

how we are going to handle the policy of our armed services.

Today, instead of pulling this bill for gun liability or some other extraneous issue, they are doing it with filibustering. They have more votes than we have. They control what happens on the floor most of the time, and they are not letting us vote on this amendment. The majority doesn't want to embarrass the White House, so they are content to sit on their hands and have the Iraqi Government over there talking about granting amnesty to those who kill Americans.

The President said he looked Prime Minister al-Maliki in the eye and said he is OK, "I looked him in the eye." Well, I hope he saw in that eye the fact that this man was willing to grant amnesty to Iraqis who killed Americans. It is not an eye that I think the American people think is appropriate—amnesty for the killers of American troops. But it appears that the majority is willing to do this even if it jeopardizes our soldiers serving in Iraq by giving terrorists who want to attack them a get-out-of-jail-free card.

We can do a lot better than that. Let's put the excuses aside and do the right thing before another day passes. Let's join together and pass this amendment.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business for 30 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee and the second half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, under morning business, are the Democrats recognized at this moment?

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Yes. The Democrats have the first 15 minutes, with 14½ minutes remaining.

MINIMUM WAGE AMENDMENT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, later this week, we are going to debate the Department of Defense authorization bill. It is a very important bill. It also is one of the few times during the course of the year where we actually have a chance to offer amendments on very important issues. Most bills that come to the floor are fairly restrictive in terms of the procedures of the Senate. They limit what you can say and what you can address and the amendments that can be offered.

On this authorization bill, in the words of the Senate, precloture you can offer quite a few different amendments, and many will address issues that don't relate directly to the Department of Defense. There is one Senator KENNEDY will bring to the floor this week that he has been offering repeatedly and one that we should take up very quickly; that is, the question of the minimum wage in America today.

Senator KENNEDY's amendment would raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour in three steps over a period of several years—\$5.85 shortly after enactment, \$6.55 a year later, and then \$7.25 a year after that. Increasing the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour would benefit 6½ million Americans, 60 percent of whom are women. These are people by and large who are in very low-paying jobs and are trying to raise children, trying to make ends meet under extremely difficult circumstances.

The current minimum wage was enacted in 1997 at \$5.15 an hour, which is barely \$10,000 a year in gross wages, total wages. I cannot imagine a family struggling to survive that could make it on \$10,000 a year. As a result, many people are forced to work more than one job in minimum wage. Many are forced to turn to pantries and soup kitchens to supplement the income for their families. Imagine, if you will, the stress most Americans feel working 40 hours a week, trying to keep up with their kids and trying to spend a little time with them, enjoying life with them on weekends, and then make that 40-hour week a 60-hour week and figure out how it would be, particularly if you are a single parent doing your level best to raise a good child.

As this Congress has ignored the minimum wage for 9 years, we have said to these struggling families and parents: We are going to make the burden more difficult for you. Even though you get up every morning and go to work, which we applaud, we are not going to reward you for that. We are going to make it more difficult for you to keep your family together.

Since Congress last increased the minimum wage in 1997 to \$5.15 an hour, the real value of that wage has gone down 20 percent, which basically means the cost of living keeps going up while the minimum wage has been stuck at \$5.15. Minimum wage workers have already lost all of the gains that were enacted in 1996 and 1997, when we last raised the minimum wage. It is amazing to me that the minimum wage has become a partisan football in the Congress. There was a time when Republican Presidents would waste no time increasing the minimum wage, and Republican Congresses would follow suit, understanding that this is very basic to the question of economic justice in America; that if the poorest among us don't receive enough money for going to work, it causes extreme hardship on them.

The minimum wage, once created by President Roosevelt, has been each

year, through each administration, extended. Now for 9 years we have done nothing, leaving the minimum wage workers in very difficult circumstances. If we pass Senator KENNEDY's amendment—and I hope we do—to raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour, it will mean \$4,400 more a year for these families. That is significant. When you look at the average low-income family, they would be able to buy 15 months' worth of groceries; pay 19 months of utility bills, which have gone up dramatically since we last raised the minimum wage; pay 8 months of rent; over 2 years of health care for the basic low-income family; 20 months of childcare; 30 months of college tuition at a public 2-year college.

Think about that difference. A low-income mother, a single mother, raising children now might be able to afford good daycare for her children so she has peace of mind when she goes to work, knowing the kids are in safe hands. I have visited with families, and if they are not lucky enough to have a mother or a grandmother who will step in, some try to find a neighbor who will, and that is not always the best care. That has to be a source of great concern to every parent facing that possibility.

I believe there is a direct correlation between the failure to raise the minimum wage and a dramatic increase in the number of Americans living in poverty.

We used to talk about this issue. This used to be an issue which was debated on the floor of the Congress, about how many people were poor in America. We believed—and still do—that this great land of opportunity should offer opportunity to the poorest among us. Yet what we have seen is that the number of poor people has been growing dramatically over the last several years, while those who are well off are even better off. So the poor are truly poorer, and the rich are getting richer.

If you look at America as a system of laws that reflect an American family, how can we afford to leave people behind? I don't think we can. Thirty-seven million Americans currently live in poverty. That is more than 10 percent of America. Thirteen million of those are children. Among full-time, year-round workers, poverty has increased by 50 percent since the late 1970s. There was a time when we cared about those numbers. There was a time when President Reagan suggested changing the Tax Code to put in an earned-income tax credit to give the poorest families a helping hand. Of course, we created programs such as food stamps, WIC, and other programs for those low-income categories. There was a time when both political parties cared about the issue of poverty. Today, we don't discuss it. I don't know why. I believe we should.

Minimum wage employees working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earn \$10,700 a year. That is \$6,000 below the

Federal poverty guideline of \$16,600 for a family of three. We should be ashamed of our Nation that we have reached this point where we ignore what we are doing to people because of this minimum wage.

Let me add that I salute our Governor in Illinois who, through the State legislation, increased Illinois' minimum wage so that we pay more to workers. But clearly we need to do this across the Nation and not leave it to the leadership of Governors. We should show leadership in Congress.

Raising the minimum wage is going to help the economy, too. A lot of people argue otherwise. Whether it be raising the Federal or State minimum wage, history shows that it doesn't have a negative impact on the economy. That is the argument which has been used against the minimum wage since Roosevelt first created it; that if you raise the minimum wage to \$1 an hour—or whatever it happened to be in the earliest days of the history of this legislation—somehow jobs would be eliminated because people would say that rather than pay a dollar an hour, they will hire fewer employees. That is always the argument, and that argument fails every time when we look at the impact of an increase in the minimum wage.

In the 4 years after the last Federal minimum wage increase passed in Congress, the economy experienced its strongest growth in over 30 years. Nearly 12 million new jobs were added in the late 1990s—almost a quarter of a million a month. So as we raised the minimum wage, the number of jobs didn't shrink, it dramatically increased—exactly the opposite of what the critics of increasing the minimum wage have argued for 60 years or more.

The last raise in the minimum wage did not have a negative impact on my State's economy when the State of Illinois sought a minimum wage increase. The fact is, in the 4 years after Congress passed the last Federal increase, Illinois experienced great economic growth. Over 350,000 new jobs were added to the State's economy. Even the retail industry, which is often cited as the industry most sensitive to the minimum wage, saw over 44,000 new jobs created in Illinois 4 years after the increase in the Federal minimum wage.

Research shows that other States experienced similar impacts.

A study by the Fiscal Policy Institute of 10 States that raised the minimum wage above the Federal rate found that both total employment and employment in the retail sector grew more rapidly in higher minimum wage States.

And for small businesses with fewer than 50 employees, the number of businesses, employment, and the size of the total payroll grew faster in higher minimum wage States than in States where the lower minimum wage prevailed, exactly the opposite of what critics say if you raise the minimum wage: you are going to hurt the retail

sector; they are going to have to shut down their businesses. Exactly the opposite has happened time and again.

The minimum wage needs to be updated. In contrast to the first 4 years after the Federal minimum wage took effect and created jobs, in the last 4 years under the Bush administration the minimum wage has held steady while its real value has steadily declined, and only 4.7 million jobs have been created.

It is one thing for politicians to give lofty speeches about values and family values. It is another thing to look at the rollover on the minimum wage and ask those same Members who are pontificating about the guidance—the divine guidance—that brings them to this Chamber and then systematically voting against the poorest among us. That, to me, is a shame and something we should remedy by adopting the Kennedy amendment.

We force a lot of hard-working Americans and their families to work longer hours, work harder to pay for the necessities. That is time away from their children, time away from just a little relaxation so they can put their lives together and face another hard week of work.

In Illinois, a worker earning the minimum wage has to work 95 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom apartment. Mr. President, 11.9 percent of Illinois residents live in poverty, and an unacceptably low minimum wage is part of the problem.

Over 20 States, including Illinois, have taken upon themselves to raise the minimum wage and give an economic boost to their citizens. After the State of Illinois raised the minimum wage in January of 2005 to \$6.50, Illinois nonfarm employment increased by 79,800 jobs. It didn't go down in Illinois after the minimum wage went up. It increased.

Since the State raised the minimum wage, Illinois has ranked No. 1 among all Midwest States in the total number of new jobs.

Illinois employers have created 30,000 new jobs in the traditionally lower paying, higher proportion minimum wage industry sectors of leisure, hospitality, and trade.

The minimum wage amendment we are debating today would give a raise to 333,000 workers in Illinois.

It has been more than 9 years since the minimum wage workers last saw an increase in their wages. It is a delicate subject and one that Members of Congress do not want to discuss, but I think we have to be very honest about it. While we have consistently, year after year, denied an increase in the minimum wage to the poorest, hardest working Americans, we have every year without fail increased congressional pay. Our salaries have gone up while we have ignored the plight of the poorest among us.

During the 9 years that Congress has raised its own pay by \$31,600, we have not increased the minimum wage for

the poorest workers in America. It isn't fair.

How can we continue to turn a blind eye to these people who get up and work hard every day? Who are they? They are the people who took the dishes off your table at the restaurant this morning. They are the ones who made the bed at the hotel after you left. They are the ones who are watching your kids at the day-care center. They are the same ones who are watching your parents at the nursing home. They are the ones who are making sure your golf course is perfect when you go out to play golf. And they are the ones who get up every single day and do these hard jobs for very little pay.

Why in the world are we sitting here ignoring the obvious? If you value families and you value workers, you should value work. To hold the minimum wage at \$5.15 an hour for 9 years is shameful, and it should change.

I urge my colleagues to support the amendment that is going to be offered by Senator KENNEDY. I am happy to be a cosponsor of that amendment.

Mr. President, how much time is remaining on the Democratic side in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DEMINT). There is 1 minute remaining.

IRAQ

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, later this week as part of the debate on the Defense authorization bill, we will talk about Iraq. That a timely issue. As of last week, there have been 2,500 soldiers' lives lost in Iraq since the beginning of this conflict. What was promised to the American people to be a rather uncomplicated effort by America to rid Iraq of a dictator has turned out to be a war that has gone on for 3 years with no end in sight.

This week the Senate will have a chance to say to the Iraqi people that as of the middle of next year, this becomes your responsibility. We will give you 12 months and more American lives and more American dollars and then, Iraq, you have to stand up and defend yourself. If you believe in the future of your Nation, it has to go beyond an election, go beyond political debate. It has to reach the point where Iraqi citizens are prepared to stand, defend, and die, if necessary, for their own country.

There are 130,000 American lives on the line today and every day. We have to serve notice on the Iraqis that their future has to be in their hands.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be recognized for 7 minutes in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

IRAQ

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I heard the distinguished deputy minority