

gas, those things they pick up on the way home to eat that fuels our restaurants.

If you want to have good balance and growth in the economy, if you want Americans to be at work, if you want this country to prosper, this is a piece of it. This is a piece to make sure Americans have health care coverage. I am confident this is not the last time we are going to have this debate this year. We will have a debate, and it will actually be considered germane. I have wondered for the time I sat and listened to the majority leader, what will be the excuse then? Maybe it is because it wasn't their idea. Maybe it is because they would like to wrap it into something bigger.

Well, as I said, 13 years after I have worked on health care—and I see my colleague from Iowa and I know he wants to speak, and I will wrap up, and I don't know anybody who has devoted much more to health care than he has. This is a real opportunity, Mr. President. It is an opportunity for the Senate to actually do something on health care versus sitting on the floor and talking about it. As it stands right now, this opportunity for minimum wage workers in America will not happen because the Senate will be denied the opportunity to vote as to whether they would like this to be part of the plan. Again, I am sure it is difficult for America to believe that this is not germane to the minimum wage bill, as it was to me. But I am not here to battle the interpretation of the Parliamentarian; I am here to suggest to you that one of the reasons we are here is we are supposed to do what is right. We are supposed to pay attention to what is going on across the country, and we are supposed to do what is right to fix it.

I ask you to think that I am doing something right today. I could walk away having a vote where I didn't win. But not getting the opportunity to have a vote cheats America out of the opportunity to begin to turn around our health care system. I hope that between now and Tuesday with the cloture vote, Members on both sides of the aisle will have an opportunity to look at this vote and to encourage the majority leader to allow us to have a vote and, if not, to encourage him to vitiate the cloture vote and allow us to talk some more.

This is important. We ought to spend time talking about major policy shifts. For the 10 years I spent in the House of Representatives, I dreamed of the fact that I could come to this floor, with the tremendous thought and debate that goes into the work here—I am not going to tell you I am disillusioned, but I can tell you this: To take something of this importance and to suggest we are not going to vote on it, or to suggest that when we are talking about ways we can improve a bill, we haven't got time to sit and debate this, that is not the Senate I envisioned before I got here.

That is not the deliberative process, the open and balanced and thoughtful Senate I used to see from the other end of the Capitol. It is my hope that, as we move forward, we will be allowed the opportunity to debate this more. Hopefully, we will be allowed to vote up or down on it. As I said, if I lose, I will save the debate for another day and another bill. We are going to have an opportunity to debate health care, I know. We are going to find more things to agree on than we disagree on. I never envisioned the Senate saying that because this is a tough vote we are not going to take it.

This vote is not near as tough as the fact that 14 million Americans, who are, in all likelihood, minimum wage workers, could have the option of health care if we did this and are not going to have health care if we don't vote. That is not silly, and it is not a delaying tactic; it is policy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WEBB). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I thank my friend from North Carolina for his timely speech. He knows what I mean by that. I didn't hear all of his remarks, but I did catch the tail end of them, and I think I get the import of his remarks, which is basically that we need to do something about health care in America. We need to debate it, discuss it, vote on it. But to the extent somehow some kind of blame is being laid at the step of those of us on this side of the aisle—after all, we just took over the Senate about 3 weeks ago—I remind my friend from North Carolina that his party has been in charge for the last several years, and they have had the White House. We haven't seen anything come from the White House, nor have we seen anything come out of the Congress to deal with this over the last several years.

Be that as it may, I say to my friend from North Carolina, the President put forward a proposal in his State of the Union Message. We will see what the budget looks like when it comes down next week. I join with him. I hope we will have a good debate and discussion. It is the most important issue we have confronting our society today. But it is not just, I say to my friend from North Carolina, the issue of how we pay the bills and how we pay for people who get sick. The issue is preventive medicine. How do we make prevention pay? How do we make prevention the incentive? How do we incentivize prevention?

I noticed a full-page ad in the Washington Post this week and also in the New York Times talking about prevention is the answer. If we really want to get a handle on cutting down the cost of health care in America, just jiggling how you pay the bills is not going to be the answer. We have to get in front of this issue and make an incentive for people to live a healthier lifestyle, for businesses to provide workplace settings that are healthy, helping to make sure people get their physicals, annual

checkups, mammogram screenings, cutting down on smoking, making sure that our schools also teach kids at the earliest age what it means to stay healthy. We are building elementary schools in America now without playgrounds. What kind of nonsense is that?

So our whole thrust on this health care issue, I say to my friend from North Carolina, we always just keep focusing on how we are going to pay the bills. That is a problem, obviously, but if we want to get out ahead of it, we have to start focusing on preventive medicine. I look forward to that debate hopefully soon.

#### INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I came to the floor today to talk about the issue that has been in front of us all week—I assume it is going to be coming to a close early next week—and that is the debate and vote on whether we are going to increase the Federal minimum wage.

I regret that previous Congresses have blocked any increase in the minimum wage. The Senate has rejected 11 attempts to raise the minimum wage since 1998—11 times. Last year, we had 52 Senators vote in favor of it, but we didn't have the 60 Senators to invoke cloture and get to a final vote.

Scores of religious and antipoverty groups have called on Congress time and again to recognize the basic principle that Americans who work full time and play by the rules should not be consigned to poverty.

In 1966, Martin Luther King, Jr., said:

We know of no more crucial civil rights issue facing Congress today than the need to increase the Federal minimum wage and extend its coverage. . . . A living wage should be the right of all working Americans.

I join with Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and say it ought to be a right. According to the Congressional Research Service, the real value of the minimum wage today, if it had the same purchasing power as it did in 1968, the year Dr. King was so tragically assassinated, if the minimum wage had the same purchasing power today, the minimum wage would be \$9.19 an hour. What are we talking about increasing it to? We are talking about increasing it to \$7.25 an hour. But at least with the earned-income tax credit, which is new since that time, food stamps—we had food stamps then also, perhaps a little more generous now—that \$7.25 an hour would at least get a family of four above the poverty line, and that would be a historic achievement for our Nation.

It is simply immoral to tell working Americans that they ought to try to provide for their family's needs on \$5.15 an hour. My colleagues and I who offered this bill respect work, we value work, including the most humble type of work. That is why we fought for years to try to ensure the minimum wage kept pace with inflation and updated periodically. But for 10 years, the

leadership has blocked us from increasing it.

Again, I remind my colleagues that the Fair Labor Standards Act, which instituted the minimum wage in 1938, one of the primary aims as enunciated by Franklin Roosevelt was alleviating poverty. Yet now the minimum wage condemns workers to a life of poverty for themselves and their children no matter how hard they work.

Minimum wage employees working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earn about \$10,712. That is \$5,000 below the poverty line for a family of three. The current minimum wage would not even keep a single person and one child above the poverty line.

The inflation-adjusted value of the minimum wage has declined by 20 percent since the last increase in 1997. I point out that since that time, Congress has raised its pay eight times, \$31,600.

Several of our colleagues have suggested all we have to do is increase the earned-income tax credit and that would address it. I am a supporter of the EITC, the earned-income tax credit. It makes a major difference for millions of Americans in poverty, but I don't see it as either/or. You make the earned-income tax credit and the minimum wage go hand in hand, and that really does alleviate poverty. There are a lot of people working in minimum wage jobs who don't understand the earned-income tax credit. Their employers may not inform them of it. They may or may not get a mailing. Maybe they can read it, maybe they can't. Possibly no one may inform them of it and they pass it by. That is why we have to raise their pay.

There is another aspect. It is saying to someone: We value your work. Your work is valuable, whether you are cleaning a hotel room, sweeping up, waiting tables. No matter what it is, your work is valuable.

When we erode people's pride in their work, we also erode their sense that they are a valuable, contributing member of our society.

Those who suggest we just expand the EITC seem to be the same ones who say how great the economy was last year. The economy was pretty good last year for those in the top brackets. It is said that a strong economy is a rising tide that lifts all boats. What if you don't own a boat? Shouldn't those at the very bottom also get a raise? Shouldn't a college kid working part time, who is technically not counted as living in poverty, get a raise to help pay for textbooks? Why is their hard work valued at less than one-third of the median wage?

We have heard the outrageous suggestion that a rise in the minimum wage is somehow a threat to the economy. That is nonsense. Just before signing the Fair Labor Standards Act, here is what President Franklin Roosevelt said. You can almost hear the echoes of his voice:

Do not let any calamity-howling executive with an income of \$1,000 a day tell you that

a wage of \$11 a week is going to have a disastrous effect on all American industry.

Today, the average CEO makes a whopping 821 times more than a worker on minimum wage. That is what this chart shows. Back in 1965, 1968, it was about 51, 54—the average CEO made about 50 times more than a minimum wage worker. Today it is 821 times more. That means that the average CEO makes more on one day before lunch than a minimum wage worker makes all year.

I remind my colleagues that corporate profits increased more than 21 percent in 2000 and reached a 40-year high. Yet the minimum wage is at a 50-year low. As a result, people who work for profitable companies making the minimum wage, what happens? They are forced to use public health care. They are forced to get food stamps, another taxpayer-funded assistance, to make ends meet. So are we subsidizing the huge profits that these companies are making, which then turn around and pay their CEOs 821 times more than the minimum wage worker because we are taking tax dollars from the middle class and helping to pay for their food stamps, health care, and other needs?

Some business groups argue that raising the minimum wage would mean that some jobs would be eliminated. In the absence of Federal leadership on the minimum wage, many States have taken it upon themselves to raise the minimum wage. Currently, 30 States, the Virgin Islands, the District of Columbia, and, I might add, my own State of Iowa have a minimum wage higher than the Federal minimum of \$5.15 an hour. Do you know what. It didn't hurt any of those States.

The Fiscal Policy Institute has studied what happens to small businesses and job growth right after the minimum wage is increased. That is what this chart shows. It shows States that have higher minimum wages and those that don't. Then we see the growth rates. There is not much difference. Both are about the same. So it doesn't hurt growth, business growth, or anything else.

People say: How can that be if they pay a higher minimum wage? How can their growth be the same or sometimes greater than a State that pays less in minimum wage? It is very simple. People who make a decent wage work harder when they get a good night's sleep. If they are working two jobs or have a sick kid at home, they may not get a good night's sleep, and they can't be as attentive to their job. If they sleep in a well-heated apartment instead of a cold flat, when they are able to eat decently and have a good nutritious meal a couple of times a day, they can be more productive. When they can get health care for an abscessed tooth that is driving them nuts rather than going to work and not being attentive to their job, they can be more productive. So when workers earn more money, they contribute more to society, and everybody wins.

Our failure to raise the minimum wage is more than an economic failure. It is a failure of democracy. Again, we live in a society where we can afford to raise the minimum wage. We can afford to have a basic standard of living for anyone willing to work for it. Yet we fail to insist, as Martin Luther King, Jr., said, on this basic right.

Unfortunately, it is hard to get people who earn the minimum wage to come here and lobby for it. They can't afford the time off, much less the airfare or even the gas to get here. Think about this: A worker making minimum wage can buy 2 gallons of gasoline for an hour of labor—an hour of her labor. I say "her" because 59 percent of workers who earn the minimum wage are women.

But even people who won't directly benefit from this legislation overwhelmingly support it. A recent AP poll found that 80 percent of Americans of all income levels favor raising the minimum wage.

This country desperately needs this increase. With declining employer-sponsored health care, the demise of other benefits, including pension benefits, with dramatic costs and other costs of living—housing, for example—workers have to pay for more with less.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition has calculated that the national housing wage—that is the hourly wage needed to pay fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment—was \$15.78 an hour in 2005. In other words, the average for a two-bedroom apartment, \$15.78 an hour, was the minimum one needed to actually pay for rent and to provide food and other needs for a family. That is about triple the current minimum wage.

Economists are all saying that we have to raise it, we should raise it. They know it will improve the lives of working Americans without increasing inflation or unemployment. But the average American doesn't need to hear from Nobel Prize-winning economists to understand the basic principle that people who work hard and play by the rules ought to be able to feed their kids, house them, and give them a good education. It is really basic fairness, and it is fundamental economic morality.

America should not be a nation that favors the powerful and well-connected at the expense of low-income workers and their families. It is time to do right by the least fortunate among us. It is time to value and honor the work of those at the bottom of the income scale. After 10 long years, it is time to raise the minimum wage.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL MONDAY,  
JANUARY 29, 2007, AT 2 P.M.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 2 p.m. on Monday, January 29.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 2:30 p.m., adjourned until Monday, January 29, 2007, at 2 p.m.