for people who are struggling to rebuild their lives is a betrayal of American values. The President of the United States should know better.

PLEDGE POLICE

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

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Mr. Speaker, this simple, powerful statement is a patriotic phrase defining what we are all about as citizens of this Republic. It is being said in school yards across America every day. In some States it is the State law that it be said. In Texas, for example, it is required along with the Texas State pledge and a moment of silence each day. This is observed by students and by teachers. But not every school child may say it. In fact, some are actually forbidden to say it because it mentions, heaven forbid, under God.

A member of the pledge police, a Federal judge in California, has issued his decree denouncing the pledge and forbidding it in some school districts in California because some adult atheist has become offended. The atheist, mind you, is not a student in any school, just an offended individual that has convinced the pledge police to stop the pledge from being uttered in schools because he is offended.

It has become the habit of the offended to use the Federal courts to change the majority will of the people, claiming the conduct of the majority of Americans is unconstitutional because it is offensive.

Okay, Mr. Speaker, what constitutional violation has occurred here?

Some claim the first amendment is violated by kids saying the pledge because of the theological phrase "under God." Let us examine this.

The first amendment reads in part: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

First of all, assume the pledge establishes religion. Congress has not made any law about the pledge, but our Federal courts have taken the word "Congress," reinterpreted that phrase, and applied it universally to all governments, including school boards. By what authority do Federal courts expand the word "Congress" to include all government entities?

Well, because they make words mean something more than they really mean by twisting simple concepts in the Constitution to mean difficult concepts for us people to understand. It is also necessary to understand that our Forefathers put the phrase in the Constitution to prevent a State and national religion like what was occurring in England at the time.

So are the atheists and the pledge police Federal judges seriously really thinking that the phrase "under God" is equivalent to establishing a national religion in the United States?

Well, my question for them is, what exactly would that religion be? Too bad the court did not enlighten us simple Americans what national religion the pledge establishes. But our Federal judges here have systematically tried to remove any mention of a divine being in the public sector by claiming any mention of God establishes a national religion. This defies common sense and makes the first amendment say something it does not say.

By the way, if this phrase is purely a religious one, why does the pledge police judge not read the second half of the first amendment that says, the government may not prevent the free exercise of religion? By banning the pledge if it is religious, does not this judge violate the free exercise of religion? That phrase is in our first amendment as well. It does seem so to me.

The pledge, when stated and looked at objectively, is a statement of patriotic duty and affirmation to America, to truth and liberty and justice. It is not purely a religious statement. It is a statement of civic duty and responsibility and national pride.

So what is next, Mr. Speaker? Are the pledge police going to ban the pledge we say each day here in the House of Representative? We shall see about that.

The real issue here is not the forbidding of the Pledge of Allegiance by our courts. It is more serious than that. It is the new constitutional right that is being invented and conceived in the minds of the far-fetched Federal elites that is not even in the Constitution at all, but the Constitution is being used as excuse to invent this new right. It is the right not to be offended.

If I am offended by what you say or do or by what the government says or does, I can go to court and sue you because I am offended. This atheist was offended by a bunch of school kids, by their mere utterance of the Pledge of Allegiance. So he goes and sues and convinces a judge to protect his right not to be offended. So no more offended words, so no more pledge. This is an example of the new phantom constitutional right of freedom from being offended.

Mr. Speaker, I was a felony court trial judge in Houston for over 20 years. I heard thousands of cases. All of those were based on the United States Constitution. But the last time I checked in the Constitution, freedom from hurting someone's feelings was not included in the Constitution. So in truth this is the right that was allegedly violated by those kids in California. They offended someone, they hurt someone's feelings, and now they have to stop.

This is a dangerous movement, but this mysterious right is not in the Constitution. But the right of free speech, Mr. Speaker, is in the Constitution. And I say to those kids in California, your right of free speech was violated by the pledge policeman when he issued his pronouncement against you mentioning "under God."

So now you may proudly say the pledge each morning in a closet or in silence, and when you get to that phrase "with liberty and justice for all," just remember you lost some of your liberty by this ruling, and it certainly is not justice for all but only for those who are offended. Mr. Speaker, this ought not to be.

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IRAQ HEARING

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FORTENBERRY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, September 15, we held an informal congressional hearing to discuss and explore a military withdrawal from Iraq. It was called "The Bipartisan Congressional Forum on How to Bring the Troops Home." It was the first of its kind and it was about time.

I had hoped that the House Committee on Armed Services or the House Committee on International Relations would have taken up the matter, but repeated calls for such hearings have fallen on deaf ears. So, with the help of my colleagues and with many others and also my wonderful staff, we went about putting together this very needed hearing.

In so doing, we knew absolutely that opposition to the war is a stance that is firmly in the political mainstream. Less than 40 percent of Americans, according to the recent polls, approve of the President's handling of Iraq, and

roughly half want to see our troops come home as soon as possible. With this being an American sentiment comes responsibility to be more than a protest movement.

We also knew that we needed to offer sound, thorough policy proposals that could turn our deeply held convictions into operational reality, and that is what Thursday's hearing was all about. This was not an opportunity for placard waving, though there is certainly a time and a place for that. We were more interested in how to bring our troops home, rather than why.

We heard from a broad range of experts, from scholars and military strategists. We heard from Senator Max Cleland from Georgia.

We started with an overview of the situation on the ground, including a perspective on the lives of Iraqis under U.S. occupation. Later, we heard about specific ways that we can pivot away from the current policies, ending our military presence in Iraq and bringing our troops home. From there, we transitioned into a discussion of what next. I have always insisted that ending the war does not and cannot mean abandoning Iraq and its people.

Believing in the principle underlying Colin Powell's "Pottery Barn Rule," and that even if it was the Bush administration policy that broke it, at the very least we must play a constructive role in the rebuilding of Iraq.

Most of all, Thursday's hearing was designed to inspire a long overdue national conversation about alternatives to the current Iraq policy.

Our goal was to fill the policy vacuum and break the silence on Capitol Hill where, frankly, Members of Congress have been slow to embrace the fresh thinking and new approaches to Iraq that their constituents are eager to discuss and are eager to hear. For too long, for a number of reasons, this debate has been ceded to the Bush administration, even as they have produced a bloody and ruinous debacle.

Thursday's hearing demonstrated that we want to do more than just say no to the war in Iraq. We want to say yes to a new, intelligent, progressive, peaceful Iraq policy that will both protect the American people and fulfill our obligations to the Iraqi people. Chief among these obligations is to ensure that the United States does not maintain a long-term military presence in Iraq. That means no permanent bases and no control over Iraqi oil.

From our witnesses, it was clear: We need to engage in an open and robust dialogue, both at home and in Iraq. They agreed that multiparty peace talks are the best way to convince all factions of Iraqis that we are serious about allowing them to dictate their country and rebuild it, and, most important of all, the need for a commitment to bring the U.S. troops home. The truth is that our military presence in Iraq is contributing to the chaos there, not alleviating it. By bringing our troops home, we can save both

American and Iraqi lives and we can reunite thousands of American families in the process.

Mr. Speaker, my hope is that last week's hearing will serve as a catalyst for elected officials, for think-tanks and others around the country to join in a dialogue about military disengagement from Iraq, that the hearing will start a discussion that has been long, long overdue. The time for action in Iraq is now. So let us start taking action.

UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

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

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share one of the many stories of human compassion and generosity that have emerged in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Organizations across the 11th District of Georgia are working hard to assist Katrina's victims, and the State University of West Georgia in Carrollton is a shining example. As evacuees from the gulf coast began making their way north into our State, the University of West Georgia community realized these victims needed shelter, food, and support immediately.

So the university arranged to house 180 evacuees, including 80 children, in Roberts Hall, an empty dorm in the middle of campus. Dormitory living is now providing these families with the privacy and security they need to begin piecing their lives back together.

But the State University of West Georgia did not just house these evacuees. The community understood that shelter was only the first step to helping these victims get back on their feet. So the university and Carroll County community mobilized all their resources to assist their adopted residents.

The health services staff and nursing department faculty worked to provide the victims with health care services. The university opened its computer labs, and volunteers helped victims locate family members and find relief resources. The community came together to provide food, clothing, personal necessities, and home items for their guests, and local organizations are helping many of these victims find work in the area.

Mr. Speaker, it would have been more than enough for the University of West Georgia and Carroll County residents to house, feed and clothe these victims, but this generous community wanted to do more. They wanted to help these victims get their lives back together and start them on the path to recovery.

So the Carrollton public school system quickly registered children so they would not fall behind in their education. Because a college dormitory is only a temporary living situation, the Carroll County Housing Authority is