

Finally, the call for a raise in the minimum wage is based on good economics. I know full well that those opposed to a raise in the minimum wage say that any raise will reduce employment, and at a certain point, it could, but a modest raise to \$10 an hour is nowhere near this theoretical tipping point, and more than six dozen economists agree.

□ 1015

In a recent letter to Congress, they explicitly said:

Increases in the minimum wage have little to no impact on the employment of minimum wage workers, even during times of weakness in the labor market.

The economic recovery has been a very long, slow road for low-wage American workers, and a raise in the minimum wage is the jolt our economy needs. Higher wages quickly turn into increased spending. Increased spending quickly turns into growth.

But minimum wage legislation, like unemployment insurance, is merely the minimum we should be doing for the American worker. Let's remember that, during the March on Washington, the demand directly preceding the call for an increase in the minimum wage was demand number 7:

A massive Federal program to train and place . . . workers . . . on meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages.

This body needs to turn its focus on advancing legislation that will create more American jobs and policies that matter to American workers. I urge my colleagues to support the American worker. Join me in calling for jobs legislation and a reasonable raise of the Federal minimum wage.

THE PRIMACY OF STRONG AMERICAN LEADERSHIP AROUND THE GLOBE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KINZINGER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. KINZINGER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, we deal with a lot of very important issues in this body. In fact, everybody that is going to speak this morning is going to speak about some very important issues. But I would argue that there is no issue more important that we deal with in this body than the issue of American global leadership and the issue of national defense.

I just got back from a security summit in Munich, and I want to share some of my thoughts in talking to our allies and talking to strategic partners around the globe.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a decline of American leadership around the globe. There is a perception that America is on the retreat from the rest of the world and is an America tired of a decade of war, which I fully understand, and is an America that decides the fight is just not worth it anymore. The decline of American leadership around the world is not just something

that we can't do because it is not good, but it is dangerous—not just to us, but to the rest of the globe.

Think about how we got in this position in the first place. It was the failure of American leadership through the nineties to pursue a terrorist jihadist by the name of Osama bin Laden. Instead, this Nation and the President treated him as a common criminal and not as a declared opponent and a war opponent of the United States of America. What we saw was an attack on the World Trade Center, an attack to the USS Cole, an attack on the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, and then, finally, it culminated in an attack that took 3,000 American lives and woke America up to the reality of global jihadism and terrorism, and the fact that we have people that live solely for the purpose of killing and destroying people that don't see eye to eye with their specific religious ideology.

Failure to confront those terrorists in the 1990s led to that big problem we have today. And what we have seen lately is the same kind of retrenchment by the United States of America—undoubtedly, still the most powerful country in the world. Our enemies no longer fear us, and our allies no longer trust us.

Let me label a few of these areas that have concerned me.

In Iraq—I am a veteran of Iraq—the U.S. Marines actually fought to take the city of Fallujah and took the most casualties that they have taken probably since Khe Sanh in Vietnam. Today, the black flag of al Qaeda flies over Fallujah. The sacrifice of thousands of Americans is now being confronted by the black flag of al Qaeda because this President, eager to achieve a campaign promise, pulled all the troops out at the end of 2011 and didn't leave a residual force. As unpopular as it may be, if we had left a counterterrorism force in Iraq, we would not be facing this problem today.

I look at a terrible deal that was just struck with Iran, a deal that basically says Iran is allowed to be a threshold nuclear state. Sure, the Secretary and the President will say that we are going from 20 percent enrichment to 5. He doesn't mention that bringing 5 percent enrichment to weapons-grade enrichment actually doesn't take that long. And, oh, by the way, all the surrounding states to Iran think that they are totally entitled to say that they have a right to enrich uranium up to 5 percent, in essence, creating a whole host of Middle East threshold nuclear states. And yet we call this a victory?

I look at Syria—11,000 opponents to Assad, tortured and murdered and labeled with numbers—11,000 people—which made Srebrenica, the thing that launched America to intervene in Bosnia, look small. Eleven thousand opponents to Assad tortured and killed. And you look at Assad, who is purposely targeting the Free Syrian Army and not al Qaeda opposition so that al

Qaeda opposition grows to him and he can stand in front of the West and say, "I am the protector." If we get to the point where we look to Assad, a brutal dictator in Syria, as the protector of freedom, God help us.

I look at instability in Lebanon, and I look at one of our greatest allies, Jordan, hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees. I look at Israel, surrounded by instability in the Middle East, and I look at a resurgent China that challenges America all over the globe now, and I look at a Russia that continues to occupy one-third of its neighbor to the south, Georgia. I look at Ukraine's people standing up for freedom. I haven't heard much from this administration.

I am burdened by this lack of American global leadership. I don't care about the politics of it. I don't care about any of this. I care about the future of this country. And what I see is the decline of American leadership in what is still the greatest country around the globe.

INCOME INEQUALITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CONNOLLY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, my friend from Illinois is right. There is a decline in American leadership, but it is not overseas—not at all. It is here at home.

Since the 1970s, American workers have seen their wages fall or stagnate. The wealthiest American incomes, however, have increased fourfold. Even after 40 years of economic growth, today's generation takes home less than its grandparents did, and high school graduates make 40 percent less than their predecessors did four decades ago.

This problem ought to elicit bipartisan concern, yet many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have shown little or no interest in the consequences of our country becoming so sharply divided by wealth. For many of my Republican colleagues, even talking about it is uncomfortable. It is time to realize that all too many Americans—hardworking Americans—are falling behind.

From 1979 to 2007, wages for the top 1 percent grew 156 percent, while the bottom 90 percent of us saw our wages grow only 17 percent. Since 1983, 75 percent of the growth and wealth has been captured by the top 5 percent, while the bottom 60 percent actually suffered a net decline. By 2010, nearly all middle- and low-income families have made the same hourly wage they did in 2000, despite having raised productivity during that time period by 22 percent. That is not how it is supposed to work. Worse, median family income was 6 percent lower. But this lost decade only caps a trend that has been going on in this country for over 30 years.

In what might be the most telling portrait of how middle- and low-income Americans are being shut out of the

new economy, Bloomberg recently reported that 95 percent of wealth generated since the Great Recession went to the richest 1 percent—95 percent went to 1 percent. In real terms, 9 out of 10 people control less wealth than they did before the crash.

In 2012, the top 10 percent of earners took home more than half of the U.S. total income. This is the highest level ever recorded. Income and wealth haven't been this concentrated since before the Great Depression, and we are beginning to rival the gilded age of the late 19th century.

A recent Gallup poll shows that the concerns about inequality have moved beyond academia and into the public consciousness. According to Gallup, two out of three Americans are dissatisfied with income and wealth distribution in the United States, including 54 percent of all Republicans and 70 percent of Independents. The same poll found that many Americans now worry about their ability to find future opportunity, and only 54 percent believe that one can get ahead by working hard. What does that say about the American Dream?

Justice Louis Brandeis once said:

We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both.

Letting a generation of Americans remain underemployed, underpaid, and despairing about their future creates a dangerous cycle of economic and social destruction, and it damages democracy. Nations whose citizens believe that the game is rigged against them are not beacons of democracy. Civic culture corrodes, and space opens for divisive and extreme politics. We have seen that here at home. The new Pope, Pope Francis, recently lamented that the world's inequality is quietly undermining social and political institutions. He gets it.

Last week, the President highlighted how our Nation's wealth and income gaps have become too large to continue to ignore. Congress cannot continue to stand idly by. I urge my colleagues to consider the many bipartisan proposals that would jump-start growth for all Americans. We need to be investing in this country's crumbling infrastructure. My own Put America Back to Work Act, which would reauthorize Build America Bonds programs, would give local government another tool to jump-start the economy and infrastructure projects.

Generations of Americans, starting with our Founders, made their way to America's shores, attracted by the promise of opportunity and the belief that, through hard work, they could get ahead. Unfortunately, that dream is at risk today.

I urge my colleagues to join all of us in preserving opportunity for all Americans, and prevent our Nation from becoming a nation of stark divide between the haves and the have-nots.

A GOVERNMENT THAT GOVERNS LEAST GOVERNS BEST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. BARR) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BARR. Mr. Speaker, in his State of the Union address last week, the President described an economy in which income inequality has deepened and upward mobility has stalled. Unfortunately, in many respects, he is right. The poor are worse off today than we were when President Obama took office. Nearly 7 million more Americans live in poverty today as compared to 2008.

A record 47 million Americans receive food stamps, 13 million more than when President Obama assumed office. Median household income has fallen over \$2,000 in the last 4 years. Seventy-six percent of Americans live paycheck to paycheck, and the percentage of working-age people actually in the workforce has dropped to the lowest rates in 35 years. A full 92 million Americans are not part of the labor force. They are either unemployed or not even actively looking for work. They are so frustrated with the Obama economy, they have just given up. When taking into account marginally attached workers—workers who are unemployed but want a job and workers who have part-time jobs who want full-time jobs—the jobless rate today is over 13 percent.

Mr. Speaker, 5 years after this President took office, the state of the Union is not strong. But instead of admitting that his policies have failed, the President offered more Big Government and more class warfare. But, Mr. Speaker, a lack of government isn't the problem, and class warfare isn't a solution. The President says we need to raise the minimum wage and extend emergency unemployment insurance yet again, for the 13th time in his administration.

We should stop thinking small in this country. We are Americans. We should think big. We don't need minimum wages; we need maximum wages. We don't need more unemployment insurance and government dependency; we need jobs and self-sufficiency. The best way to combat income inequality, to restore upward mobility in the American Dream and create a healthy economy is for Washington to get out of the way, whether in the doctor's office, in the job market, or at the gas pump.

That means replacing ObamaCare with patient-centered reforms that will lower the cost of health care without growing government. It means cutting wasteful spending and making reforms to put the Nation on a path towards a balanced budget. It means comprehensive tax reform that rewards work, saving, and investment and allows individuals, families, and businesses to keep more of what they earn. It means rolling back provisions of Dodd-Frank that allow bureaucrats to take away choices, financial services, and products and limit access to credit and take those away from the American people.

It means unleashing the energy potential of the United States by ending the war on coal and approving, immediately, the Keystone pipeline. And it means giving the poor a hand up rather than a handout, giving them a job instead of a government check, and giving them the skills they need to escape dependency so that they can achieve their God-given potential.

We can do all this. We can restore the American Dream, and we can restore opportunity and economic growth. And I stand ready to work to get America back on track.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH: THE NATIVE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF ALABAMA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Ms. SEWELL) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in honor of Black History Month and the countless contributions and sacrifices made by notable African Americans to this great Nation. I also stand before you to proclaim the month of February as a time of reflection for Alabama's Seventh Congressional District.

In honor of Black History Month, I thought it would be befitting that we pay honor and tribute to the native sons and daughters of Alabama that have made significant contributions not only to the great State of Alabama, but to this Nation. As representative of the Civil Rights District and a beneficiary of the sacrifices of so many, I have committed to sharing the stories of these extraordinary men and women throughout the month of February so that their contributions will forever be recorded and referenced in our Nation's history.

□ 1030

Today, I again begin with a tribute to Virgil Ware, 13, and Johnnie Robinson, 16. These American heroes and Birmingham natives lost their lives within hours of the historic bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on Sunday, September 15, 1963.

While many of us have heard the heart-wrenching stories of the four little girls that perished in that bomb, many aren't aware that on that same day, Virgil and Johnnie were also victims of unspeakable and senseless violence.

Virgil Ware was born on December 6, 1949, in Birmingham, Alabama to James and Lorine Ware. He was the third of six children. One of his surviving brothers, Melvin Ware, describes Virgil as a special child who was exceptional in his educational endeavors. While his brothers were preparing for social gatherings, Virgil could be found reading a good book or perusing the encyclopedia. A few months before his death, the eighth-grader expressed to his older siblings that he was looking forward to joining them at the local high school next year. Before Virgil's