

an election just by entering the signal space of a voting machine. Since no action has been taken by the Federal Government to prevent any of these abuses, we can expect more of the same.

And speaking of voting machines, the allocation of those machines is also done to manipulate the outcome. Who wants to wait 5 hours in line in the rain to vote? Thousands of voters in Ohio had to do that and it just so happened that they were black. Scholars and researchers have done the math. Voting machines were allocated not by the number of registered voters by precinct, but by some other calculation. How could majority black precincts in Columbus, OH have 3, 4, or 5 machines and have over 1,000 voters in their precincts, and mostly Republican precincts in say, Dublin, OH had the same number of machines for one third the number of voters?

This pattern of devaluing and marginalizing the black vote was seen again in the recent Mayoral election in New Orleans. Here it was not Republicans, but a conservative Democratic Governor who blocked efforts to provide electronic polling stations to enable hundreds of thousands of mostly Black Katrina survivors the chance to vote. It was among the largest instance of African-American voter disfranchisement since the enactment of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

Since no action has been taken by the Federal Government to prevent any of these abuses, we can expect more of the same. In addition, in the coming Fall election we will see the introduction of electronic poll-books, which are untested and non-transparent. Governor Ehrlich of Maryland, a Republican, has deemed this new addition to the voting experience to be unreliable.

So, Mr. Speaker, who cares? We care. And that is why we need a Voting Rights Act. Not to tarry in the days of the past, but to protect us from encroachments on the right to vote that occur today and that might be tried tomorrow.

□ 2300

RESTORING ACCOUNTABILITY

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

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the 37-Member strong, fiscally conservative, Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, I rise this evening to talk about a very important principle, and that is restoring accountability within our government.

Under the United States Constitution, Congress has an obligation to provide congressional oversight of the executive branch. Congressional oversight prevents waste and fraud, ensures executive compliance with the law, and evaluates executive performance. However, under the current leadership, Congress has abandoned this responsibility by failing to conduct meaningful investigations of allegations of serious waste, fraud, abuse and mismanagement of taxpayer dollars.

By failing to serve as a check and balance for overspending, waste, fraud and financial abuse within the executive branch, this Republican-led Congress has failed the American taxpayer.

This President, this administration, and this Republican-led Congress must be held accountable for our massive Federal debt. American taxpayers deserve to know how their money is being spent.

In 2004, \$25 billion of Federal Government spending went absolutely unaccounted for, according to the Treasury Department. The Bush administration was unable to determine where the money had gone, how it was spent, or what the American people got for their tax money. Even worse, the Republican-controlled Congress failed to hold the executive branch accountable for this omission.

Then, in 2005, the Government Accountability Office reported that 19 of 24 Federal agencies were not in compliance with all Federal accounting audit standards and could not fully explain how they had spent taxpayer money appropriated by this Republican-led Congress. Yet, Republican leaders in Congress did not force these agencies to fully account for how the money was being spent before doling out billions more of taxpayer dollars to the same programs.

FEMA continues to store over 9,000 mobile homes, as you can see here, in a pasture in Hope, Arkansas, while victims of Hurricane Katrina remain homeless. FEMA's response has been, well, we will make sure the manufactured homes do not sink; we will spend \$4 million laying gravel in this pasture. It is time FEMA was held accountable. It is time FEMA got these brand new, fully furnished, 14-foot-wide, 60-foot-long mobile homes to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

American taxpayers deserve answers as to why their children and grandchildren have to foot the bill for the fiscal mismanagement of this administration. The time has come that this administration is held accountable for its reckless behavior. Congress must act now to renew its constitutional responsibility to serve as a check and balance for overspending, waste, fraud and financial abuse within the executive branch.

That is why the Blue Dog Coalition is sponsoring legislation that would require Congress to renew its duty to conduct hearings on spending and hold the administration officials accountable.

One of the founders of the Blue Dog Coalition, Mr. TANNER of Tennessee, has introduced H. Res. 841. Among other things, it would require congressional hearings within 60 days of Inspector General reports that identify waste, fraud, abuse or mismanagement of more than \$1 million.

It would require congressional hearings when the Government Accountability Office names an agency "high risk" for mismanagement.

It would require congressional hearings when an agency's auditors issue disclaimers or corrections, indicating accounting information is inaccurate or incomplete.

It would require congressional hearings at least twice a year to review the Office of Management and Budget's performance-based review program.

Mr. Speaker, wasteful government spending must stop, and that is why it is time to restore some commonsense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's government. It is time to restore accountability to our Nation's government.

OUR UNITY

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

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, in 2 weeks, we will be observing the 230th anniversary of our Declaration of Independence, and I think it was on June 21, in 1788, that the State of New Hampshire was actually the ninth State to ratify the Constitution of the United States.

When the United States was founded, there was a search for a national motto, and the first motto of our country, *e pluribus unum*, Latin, translates to, out of many, we are one.

The very words, United States, speaks to the unity, not just of colonies and then States, but really speaks to a deeper meaning of human unity. Out of many, we are one. It is not simply unity in this country. It is the unity of people all over the world.

This year, in our 230th year since we declared our independence, we find ourselves gripped by a type of thinking which separates us from the rest of humanity, which causes the United States to be locked into dichotomized thinking of us versus them, whoever they are.

With that comes a very heavy price. It comes a separation which has led us to war. It comes a separation that has separated us from the ambitions of people all over the world who are hoping for a rising standard of living through having guarantees for workers rights, human rights, environmental quality principles, which they had hoped that the United States would stand for.

We separate ourselves from human unity by not participating in a wide range of international agreements, and yet we are the United States. Our very name speaks to unity.

How then can we find ourselves again as a Nation? How can we come to reconnect with the deeper meaning of who we are? How can we step away from this experience which since 9/11 has taken us into a blind alley?

If there was ever a time when this country needed a period of truth and reconciliation, this is it. We find so many of our fellow countrymen and women still believe that Iraq had something to do with 9/11. It did not. But at

a time when 9/11 gave us an opportunity to start a whole new national discussion about who we are and how we can reconnect with the world, decisions were made which further separated us. We went down a blind alley, and in that blind alley we remain, unaware of the truth behind 9/11, not with respect to who did it, but with respect to what is our role in the world, what is America's position in the world.

This, the 230th year of our experience of declaring independence, is a perfect time for us to recommit ourselves to perhaps call for a declaration of interdependence, accompanied by a vision which sees the world as one, which sees the world as being interconnected and interdependent, which understands that when we build nuclear weapons, we, the United States, threaten the world; that we have a responsibility to lead with nuclear non-proliferation; that we have the responsibility to lead with the biological weapons convention, fully participating in that, and the chemical weapons convention and the small arms treaty and the land mine treaty, to join the International Criminal Court, to sign the Kyoto climate change treaty, to truly participate the entire world.

We are independent, but we are also interdependent, and there is no paradox there. It is a fact that both of those modalities can and must exist simultaneously in order for our Nation to be healthy, in order for us to grow.

□ 2310

Mr. Speaker, although I didn't really agree with many of his policies, one of the President's I admired the most was Ronald Reagan, because I saw him as being connected to the optimistic nature of America. One of the casualties of 9/11 has been our optimism, our courage.

This Nation has the capacity to be much more than it is today, and whether we are Democrats or Republicans, we need to try to search for a deeper meaning of who we are. We need to reach for a deeper meaning of who we are in the world and we need to confirm that our purpose is human unity, not just the unity of 50 States.

MINIMUM WAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for half the time remaining before midnight.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. So I have 25 minutes; is that correct?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Yes.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I would say to those who are going to speak to be aware of that so others get a chance to speak.

I yield to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER).

Mr. HOYER. Thank you very much. The hour is late and the time is limited. Mr. Speaker, I rise, however, to

briefly urge my colleagues to take action on raising the minimum wage. This is an action of fairness. It is the right thing to do. It is an issue of values. The American people believe it is the right thing to do. Eighty-six percent of them have said we ought to raise the minimum wage.

This issue clearly illustrates the different priorities, it seems to me, between the Democratic and Republican sides of the aisle. We Democrats have been trying to get this issue on the floor for years now.

Let us look at the facts, Mr. Speaker. Democrats have been fighting to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour over 2 years. Today, if the minimum wage were at the rate it was in 1968, we would be paying \$9.05. We are not getting there, but we ought to do better than we have done.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Republican side of the aisle is fighting us tooth and nail while attempting this week to bring up legislation once again that gives the heirs of the wealthiest families in America a break on the estates tax and drive our Nation even deeper into debt. That is right, while the working people struggle to make ends meet, doing what we expect them to do, this Congress is rushing an estate tax bill, what I call the "Paris Hilton Tax Relief Act," to the floor.

Of course, as usual, the bill is not paid for and continues the majority's fiscal irresponsibility and will increase our costs of borrowing by \$280 billion over the next 10 years. We are borrowing because we have no money to give a tax cut, so we are going to have to borrow it from other nations.

Last week, in the Appropriations Committee, I offered an amendment to the fiscal year 2007 labor-health bill. That amendment passed, raising the minimum wage 70 cents on each of the next Januarys, 2007, 2008 and 2009, bringing to \$7.25 the minimum wage. Seven Republicans, Mr. Speaker, on the committee voted for that bill, several of whom have tough races. So they were listening very carefully to their people at home; and their people, again by overwhelming majorities, say this is the fair and right thing to do.

We thought we were going to consider that labor-health bill this week. It was announced it would be on the floor this week, but it was pulled. I am not sure exactly of all the reasons, but in part surely it was pulled because there was a question about the rule.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, when that bill comes to the floor, the rule vote will be a minimum-wage vote. And if you think that the minimum wage ought to be increased, if you think working Americans ought to be given a wage that gets them out of poverty, if you think that somebody who works in America ought to be able to support at least themselves, then you will vote against the rule, unless it gives a waiver for this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. MILLER and I, and the others who will speak on this floor,

believe very strongly that in an America that honors work and in an America, the richest Nation on the face of the Earth, that is an example for the rest of the world, we ought to make sure that those who work, those who get up in the morning and work hard, play by the rules, as Bill Clinton used to say, ought to get a decent, fair wage.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that when this bill comes forward that every Member of this House will vote for a rule that ensures an up-or-down vote on raising the minimum wage in America for all our workers who work at that level. There are 6.6 million people, Mr. Speaker, 6.6 million Americans trying to support themselves and participating in helping to support their children and their families. It is the right thing to do.

Over 86 percent of Americans think it is the right thing to do and the House of Representatives ought to do the right thing.

And, five of those seven Republicans who voted with Democrats last week flip-flopped. The other two failed to vote.

And, the amendment failed.

Mr. Speaker, the failure of this Congress to act on the minimum wage is a national embarrassment.

It has been 9 years since we last raised the Federal minimum wage—the second longest period without an increase since a minimum wage was first enacted.

Today, the minimum wage is at its lowest level in 50 years, when adjusted for inflation.

Had the minimum wage been indexed for inflation since 1968, it would be \$9.05 an hour today—not \$5.15.

People who work full-time in the United States of America—the richest nation on earth—should not be poor.

But in 2003 there were 3.7 million workers who worked full-time, year-round, and still lived in poverty.

And, let's disabuse ourselves of this notion that "no one" really makes the minimum wage any more.

Not true.

In fact, a minimum wage increase would directly benefit 6.6 million low-wage workers—most of whom are adults who work to support themselves and their families.

An increase would specifically benefit 760,000 single mothers who toil day in and day out, sometimes at 2 or 3 jobs to provide just the basic necessities for themselves and their children.

Let's also dispense with the Republicans' favorite argument—that raising the minimum wage will somehow cost us jobs.

Again, not true.

We know that this argument is false because 20 States and the District of Columbia have raised their minimum wage above the federal rate.

And, a study conducted by the Center for American Progress and Policy Matters Ohio shows the following:

Employment in small businesses grew more (9.4 percent) in states with higher minimum wages than Federal minimum wage states (6.6 percent).

And, inflation-adjusted small business payroll growth was stronger in high minimum