

I think we need to be praying now for great leaders in America, people who understand the problem, are not going to turn their tail and run away from it; they're not going to pretend it doesn't exist but take it straight on, because I believe the American public, when they understand the nature of what we're dealing with here, I think they're willing to roll their sleeves up and say, Let's do what Americans have always done so well. Let's just move forward and solve this problem. Let's figure out what each of us has to do, what's reasonable, and let's move forward and get this thing done.

It was my father's generation. My father served with General Patton, and there was that phrase, everybody did their bit. That was kind of the speak of the day. We, likewise, are challenged now that we have to do our bit. We have to be making the wise decisions to put our business and industry back in place.

Now, that's very controversial. You might be surprised here on the floor of the U.S. Congress—you wouldn't be surprised if I said Republicans and Democrats are pretty polarized on the abortion issue, and they are. But you might be surprised to know that in terms of voting, Republicans and Democrats are more polarized on the energy issue than they are on the abortion issue. But I believe that the fact that the foreign oil is starting to become very expensive and more scarce is going to tip the balance of that argument. And I believe that America is going to start developing our own supplies of energy, and I think that's the way we have to go. I think we have to get rid of the redtape and the ridiculous regulations like rogue dust and spilled milk in the dairy barn and things like that that just don't make any sense. There's a Clean Water Act, also, that has incredible kinds of regulations and things that don't make any sense at all from an engineering point of view.

We have to look at those things. We're going to have to trim out some of those things in this budget in order to create that environment, a good, strong environment for business. But we're going to also have to look at this spending. We're going to have to figure out ways to reduce that spending.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, and actually I'm a chairman of the subcommittee that deals with the Navy, the Marine Corps and projection forces—that would be things like bombers and long range—we realize that there is not a whole lot we dare to cut here because of the various other nations and the rate that they're spending on defense and the threat they could be to our country. This money is not always spent as wisely as it should be, but, again, the Navy right now, the American Navy, has the same number of ships as we had in the year 1916. That's not enough ships to do what we need to do in order to try to create a peaceful and free trade area

where we can trade back and forth across the oceans of the world.

And so there's not going to be a lot here to be able to solve this problem. We can spend this money more efficiently probably, but we're not going to be able to cut a whole lot there. The solution to this is, once again, pretty straightforward: We have to cut particularly the amount of spending we're doing on entitlements, and particularly we have to reduce the growth where the entitlements, as the years go out, are going to become more difficult. This growth is induced because of the fact that the population is getting older and the older people are taking up more of these entitlement programs, so it becomes more expensive.

So people like me, I'm a baby boomer, as the baby boomers get older, then they're going to get onto these programs. It's going to cost a lot more, and there's not as many younger workers to be able to pay. That's part of why this gets high. We have to be able to bring that curve down, and we have to cut the level of spending in that area.

So we have to do the cutting on the one hand, and the other thing is we have to grow the economy. We know how to do it. It's been done by other Presidents. We understand the economics of it. But it's just a big challenge. The sooner that Americans across the board understand what we're dealing with, say, "Okay, let's roll up our sleeves. Let's get to work on this thing," I have tremendous confidence. Americans in the past have always rolled up into challenges. They've done well, and we've gotten through many things.

I think the way we'll get through them, also, is something we can learn from the past. That was what the Pilgrims did when the Pilgrims first landed. They had a dream of creating a nation that was designed in an entirely different way than the European countries. They arrived here, and in the first couple of months half of them died. The Mayflower, in the time spring came around, up anchor, was headed back to England. The captain said, Come back to England with me, but 50 Pilgrims said—52 or 53—said, No, we felt like God called us to this country to do something new and different and unique, and they stayed, and that dream started the great American Dream.

Later on, 160-some years later, there was a general by the name of General Washington at Valley Forge. He also was forced to his knees looking to God for help in America's time of crisis. He saw the answer to his prayers. In fact, there was this old guy with bifocal spectacles when the first Constitution was going to be ratified that talked about those days when George Washington ran the army. He rose to speak because the politicians were disagreeing with each other at the Constitutional Convention, and old Ben Franklin with his glasses down on his

nose, 80-something years old, which of course was very old in those days, stood to address George Washington.

He said: I have lived through a long time, and the longer I have lived, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if it's possible that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that a nation can rise without His aid?

Then he goes on to say that in the recent war we saw frequent instances of God's superintending Providence. And he closed by saying: We need to be in prayer as a Constitutional Congress here as we look at adopting the new U.S. Constitution.

Well, Washington called the first day of Thanksgiving as America adopted the U.S. Constitution, but that tradition that when we got in a jam that we looked to God continued. General Eisenhower, recognizing that trend, decided to add it to our Pledge of Allegiance. And so it was that he added words that came from Lincoln, from his Gettysburg address, the words "one nation under God."

□ 1730

And so Eisenhower, on just the front steps behind me of this Capitol, recited for the first time the new pledge, which included "one nation under God, indivisible."

And so as we approach this crisis in our history, I have faith, faith in the American people that we will take a look at the problem, that we will solve it, we will do the right thing, and that we will recognize that the problem is bigger than we are, and that we will have the wisdom to also ask God's blessing on our efforts, and that by His help we will be able to overcome and put America back on a more solid fiscal footing.

I thank you for allowing me to do, I suppose you'd call it, a 30,000-foot view of the budget, not a lot of details, but the big picture, a very sober, a very serious big picture, one that we all have to think about, we all have to become engaged in and take part in.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence. I thank you for your attention and the attention of my colleagues and friends. God bless you all and God bless America.

A TRIBUTE TO PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise to lead a Special Order this evening in tribute to public employees everywhere, and especially our Federal employees here in the United States, 85 percent of whom do not work in Washington. I hope that my colleagues and I will be able to offer some little

known facts about Federal employees today so that the word "Federal employee" gets a face and you know who it is we're talking about.

Today I introduced a resolution supporting the right of all workers to bargain collectively, public and private workers. I'm grateful that Representative DONNA EDWARDS cosponsored this resolution with me and invite others to cosponsor the resolution. The resolution reminds us of what our grandfathers and our forefathers would have told us, that for a long time there was a fight waged after it became clear that individual workers standing alone have little or no bargaining power against some employer that they hope will hire them or in whose employ they find themselves. Thus rose, and finally was legalized as the National Labor Relations Act, the right of workers to form unions.

In no free society in the world is the right to bargain collectively barred. That right has been under attack for decades, and the decline of unions in the United States is directly attributable to the difficulty in organizing workers today because the National Labor Relations Act is a figment of another century.

I think we will see in some of the statistics coming out of Wisconsin and out of the country at large that the decline of unions today does not mean that unions are not prized institutions in our country, and I will have some statistics that show that.

What I think most Americans recognize is that they owe to the American trade union movement much that they take for granted today, even if you are not a member of a union movement. Unions could have been content to bargain at the table for health and safety conditions, for a 40-hour week and the rest of it. Instead, they led the country in making laws that require a 40-hour workweek, child labor laws, require health and safety conditions, require overtime pay, and encourage health insurance and pension insurance. Those matters which began at the bargaining table now many Americans enjoy, and yet we have seen targets especially placed on the backs of public employees.

I'd like to open by giving you an idea of who a public employee is by speaking of a public employee in my own district, the District of Columbia. I don't know Anthony Hutchinson, but I've heard about him. He is an example of an exceptional Federal employee, I understand. He is a husband and a father of two. He lives on Savannah Street in southeast Washington. He is a transportation security officer, and he has worked at the Ronald Reagan National Airport for the last 6 years. He is also a member and shop steward of his union, which in this case happens to be the National Treasury Employees Union. He has been named the Transportation Security Officer of the Year. He has received outstanding ratings from his employer. He was once the

chair and once the vice chair of the Safety Committee. He is on a team that has designed ways to keep transportation security officers up to date on techniques for identifying weapons and prohibited items through x-ray machines. He served on the Emergency Readiness Team—that's a team that deploys within 24 hours in the event of an emergency or national disaster. Anthony Hutchinson is a Federal employee.

When you speak of Federal employees, it seems to me we owe them at least the courtesy of recognizing them for what they do for the American people. But you would not have understood that if you have been watching over the last few weeks the episodes in Wisconsin. These were shocking. And many I think thought, well, maybe it has come to this. Unions aren't very popular and maybe people are ready to bash unions in just this way. But look what the polls are showing us.

The polls show, following Wisconsin, when there have been national polls about the standing of public employees and public employee unions, that Americans oppose weakening the bargaining rights of public employee unions by a huge margin, by a margin of 2-1, 60 percent to 33 percent. Only a slim majority, just a slim majority of Republicans favored taking away bargaining rights. It's as if Americans understand a right when they see one.

Now, bargaining rights are not like the rights of freedom of religion or freedom of speech.

□ 1740

But they're right up there on my list of six or seven rights that Americans believe, once you get, you are entitled to because you have gotten them democratically. You had to go worker by worker. You had to organize. And it looks as though there has been a horrific backlash from Wisconsin.

Indeed, now Americans, when asked how they would choose to reduce their own State deficits, having watched Wisconsin, say they prefer tax increases over benefit cuts for State workers by a margin of 2-to-1. That is what Wisconsin has given the country. It has laid bare what a frontal attack on a basic right means. And what it means is Americans are not for it.

We saw what happened in Wisconsin overnight, that through the tricks of parliamentary maneuvers they were able to, in fact, weaken the bargaining rights of Wisconsin workers. There is going to be a price to pay in Wisconsin, I believe, and I'm going to point to why.

The present Governor of Wisconsin came in with a six-point margin of victory. His polls show seven points behind now. Forty-five percent strongly approve of his performance. The man has only been in office a little more than 3 months. Public employees' unions, including teachers' unions in Wisconsin, now have favorable, positive ratings, 16 points higher than Walker's ratings.

The turnaround in Wisconsin I think tells us where the country is headed when they see the overreaching here in Washington and when they see the overreaching at the State level.

The Wisconsin results are just astounding. They fly in the face of everything Walker was doing. They are the classic backlash to overreach. The State's population now believes that Walker should reverse course and raise taxes on those making \$150,000 a year. That's by a 72 percent to 27 percent margin.

There you have it. A kind of incubator in one State that I think, writ large, tells us where the country stands when it comes to public employees.

Now, the national poll found, not unexpectedly, that 71 percent of Democrats opposed weakening collective bargaining rights. But there was also almost as strong opposition from Independents—71 percent Democrats, 62 percent of Independents. And only a bare margin of Republicans were for weakening collective bargaining rights.

We know that when it came to Walker, there was no doubt what he was after, because the unions, seeing that the State was indeed in trouble, had a huge deficit, gave him what he desired in savings. And still he would not compromise. He held his ground, and in holding his ground, appears to have lost his State.

This is a turning point moment for the country. This is a moment that is sorting out those who linger on the extreme from those who have fought to find their way to the mainstream. And Wisconsin is a harbinger of what overreach will reap here in the House of Representatives as polls in Wisconsin show it has already done there.

Look what we have here. The President already announced a freeze, a 5-year spending freeze, on Federal employees in the State of the Union. They didn't like that. But that seems to have whet the appetite of Republicans for more and even more.

They come to the floor with bills that would furlough Federal workers for the 2 weeks, would impose an additional 1-year pay freeze, and cut 200,000 Federal jobs. There's another bill that would limit the ability of Federal workers to bargain collectively.

The bills just roll out of Republicans—a freeze, a cut in the Federal workforce by 15 percent. Don't you think somebody would want to look and see who the workers are before coming up with a number like that? Cutting agency funding to 2008 levels in 2012, as H.R. 1 does, and then to 2006 levels for the next 9 years. That would reduce most agency budgets by 40 percent.

I see that my good friend who has also cosponsored the resolution paying tribute to America's public and Federal employees has come to the floor, and I am pleased to grant her such time as she may desire.

Ms. EDWARDS. I want to thank the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia.

Mr. Speaker, I'm here today because I'm here on behalf of and with the 150,000 Federal workers who live in the Fourth Congressional District in Maryland. But in our region, in our metropolitan region, we know that there are some 700,000 Federal workers just in the Washington metropolitan region who do so much to protect this country, to keep our neighborhoods, our communities safe, to keep our food safe, to make sure that we know what the weather is; 2.7 to 2.8 million Federal workers all around the country and around the globe. That means that they're not all here in Washington. So I'm always troubled when I hear people who, for the last couple of decades, have just gone on an all-out attack against the great work of Federal workers.

And I would say to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia, I know a little bit of something about Federal workers. I grew up in a household with two Federal workers. My mother and my father both worked for the Federal Government. In fact, it was working for the Federal Government that really helped them become a part of the middle class in this country. It was the work that they did as Federal workers that saved taxpayers lots of money. It was the work that my father did in uniform in this country protecting and honoring all of us by his service.

And so there's such a wide range of the Federal workforce, and yet some who want to go after Federal workers—and I say “go after,” and I mean that very directly—do it without actually knowing what it is that Federal workers do.

Well, I want to tell you about some of the Federal workers in my congressional district. They are workers who work at the Food and Drug Administration. They're doing some of the most cutting-edge research that is out there. They are looking to make sure that our—that the food and the drugs that are in our marketplace are safe for children and families and consumers.

I want to talk about the Federal workers at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

□ 1750

Today in the Washington region, and up and down the east coast, we have actually had flood warnings for communities, including communities around the District of Columbia metropolitan area, that are under flood warnings and watches today. It's Federal workers who actually helped us to analyze the data coming from the satellite that was put up into our atmosphere by Federal workers that help us understand what's happening in our environment with our climate and our weather.

It's the Federal workers at NASA who took the charge that President

Kennedy gave to them to explore space, to discover that new frontier, who have been at the cutting edge of all kinds of research that benefit us in every capacity. I like to say to people it was actually a Federal worker and the Federal workforce that figured out through technology and experimentation that they could create materials that would lead to the creation of air bags and seat belts in our space program. And those are the same air bags that I know saved my life one time when I was in a car accident, and have saved many lives all across this country. Well, that's the product of what happens when you make an investment in our Federal workforce.

It's a Federal worker who works at Andrews Air Force Base in my congressional district looking out for the protection of the President and for diplomats who fly in and out of Andrews, making sure that we safeguard the protected space in this capital region, making sure that we have an Air Force and personnel who are deployed to as far away places as Afghanistan and Iraq looking out for improvised explosive devices, training some of our great other servicemembers, those German shepherds and other service dogs that we see. It's the Federal workforce that's doing those things.

So I am often shocked, Mr. Speaker, when I hear people targeting the Federal workforce. Let's just be clear, Federal workers have actually absorbed and been willing to absorb and to take, not liking it, as the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia points out, a freeze that's been placed on their wages, but they continue to serve. It's the Federal worker, Mr. Speaker, who makes sure that that Social Security check and that disability claim and those veterans services are provided not just in the Fourth Congressional District in Maryland, but all across this country.

So when I think about the range of things that Federal workers do that no one else does, it's really extraordinary. People try to compare, the gentlewoman knows this, try to compare wages and salaries to wages and salaries in the private sector; but it's not a direct match. I mean, imagine, if you would, that we could get away in the private sector with paying a top-notch engineering researcher \$100,000 to work for us. But that's what happens in the Federal Government, even though those salaries may be significantly higher than that.

Ms. NORTON. The gentlewoman is making a very important and much misunderstood point with these comparisons between apples and bananas. Half of the Federal workforce, I learned, work in the nine highest paying occupation groups: judges, engineers, scientists, nuclear plant inspectors. That's half of the Federal workers. Less than a third of private sector workers work in these same nine top-drawer occupations. So when you hear these comparisons, you are not com-

paring comparable workforces. The private sector has categories we don't even have here like cooks and manufacturing workers.

So these comparisons that you speak of, I say to the gentlewoman, could not be more important to distinguish. We are talking about the highest level workforce in the United States of America. And I will say to the gentlewoman, I learned as well that there are far fewer of them than when I was a child. In 1953, there was one Federal worker for every 78 residents. Today, there is one for every 147. How did you go from one Federal worker for every 78 residents to one for every 147 residents? Productivity. This is a knowledge workforce. It is a workforce to die for.

I yield to the gentlewoman from Maryland.

Ms. EDWARDS. I want to thank the gentlewoman, because I think it's really important for us to understand really who is the Federal worker. You know, what is it that they do? And as the gentlewoman has pointed out, our food is safe because of Federal workers. The drugs that we take, whether they come over the counter or they're prescription drugs, they're safe because of a Federal worker. When that prediction is coming through for severe weather that hits the middle of our country in the most oppressive way, it's a Federal worker who analyzes that data and works really hard and really quickly to get that information out to the public.

Federal workers also work in some of the most dangerous fields, in addition to being some of the most skilled fields in this country. You mentioned the work, the gentlewoman did, the work of our nuclear scientists that Federal workers do, in our laboratories all across this country, not just in Washington, D.C., in States like Colorado and California and New Mexico, some of the highest level of scientific work that's going on in the country.

So we have a skilled Federal workforce. And, you know, I was really shocked about this story that we have heard evolving in Wisconsin and the struggle of Wisconsin workers for collective bargaining rights that indeed on the committee on which we serve in Transportation, just a couple of weeks ago we were looking at an authorization for the Federal Aviation Administration. In that authorization we actually passed legislation through our committee that would say that if you didn't show up for a union vote, maybe you were sick, maybe you didn't want to vote, for whatever reason, your not showing up would be counted as a “no” vote.

Can you imagine if any of us actually conducted elections like that? All those folks who decided to stay home for whatever reason would be counted as “no” votes? I daresay there would be a lot of Members of this Congress who would not be Members of this Congress under those kinds of rules. Yet those are the kinds of rules that are being promoted by the Republican majority

through our continuing resolution, through our authorization that really go at the heart of taking the feet out from under the Federal workforce.

Ms. NORTON. I thank the gentlelady, and I hope she will remain with us, because the gentlelady is pointing out distinctions that the public is largely unaware of. Some of these job categories that my friend from Maryland points to ought to be instructive: rocket scientists, VA nurse, park ranger, cancer researcher, prison guards.

It's interesting that the cooks in the Bureau of Prisons are probably paid more than the cooks in the private sector because they have supervision of prisoners, who also work in the kitchen. How do you measure that? You don't do it by throwing out a bunch of statistics, public versus private, and believe that that tells the whole story.

Now we are very pleased to be joined by the gentlewoman from Hawaii, our new Member from Hawaii, and I am pleased to grant her 5 minutes.

Ms. HIRONO. Thank you. Relatively new Member. I am really glad to join the two of you in honoring and acknowledging the work of our Federal workers. Ms. EDWARDS and I sit on the same Transportation and Infrastructure Committee; and, yes, it was quite revealing to talk about the kinds of changes some people were proposing to the FAA bill that would have totally changed the way you count votes. It is a way to count votes that doesn't happen in any other arena.

Certainly, if we had to count votes where all the people who were registered to vote didn't vote would be counted as a "no" vote, I would say that most of us here, including our friends on the other side of the aisle, would not be here.

That's very telling to me, the kind of perspective that's reflected, any kind of an effort that goes after government employees. And today we are here to talk about the thousands and thousands of Federal employees who are doing the job every single day to keep our government going.

□ 1800

Who do we think keeps government going but our workers? We need to acknowledge that and honor them.

When you go to the Social Security office, for example, as I have, and when you see the Federal employees processing the paperwork, that needs to happen so that our seniors can get the benefits that they've worked hard for and that they deserve. When you go to an unemployment line, you see State workers. This is what I mean. Government employees are there, doing the jobs they need to do to enable our working people and middle class families and everyone else in our country to get the kinds of services that we pay for.

They're being scapegoated as though they're the ones who are responsible for this economic crisis. Some people refer to it now as the "Great Reces-

sion," with a capital "G" and a capital "R," as opposed to the Great Depression. So many of the stories that we hear are about people just struggling to make ends meet, including our Federal employees. They're like the rest of us. Of course there are faces to all of these Federal employees. In fact, let me just tell you about some of the Federal employees who have been acknowledged in my State for the exemplary work that they're doing.

For example, I want to talk about Sergeant Michael Schellenbach, who is a combat camera officer in charge of the Kaneohe Marine Corps Base in Hawaii. He won a Federal Leader of the Year award. He provided unparalleled customer service to prepare marines for Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

Warren Au won the 2010 Federal Employee of the Year award for professional, administrative and technical professions. Warren works in the Naval Facilities Engineering Command as an electrical engineer on the Far East planning team. He developed and implemented an electronic data-gathering tool to produce an updated facilities plan. The tool is now required at all Navy and Marine Corps installations, and it has greatly increased productivity and efficiency, saving taxpayers—that's all of us—a lot of money.

Bill Pursley was a 2008 Federal Mentor of the Year. He works for the Transportation Security Administration at Maui County Airports. Under Bill's guidance and leadership, over dozens of officers have been promoted to lead, supervisor and master positions. Bill's very calm and convincing demeanor has earned him the respect of airport employees and leaders, and he has had a significant impact on keeping us safe.

These are just a few of the 4.6 million Federal workers and retirees in every State in our country who have not only provided services to us over the years and who have earned their retirements, but they're continuing to, as we have referred to in so many of our committees, step up to do more with less. They have been doing that for years now, and I am proud of them. I am proud of the Federal workers in Hawaii.

Ms. NORTON. If the gentlewoman would yield, I think it's very interesting that we have on the floor Members from, perhaps, the most dense part of the Federal workforce, all the way to Hawaii. Eighty-five percent of Federal workers does not work in the Washington region. Ms. EDWARDS and I feel fortunate to live in the National Capital Region, but we by no means regard ourselves as representative of Federal workers. Every Member has Federal workers in her district. So, when you're bashing Federal employees, you'd better watch yourselves because you're bashing your own constituents.

Does the gentlelady from Maryland want to speak to that issue?

Ms. EDWARDS. I do.

Too often we hear: Let's cut Washington. We don't care if the Federal Government shuts down because it's just a bunch of Federal employees. In fact, only 1 quarter of Federal employees works in the Three-State Region that comprises the Washington Metropolitan Region. The other 75 percent of Federal employees works someplace else.

I love this idea of exploring what it is that Federal employees do because I'm often fascinated by the many jobs that they do which provide so many important resources for us:

Meteorologists. Well, could we do without meteorologists? Ask the people in California and in these other earthquake zones. In the gentlelady's home State of Hawaii, we need meteorologists in that sector. Aerospace engineers, who are exploring these 21st century new technologies and horizons that are not here on this Earth, who are looking at things like climate and planetary science, they don't make a lot of money. They may have Ph.Ds. An aerospace engineer with a Ph.D., who works for the Federal Government, probably makes about \$70,000. Imagine if you translated that skill level into the private sector.

So I thank the gentlelady for reminding us of the fact that Federal workers span the spectrum of job skills, and they're in every single State and in every congressional district in this country.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire as to how much time I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman has 25 minutes remaining.

Ms. HIRONO. Will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. NORTON. I am glad to yield to the gentlewoman from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Thank you.

When we think about the kinds of resources in our country that everyone enjoys, think about our national parks. What a tremendous resource for all of us, and so many families go to all of our national parks. Guess who is there to make sure that families, individuals—all of us—have a lovely time? Who is protecting our endangered species, these national parks? We have a lot of national parks in Hawaii. In fact, you may have seen the pictures recently of one of them. We have the continuing eruption of Kilauea on the Island of Hawaii, which is part of my district.

So there are just so many areas in which we could not do without the commitment of our Federal employees. Truly, I feel as though they're getting picked on for basically political reasons, and it's unjustifiable to do that and to scapegoat our workers in that way.

Ms. NORTON. They deserve just the opposite.

Ms. HIRONO. Yes.

Ms. NORTON. Far from scapegoating, it seems to me we ought to stand up

and salute Federal employees for what they're doing for this country now.

Ms. HIRONO. You mentioned Ms. EDWARDS and about exploration and about meteorologists. Well, the astronaut program, that's a Federal program. We had a wonderful astronaut from Hawaii, Ellison Onizuka, who tragically lost his life in the *Challenger* disaster.

This is part of what we need to do to educate all of us and the young people and our students. In fact, I was visited by a group of students in my district yesterday. They were here with the Close Up program, and were here to learn about the Federal Government and what keeps the Federal Government going. It's not just us. It's all those 4.6 million people out there who are helping.

Ms. NORTON. Ms. EDWARDS, you are probably also aware that we hear about the best and the brightest. The Federal workforce, now with many baby boomers, is eligible to retire, and there is absolute panic about whether or not we will ever see a workforce as good as the workforce we got in the post-Kennedy period. These were people who came fresh with all of the notions of the Kennedy era that public service was a wonderful thing, and they made their careers in the Federal service. Ninety percent of them could retire in the next 10 years. Now the whole world is open to them. They could go to the high-tech companies. They could go to Hawaii. They could go to California.

Will we be able to attract the best and the brightest right when we most need them—in an era when the country needs, on this side as well as on the military side, the very best talent we can find?

□ 1810

Ms. EDWARDS. The gentlewoman from the District of Columbia raises yet another really interesting point and it is that not only could they go anywhere in the United States, but the world is their oyster. We know that our best and brightest are not just being recruited from State to State outside of the Federal workforce, they are being recruited outside of the United States, because we know that we have the talent here, and what better place to absorb that talent in public service than in service in the Federal sector.

I am just so proud. I think about the time that I met a scientist, a researcher over at the National Institute of Standards and Technology. Let me tell you what they do at NIST.

Any piece of the electronic equipment that you might have, and maybe it's in your doctor's office, and it's an MRI machine, or maybe it is something, a piece of your home equipment in your home, or maybe it's the iron, or it's the toaster, or it's the microwave, the National Institute of Standards and Technology sets a standard for industry for those products and tests those to meet standards. It means that no matter where you go, no matter what store you shop in, that that

equipment is calibrated in the same way. Now, you may not think that matters for a toaster, but it surely matters for an MRI machine.

Those are the kinds of jobs that our Federal employees do. Those are jobs that you really can't translate into the private sector but that are so necessary to safeguard the public.

Ms. NORTON. That's such an important point about translating them. Unlike what the Federal Government is required to do, the people who have been throwing around the comparisons don't do what the Bureau of Labor Statistics does. Now, this is very, very difficult work.

When the Bureau of Labor Statistics compares workers in the public and private sector, they have to, for example, look beyond the title of budget analyst. In the Federal Government, they may be dealing with a budget analyst who has oversight over multimillion-dollar agency budgets.

In the private sector, that may be somebody who is sitting in an office pushing papers, is qualified, but nowhere near the same kind of responsibility. What the Bureau of Labor Statistics does, and only the government can do this, because only the government has the resources, is to literally get into the weeds so that when you see the government statistics, those are the statistics to be trusted.

I have got to ask my good friend to help me as well on one of the great distortions, and that is on Federal benefits.

I think most Americans don't know that Federal employees pay for 30 percent of the cost of their health care. If you get dental and vision, you pay 100 percent.

If you have group life insurance, the employee pays 66 percent of the premium and the full cost of any additional coverage, and if you have, and many employees now have, Federal long-term care, 100 percent.

The Federal Government, yes, is a decent employer. It is by no means an overly generous employer. Just compare that to Fortune 1000, Fortune 500 employers and see if these employees who pay 30 percent of their health care premium are coddled. I don't think so.

Another issue that is often raised is contractors. One of the most astounding things about the Federal workforce, and some things should be done by contracting out, but there are more contracted, contracted Federal employees than there are Federal employees. When you are attacking Federal employees, you are attacking people who work in the agencies, who work, as my two colleagues have spoken in detail, work as a park ranger, who work as a rocket scientist.

But the invisible workforce is the contracting workforce. At the Department of Homeland Security, for example, we have 188,000 employees but there are 200,000 contracting employees working for the Agency. So if the public really wants to know where the

money goes, they shouldn't be targeting the employee who stands up, has USA written across their chest, is proud to work for the Federal Government. They should look at the entire workforce, which turns out to be many, many contracted workers.

It's interesting to know that the President is cutting the number of contracted workers and expects to save \$40 billion annually by, in fact, bringing that work in-house, so that we know who is performing it, we can measure them. We can get rid of the work we don't need. You contract the work out, it's gone, and it gets a life of its own.

Ms. EDWARDS. Well, I think that you raise such an amazing point for the American people on two points, one about Federal benefits. There is this wide assumption across the country that Federal workers don't contribute to their own health and life insurance and their dental insurance, and it's just not true. So I think it's really born for us to debunk that right now.

As you say, the Federal Government is a decent employer, but it is by no means the best employer when it comes to providing benefits, as some of those Fortune 500, Fortune 1000 companies that you point to. Nonetheless, it's the Federal worker who contributes to her own benefit, contributes to her pension, contributes to her health insurance, contributes for her family members across the board.

The gentlewoman also makes an important distinction for us to know that, in fact, the Federal workforce, because they sometimes work alongside contract employees who are paid different rates, who have different benefits, but are in some cases doing very, very similar kind of work. I applaud the Obama administration for trying to get a handle on what is uniquely government work and shouldn't be contracted out because we need much greater oversight.

I know, I mentioned earlier to the gentlewoman that I come from a family of Federal workers. I want to tell you about one of those workers, because I bet if anybody goes back, they would say that my mother saved the Federal Government a boatload of money.

She was a steward of the taxpayer. She worked in the Department of Defense doing military housing, overseeing contracts. She would tell you in a minute if a contractor was violating a contract. She would tell you in a minute if they were overspending where they didn't need to overspend, and she would save the taxpayer money because she viewed herself as a steward of the taxpayer as a public servant.

I know that my mother is not alone. She is joined by millions of Federal workers all across this country who take pride in the work that they do for the taxpayer, the work that they do in service to this Nation, whether it's processing Social Security disability claims, or it is making sure that our veterans get appropriate medical and

mental health attention, or whether it's making sure that our airways are safe and clear, that our planes are landing and taking off safely, protecting us in our parks.

After all, if someone gets lost, a child gets lost in a park, it's a Federal worker that goes to find that child and reunite him or her with their parents. The Federal workforce is varied, it's diverse, it's efficient. It's becoming more efficient every day. Federal workers are really contributing to the lifeblood of this country.

So I think for those who want to get about the business of cutting spending where it's appropriate, let's do that responsibly. But let's not make the Federal worker the scapegoat for budget-cutting and for ending deficit spending. Let's continue a strong and vigorous Federal workforce that really is working to the best benefit of the taxpayer.

Ms. NORTON. This is such an important point. I would say to my friend from Maryland because, remember in Wisconsin, the public employees said, look, we will do our share. Yet the Governor insisted upon going at collective bargaining. Anyone who thinks public employees are not willing to do their share does not understand how unions operate.

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If you have a workforce that needs to be downsized, if you have a workforce that needs to give up some of what it has for a period of time, the best way to deal with that workforce is through an agent that the workers trust. If the employer has no agent and simply goes in and does it, that becomes a deflating, morale-sapping exercise. Unions are very sophisticated. Unions operate within our capitalist system. They know when there's money on the table and when there's not. Unions are said to have been the major agent in creating the American middle class.

What do we mean by that? After all, there were businesses, automobile companies and managers. What we mean by it is that when that money was coming, when that revenue was coming to business, it was sitting across from a union who said, workers help produce this product, the revenue from this product should be shared with workers. Out of that came the great American middle class. That is why an automobile worker, for example, who didn't have a college education, could get a pension and could support a family.

And unions did this, yes, across the bargaining table; but in doing it for their own members, they spread it through the society, because then competitors had to meet the union wage. And so what happened was you got a great American middle class that you did not have before the unionization of American workers. And they deserve credit for that. Unions deserve credit for that. They don't deserve to be bashed.

I have to say to my good friend, I was never so gratified to read what the

polls show us. And I indicated some of those figures when we began this special hour that 2-1, Americans oppose weakening the bargaining rights of public employees. After all that has happened in Wisconsin, instead of their reaping the whirlwind for it, American people understand what it means to take away a precious right, even a right some of them don't enjoy. And so they say they would rather have their taxes raised than to even weaken—weaken the collective bargaining rights of workers.

If that is not a lesson for the other side of this Chamber, which is overreaching in 1,000 different ways, nothing is. It is a bellwether of what is to come.

Ms. EDWARDS. I want to thank the gentlelady and my friend because I think what you've done is you've brought the connection from the public sector worker in Wisconsin and throughout our States to the Federal workforce and to the private sector workforce.

I think what we've seen over these last couple of decades, and I think it is evidenced in the poll and the support that all workers are showing for the workers in Wisconsin and for the idea of collective bargaining rights, is that we all recognize as workers whether you're in the public sector or the private sector, whether it's State or municipal government or it's the Federal Government, that, in fact, it's that organizing and the ability to organize and the ability to bargain that has helped so many of us to achieve a place in the middle class. And I think that there is an understandable fear of losing that given what's transpired over the years.

In fact, you look at wages in the private sector, and private sector wages have, in fact, remained stagnant for about the last decade. And so you can understand that a private sector worker is actually feeling that strain, but they understand the position of the public sector workers, of the Federal workers. And so we're all united as workers together to make sure that we can lift all of us into the middle class.

And I think the Federal workforce is particularly important because the Federal workforce then becomes sort of a bellwether for what can happen in other sectors in our workforce. Thank you for bringing that full circle.

Ms. NORTON. I want to thank the gentlelady for coming down. You make a very important point about the stagnation of the American standard of living. It correlates with the stagnation of the American labor movement. The stagnation of the American labor movement has everything to do with the difficulty under the National Labor Relations Act of organizing a union today.

When unions were first legalized in the 1930s, they were encouraged. Today, it is very difficult under the existing statute to organize a union; and I'm amazed that unions are still alive

and kicking. But I must say what we've seen from Wisconsin is a national reawakening of the American trade union movement. I think unions are going to be able to organize in ways they would never have been able to organize without Wisconsin. Thank you, Governor Walker.

As I close this hour, I want to particularly thank my two friends from Hawaii and from Maryland for coming down to share this special hour with us. We think the least we can do is to, every once in a while, say to Federal employees and to public employees, we appreciate what you're doing.

President Obama perhaps said it best. I don't think it does any good, he said, when public employees are denigrated or vilified or their rights are infringed upon. We need to attract the best and the brightest to public service. These times demand it.

Again, I thank the gentlelady for coming forward.

THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. JACKSON) is recognized for 30 minutes.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, let me first begin by associating myself with the remarks of the distinguished gentlelady from the District of Columbia and the gentlelady from Maryland on a very thoughtful presentation that they offered the body this evening.

Mr. Speaker, there has been some controversy in the blogosphere and on conservative talk radio shows about some comments I made last week regarding my belief that every child in this country should have the constitutional right to an education of equal high quality. Let me be clear. Last week, I raised the possibility that such a right might lead to an education standard in this country of an iPad for every child just like it could lead to standards of class sizes and athletic facilities and music classes and other important resources for our children.

Let me be clear on a few things. These devices are revolutionizing our country, and they will fundamentally alter how we educate our children. Mr. Speaker, this is an iPad. It is an incredible device, so incredible, in fact, before I could open it up after I recently purchased it, Apple came out with the iPad 2.

Mr. Speaker, this is the Kindle, a device from Amazon that allows you to download books and to read them. Before I could finish opening up my Kindle, Kindle came out with an even smaller Kindle, neither of which has been activated at this time.

Mr. Speaker, it will not be very long before every child in this country is educated using one of these devices or something similar. Why? Just go to your local Borders bookstore, that is, if there's one left.