

so, an atmosphere of trust must be established, and a rapport developed which assures that the minor is both emotionally able and psychologically willing to discuss issues which may be embarrassing, shameful or traumatizing. In order to accomplish this, a judge frequently has to take more time than in the case of an adult to make the child feel sufficiently safe so as to fully participate in the hearing. This often involves multiple hearings, so that familiarity with the people, location and general process can ease tensions and inspire confidence.

Because many of the juveniles we see in proceedings come from countries where governmental authorities are corrupt or pose a danger to them, Immigration Judges need to be particularly aware of the environment in which their hearings are conducted, so that their neutrality and independence is clearly demonstrated, enabling a minor to address difficult issues without fear or a feeling of futility. We must go to great lengths to create an courtroom environment where our hearings are not perceived as coercive. Frequently we find that both children and adults who appear in Immigration Court do not understand the difference in the roles of the government trial attorneys and judges, and even when provided pro bono counsel, assume that everyone associated with the proceeding functions as a prosecutor or law enforcement official. At this early stage some of our judges have reported concerns about the lack of quality of interviews that have resulted in "negative credible fear" findings and summary deportation orders at the border. For all these reasons, it is particularly important that Immigration Judges be the ones charged with making these crucial determinations, rather than Border Patrol agents.

The complexity of a judge's job is increased exponentially due to the language and cultural differences which we routinely encounter, as well as the limitations upon minors who are not represented by attorneys. Under governing regulation, children under sixteen without responsible adults to help them cannot accept service of the charging documents which initiate removal proceedings, and those under fourteen without a responsible adult cannot enter pleadings to those charges. In addition, in the vast majority of cases, the burden of proof to demonstrate eligibility for relief rests on the minor, even though their ability to gather the evidence necessary to support their claim—whether it is personal documentation, general country conditions information or expert opinions—is greatly reduced because of their age. In many cases, the lack of corroborating evidence may be fatal to a claim for relief from removal. This is even more true for a child's case, since their ability to provide clear, consistent and detailed testimony that could support a claim without corroborating evidence may be compromised by their age.

All these factors lead inexorably to the conclusion that removal proceedings regarding juveniles should not be subject to strict time constraints regarding scheduling or decision-making. Judges need the ability to tailor the time frames of various aspects of the proceedings to the emotional, physical and psychological state of the individual in court. The ability to find local counsel or obtain supporting evidence and documentation can vary significantly depending on an individual's age, mental capacity and custodial circumstances.

The adage "haste makes waste" is apropos to the context of these cases, because speeding up or truncating the process creates an unacceptably high risk of legal errors which directly lead to higher rates of appeal. Rather than making the process move more

quickly overall, the opposite occurs as appeals cause a backlog and delay at the higher levels of our court systems, which in turn, drives up the fiscal costs of these proceedings. This effect has been proven by past experience when proceedings at the Board of Immigration Appeals were "streamlined" only to result in an outcry from the federal circuit courts and harsh criticism of the lack of proper records for them to review, resulting in remands rather than resolutions. Similarly, bypasses to Immigration Court proceedings such as expedited removal proceedings have been subject to serious criticisms by neutral observers, including the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees. In this situation, the concern is not that "haste makes waste," but that hasty decisions could result in loss of lives or limbs, by deporting individuals to a country where they face persecution.

It is our experience that when noncitizens are represented by attorneys, Immigration Judges are able to conduct proceedings more expeditiously and resolve cases more quickly. Judges have found that cases with legal representation generally 1) reduce the number and length of proceedings for benefits for which individuals are ineligible; 2) generally require fewer continuances for preparation (including when applications must be processed with other agencies); 3) obviate appeals based on a lack of understanding regarding legal rights or concerns about fairness; 4) take less hearing time for judges because they are better researched and organized; and 5) tend to reduce the number of futile claims which utterly lack a basis in the law. Because of those and several additional reasons why attorneys are beneficial to our process, allowing judges to grant reasonable requests for continuances, based on their knowledge of the local availability of low fee and pro bono counsel, ends up being the most time-efficient approach.

A due process review of the fundamental fairness of any proceeding requires consideration of three distinct factors: first, the nature of the private interest affected; second, the risk of an erroneous deprivation through the procedures used and the probable value of additional or substitute procedural safeguards; and finally, the fiscal and administrative burdens that those additional or substitute procedural requirements would place on the government. Immigration Judges are in the best position to guarantee due process, while at the same time efficiently and fairly conducting removal proceedings. However, to do so, they must be given the flexibility to balance the needs of the individual appearing in court with the interests of an expeditious adjudication based on the unique situation presented in each case. Rigid deadlines hamper rather than enhance that ability, and artificial constraints on the time necessary to fairly adjudicate cases will likely promote litigation, rather than resolve individual cases. For all these reasons, NAIJ strongly opposes the proposed implementation of a seven-day adjudication time frame for these cases.

With the proper allocation of resources to allow the hiring of sufficient Immigration Judges and support staff to assist them, we would be able to schedule all hearings within appropriate time frames. Justice would be served and legal challenges to individual outcomes reduced. While the need to address the surge in juveniles is seen as paramount now, the overall context of this crisis cannot be overlooked. As of today's date, there are only 228 full time Immigration Judges in field offices, handling a nationwide caseload of more than 375,500 cases. The average time to decision nationally has now climbed to 587 days. The unfortunate and ironic fact is that

with long delays, people whose cases will eventually be granted relief suffer, while those with cases which will ultimately be denied benefit. Individuals with "strong" cases are trapped in limbo inside the United States while family members abroad become ill and die, family members who can provide them with eligibility for an immigration benefit die, and their claim for relief becomes stale by the passage of time. Conversely, those individuals who do not qualify for benefits, or who have adverse discretionary factors making them undeserving of legal status are allowed to remain for years, possibly accruing eligibility for relief, while their cases are pending.

We believe that the totality of this situation deserves your immediate attention, so that fairness and balance can be assured to all who appear in our nation's Immigration Courts. If the general needs of our entire caseload are sacrificed to address the short term crisis, we fear that the overall reputation of the Immigration Court system will be damaged unnecessarily and irreparably.

Of course, if we can provide any additional information or answer specific questions you may have, please just let us know.

Very truly yours,

DANA LEIGH MARKS,
President.

□ 1830

PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. COOK). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. POCAN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be here today on behalf of the Progressive Caucus, along with other members of the Progressive Caucus. We have long fought for the middle class and those aspiring to be in the middle class. Today, specifically, we want to address Congressman PAUL RYAN's plan to help alleviate poverty in this Nation.

Needless to say, we were excited to find out a Republican wanted to talk about poverty, given the votes that we have had this session in this body. Whether it be the draconian cuts that appeared in the House Republican budget, the slashing of food stamps and assistance to the most needy in this country, to see a Republican finally stand up and talk about poverty, we were excited. And we want to have that conversation this evening.

So just what is in Congressman PAUL RYAN's plan to help alleviate poverty? I am sure it must be something about raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 in the next 3 years so that we can help lift people who are making \$15,000 a year out of poverty. I am sure it addresses equal pay for equal work so that men and women are paid for doing the same work. But it doesn't appear that is part of PAUL RYAN's plan.

I am sure it addresses some educational issues. I am sure it helps people pay back their loans at lower rates and makes sure we have expanded Pell grants available so that no one should be denied a higher education simply because they can't afford it. No, that is not part of the Ryan plan either.

I am sure there is an investment in early childhood education, because every person in this room must surely know that if we help invest at those earliest years, you can have a lifetime of experiences and opportunities for someone. That is not in the plan either.

Surely, it must address investments in infrastructure. We have crumbling roads and bridges. We have bridges and roads that are old enough that they are eligible for Medicare in this country. Surely, putting people back to work at a time like this and investing in our infrastructure would make sense. It is also not in the Ryan plan.

Let me try one more thing. It has got to be here. We must provide incentives to create good-paying jobs here in America rather than overseas. Clearly, the 21st century Make It In America Act must not be in the plan either.

All those things that I just mentioned—raising the minimum wage, making sure we have equal pay for equal work, expanding opportunity through expanded Pell grants and helping people refinance their student loans, helping people get access to early education and investing in our infrastructure and jobs here at home—are part of the House Democratic Middle Class Jumpstart program. They are what we would do in our first 100 days if we were to take over the majority after this fall.

But surely there must be something we could talk about today in PAUL RYAN's plan. There has got to be something equally bold and, hopefully, not just old, a bunch of old ideas warmed over, brought back to us in versions of block grants and not really providing any real assistance that the most needy in this country need.

I am joined by a number of my colleagues today who are going to address exactly what is in PAUL RYAN's plan and perhaps how we can offer a little different perspective to help the most needy in our country.

I would like to start out with a very esteemed and respected colleague from Illinois, Representative DANNY DAVIS.

Mr. DANNY K. DAVIS of Illinois. Thank you very much. I am pleased to be here to join you, Mr. POCAN, and other members of the Progressive Caucus as we talk about the real deal in terms of what it is that you do to reduce poverty.

I read some of what we are talking about, and I really couldn't believe that that had anything to do with the reduction or any efforts to seriously reduce poverty.

We have made some progress in the last 50 years, but it is unacceptable that 49.7 million people, including 13 million children, were poor in 2012. In my congressional district alone, 41 percent of children, or 67,000 children, live in poverty. It also is shameful that racial disparities remain in the experience of poverty, with child poverty for African Americans being 29.2 percent, in 2012, compared to 9 percent for their White peers.

And so I welcome working with anybody that would like to reduce poverty. As a matter of fact, ever since I have been here, I have championed two of the chief proposals mentioned by the Ryan plan: expanding the earned income tax credit to childless and non-custodial parents, as well as reducing incarceration among low-risk and non-violent offenders.

The earned income tax credit is one of the most effective antipoverty programs that we have. A Brookings Institution report highlights that the high rate of incarceration in our country exacts considerable cost from American taxpayers, especially from State governments and families.

However, I am extremely concerned about the proposed way of paying for these programs. Rather than asking large corporations to pay their fair share of taxes or closing international tax loopholes that allow large, multinational companies to evade billions of dollars in taxes, the Ryan plan would eliminate or eviscerate many important programs like the Social Services Block Grant and the Economic Development Administration.

So I don't know what Mr. RYAN is really talking about. It seems to me that he is talking the same talk we have heard so often.

Ms. MOORE. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. POCAN. I yield to the gentleman from Wisconsin.

Ms. MOORE. Mr. DAVIS, you are a member of the Ways and Means Committee so perhaps we can seek some clarification on the earned income tax credit expansion, which you say you have championed, and that is a very effective antipoverty program, one of the elements in the Ryan antipoverty program that you say is a good feature but you object to the pay-for for the expansion of the earned income tax credit.

In order to expand it to folks up to age 64, as he proposes, which is a great idea—and incentives work, because he says a lot of poor people don't want to work—this would enable low-income people to have that subsidy through the Tax Code, as we benefit many corporations that same way.

Just recently, the Ways and Means Committee just extended about \$618 billion of corporate taxes. I am wondering what the pay-for for these corporate extenders were.

Mr. DANNY K. DAVIS of Illinois. They didn't really deal with pay-fors. As a matter of fact, one of the reasons that many of us objected to the piecemeal way in which the Republicans are looking at what we call tax reform is we have been trying to move towards comprehensive tax reform where you look at all of the taxation that we are doing. And yes, there would be what is called some losers and some winners, but you wouldn't cherry pick and just give corporate giveaways and not do things like make sure that you have got the new market tax credits in, which are designed to help redevelop,

restore, and reconstitute communities that are hurting, that are seriously underfunded and don't have things.

Many communities in my district which were actually burned out by the riots after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King are still burned out.

Ms. MOORE. Mr. DAVIS, that was very confusing to me, and I will take my seat, but I just wanted clarification on that.

The earned income tax credit, which is a benefit that is provided to ordinary Americans through the Tax Code, we are required to eviscerate programs like Meals on Wheels for elders through the Social Services Block Grant and to get rid of maybe some of the low-income heating programs that heat homes in places like Chicago that are cold in order to pay for an expansion of the earned income tax credit, but the \$618 billion in tax cuts which were designed to be just temporary but you made permanent the other day, I guess you pay for it by not giving unemployment compensation to people.

Mr. DANNY K. DAVIS of Illinois. Let's say the majority on the committee made it permanent because we voted—that is, those of us who are Democrats voted against it. That is why I think it is so important that we are here this evening.

I just simply want to again commend Mr. POCAN for taking the leadership to bring us together and give us the opportunity to discuss these issues.

I just say: Right on, my brother. I am glad to be here with you.

□ 1845

Mr. POCAN. Thank you, Representative DAVIS, so much for all of your advocacy on behalf of those who are struggling to be in the middle class and for making sure we can try to reduce poverty.

Representative DAVIS is right. There are a couple of nuggets that are in the Ryan proposal that make sense. I think there could be bipartisan support for criminal sentencing reform. There should be, and it is long past due, and it is good to see that proposed in the plan.

As Representative GWEN MOORE from Milwaukee so eloquently put forth, expanding tax credits for childless workers is something through the earned income tax credit we would support except that, perhaps, the Ryan proposal doesn't quite fund it in a way that makes sense.

So there are a few nuggets in there, but there is an awful lot that really doesn't do much about reducing poverty and, in fact, would probably, very likely, increase poverty in the near term.

I would like to yield to another colleague of mine, to someone who has been this body's, really, most outspoken person in talking about poverty. She is leading a task force for the Democratic Caucus that specifically addresses poverty. I would like to yield to my great colleague from the State

of California, Representative BARBARA LEE.

Ms. LEE of California. Thank you very much.

Let me thank you, Mr. POCAN, for yielding but also for organizing, not only this Special Order tonight, but for having these Special Orders in order to really raise a level of awareness with regard to these important issues facing millions of Americans in our country. We know that you are here every week, sometimes by yourself, but I have to thank you for your tremendous leadership and for helping the Progressive Caucus continue to beat the drum on behalf of the American people.

Mr. Speaker, we all know today that, of course, the Republican Budget Committee chair, PAUL RYAN, rolled out his expanding opportunities for all plan for addressing poverty in America. That is what it is called.

I can say, like you, I am happy to see that there are some areas we can work on together in this plan. That includes fixing our broken criminal justice system, expanding and supporting the earned income tax credit if we don't, as his plan calls for, rob Peter to pay Paul. I am glad to see that the conversation on poverty in this country is finally catching up and catching on with my Republican colleagues at the national level.

We have been working for a long time—our task force, you, all of us here tonight on this floor and others—to try to get this urgent issue the attention it really requires here in the House of Representatives, but we know that, ultimately, most of Mr. RYAN's recommendations are more about rhetoric than reality.

My question in looking at his list of proposals is, first of all: Where is the jobs plan? We all know that the primary means and pathway out of poverty is a good-paying job with benefits.

Add to that that his proposal has, really, the same—I call it—old-time block granting proposals that we have seen, once again, for, I guess, 4 years in the Ryan budget. In fact, if you will recall, the Ryan Republican budget takes more than two-thirds of its cuts from programs that serve low-income and vulnerable Americans. When he talks about consolidating programs, including SNAP, into block grants, it is as if he is forgetting that his budget cuts \$300 billion in these 11 programs for the next 10 years. I can't quite figure out why the rhetoric in the plan lays this out, but yet his budget takes the same plan and cuts \$300 billion.

It does nothing, as I said, to create jobs. It does nothing to provide Americans a living wage or to extend unemployment insurance to the 3.3 million long-term unemployed. People really need to understand that this plan is not about substance. It is about Republicans trying to put a compassionate face on their draconian policies. That is what this is about.

Some of us have raised some key questions about this proposal, and I

would like to just lay out some of these questions when we are evaluating his plan. The House Ways and Means Committee, under the tremendous leadership of our ranking member, SANDY LEVIN, laid out some of these questions, which include:

Does compassionate conservatism really just mean cutting spending while saying you are about caring for the poor?

Will this plan include proposals that have been shown to both reward work and reduce poverty, such as increasing the minimum wage and extending benefits to the long-term unemployed who are looking for work?

Will Representative RYAN support flexible assistance to States to help struggling Americans or will he push States to cut such assistance?

Will Mr. RYAN's proposal fit into a balanced approach to address the deficit?

I just have to say, Mr. POCAN and others who are listening tonight, in this block granting proposal and in many of his proposals, there are work requirements. For any of the services or for any of the programs, you have to have a job. They have cut workforce training, and they have not created any jobs, so their work requirement as eligibility for programs that help provide this bridge over troubled waters just doesn't make any sense. It is wrong. Unless you have got a full-employment economy and unless the recession has really ensured that everyone has a good-paying job, then a work requirement to be eligible for benefits in order to help reduce poverty or to help lift you out of poverty is just counterproductive, and it doesn't make any sense. This is something that we have to continue to work on in terms of Mr. RYAN. We need this conversation. It needs to be bipartisan.

This week, some of us are taking the Live the Wage Challenge from the Raise the Wage coalition. We are living on \$77 a week, which is what a minimum wage employee in this country has to live on after taxes and housing expenses. We are doing this, though, to raise awareness of the everyday struggles of millions of our constituents. We will be off of this \$77-a-week budget in a week, but millions of our constituents won't be. I wish that this plan would really have a pathway so that millions of our constituents would be able to live off of a good-paying job with benefits.

Finally, let me just say that this Congress should focus on supporting and expanding programs that are working to lift people out of poverty—programs that have worked for the last 50 years since the war on poverty began—such as Head Start. I will tell you that we have got a long way to go. We shouldn't talk about cutting these programs. They have helped people move into the middle class. We know that. We should not play politics with poverty.

I hope the Republicans really get real about reducing poverty rather than

trying to fool the public, and that is what is happening now. They are trying to fool the public with this new brand, and it is a new brand of conservative compassion, but I will tell you that this rhetoric has nothing to do with the reality of the Ryan budget. This is where the rubber meets the road.

Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to talk about this.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you, Representative LEE.

Representative LEE and I and Representative MOORE all serve on the Budget Committee, and we have had a lot of time to see the PAUL RYAN Republican budget.

When you talk about the SNAP program, I will just give one example. I remember, in this body, we had a debate as to whether we were going to cut \$20 billion or eventually \$39 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Yet we knew, when the Ryan budget was proposed—the Republican budget that was voted on in this body—the cuts to the SNAP program were \$135 billion. Either there has been a rebirth in how we look at poverty from the other side of the aisle or, perhaps, there is just a little different packaging of some of the same bad ideas that just sound a little better, and I really appreciate your bringing those out.

Ms. MOORE. Before you leave, I wanted to know if you would respond to a question, Ms. LEE.

Ms. LEE of California. Yes.

Ms. MOORE. You mentioned in your remarks that, in the Budget Committee and on the budget that this House passed, there were 300—was it “billion” dollars in cuts?

Ms. LEE of California. It was \$300 billion by consolidating the 11 programs that he wants to block grant to the States.

Ms. MOORE. But what he says in his rollout is that this is budget neutral, which means that it won't cost taxpayers any more. It is budget neutral, and it won't cost taxpayers any more, but it also will not cut programs. It is a really clever sort of budgeting trick on one hand, don't you think, to say you are not going to cut it from where you have already cut it?

Ms. LEE of California. It is more than clever. I think it is wrong to mislead the public as it relates to the numbers. It is cooking the books. It is robbing Peter to pay Paul. It may be budget neutral, but, definitely, the cuts will take place in order to get to a budget neutral plan, and that is the problem I have with this. By consolidating all of these programs and by block-granting these programs, who is going to see the cuts and feel the cuts of the block granting? It is going to be the most vulnerable.

Thank you very much for raising that, but it is true. We see this on the Budget Committee each and every day.

Mr. POCAN. Representative LEE, if you would yield to one more question

since we are talking about the bad math that we all too often see from the other side of the aisle: Didn't we also, during the budget, see some incredibly bad math when it came to the budget's repealing the benefits of the Affordable Care Act but its somehow trying to keep the revenue in savings? Wasn't that bad math something like \$2 trillion worth of bad math, and now we are supposed to accept this \$300 billion, allegedly, "no cuts" to the program? What were those numbers?

Ms. LEE of California. It was very interesting. Of course, they have opposed the Affordable Care Act and have tried to repeal it—what?—50-some times now, but yet have captured the savings, which the Affordable Care Act is very clear on having made, to base their budget on those captured savings.

I think that, again, it is fuzzy math, and it is a way to deceive the public. It is a way to promote their policies of making sure that those who have access to affordable health care now don't have it in the future and that those who need it will be prevented from gaining it through the Affordable Care Act.

Ms. MOORE. I just want to ask you one more question about this fuzzy math, Congresswoman, since you serve on the Budget Committee.

The SNAP program is an entitlement program. What it means is, if you are eligible for food stamps, you receive them. Food stamps were critical in getting people over the hump in the recession. People sometimes reported that their only income was these food stamps.

So, if you see block grant SNAP—and correct me if I am wrong—what that means is that no matter how bad the economy becomes—because we have a countercyclical economy if we get a recession or a depression—and no matter how many people are eligible for food stamps, once you get your block grant, your some certain amount of money, and once that money runs out, then you will find yourself on a waiting list or not being served. Is that how you understand a "block grant"?

Ms. LEE of California. Exactly, Congresswoman MOORE. I am glad you raised that because that is exactly what happens.

First of all, there will be some requirements of the States but not many, and once the States run out of money, it is too bad. Food stamp recipients may or may not receive the type of assistance they need to help them with this as a bridge over troubled waters. It is not a fair system. We would see more people being cut from SNAP rolls, and we would also see more people needing food stamps because of the safety net being eroded even further. So it is a catch-23. Block-granting all of this to the States would harm the most vulnerable.

Ms. MOORE. Thank you.

Mr. POCAN. Again, thank you, Representative LEE. I appreciate it. Your final comments about how hard it is to

actually be able to eat a block grant, perhaps, is part of the problem of why we don't quite trust what we see in that it will work as presented. Thank you so much for your time.

I would like to yield to another colleague of mine who is also from the State of California. He is one of my fellow freshman colleagues, Representative MARK TAKANO.

Mr. TAKANO. I thank the gentleman from Wisconsin for yielding.

Earlier today, your colleague from Wisconsin (Mr. RYAN) released his long-awaited antipoverty plan. This is a bold step for Mr. RYAN because, if you look at the history of the Republican Party, there is a clear and undeniable pattern of implementing policies that help the top 2 percent but that do nothing for those struggling to make ends meet. Of course, they have proposed various "reforms" over the years, but those initiatives were never anything other than safety net cuts or ineffective, recycled ideas disguised as reform. I am thinking of a childhood jingle, "Jack and the Beanstalk"—Fee-fi-fo-fum. I smell the budget of faux reform.

□ 1900

That appears to be the case here.

Mr. RYAN calls his new plan an "Opportunity Grant," as it would consolidate safety net programs such as food stamps and housing vouchers into a single grant to States.

If that sounds familiar, that is because an "Opportunity Grant" is nothing more than block grants under a new name, and block grants have been shown to have limited impact in helping to lift people out of poverty.

Now, if Mr. RYAN really wanted to lift people out of poverty, he would support a raise in the minimum wage. Raising the minimum wage will increase the take-home pay for more than 28 million workers, add \$35 billion to the economy in higher wages through 2016, and create 85,000 new jobs as a result of increased economic opportunity.

At the very least, I know that my colleague, BARBARA LEE from California, is, as I am, undertaking the challenge to live on a minimum wage by living off of \$77, the average amount of money left over for full-time minimum wage workers after taxes and housing expenses.

I would challenge Mr. RYAN to step inside the shoes of someone who is living on that minimum wage. Although I know I could never fully understand what it is like, this challenge will give me a small glimpse into the lives of many people in my district.

So I would like to invite Mr. RYAN to participate in the challenge so he can, for a brief moment, understand what it is like for people in poverty to live on such a wage. Perhaps then Mr. RYAN will understand that the same old recycled ideas will not help those who really are in need.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you, Representative TAKANO, for all the work you are doing.

Mr. Speaker, next I would like to yield to a colleague of mine from the great State of Wisconsin (Ms. MOORE), a great friend of mine going back to the days in the State legislature, not only a great friend, but a great mentor to me.

Ms. MOORE. Thank you so much, Mr. POCAN. And I want to join my other colleagues for thanking you for your stewardship with the Progressive Caucus and putting this Special Order together.

I won't waste a lot of time complimenting our fellow Wisconsinite for at least listening to some of the ideas that have come from the Democratic side in his poverty plan. I think that looking at mandatory minimums is a long overdue sort of proposal that needs to get some traction.

Certainly, expanding the earned income tax credit for millions of Americans will make a true difference in many people's lives, and I just want to congratulate Mr. RYAN for that.

But let me be really clear. You don't have to really go through the entire 70 pages of his proposal because he starts right out in the beginning telling you that he doesn't believe that the safety net programs, that the efforts to help people get out of poverty for all these years, have been very helpful. He starts off by calling them a failure.

We all know that many of the programs created under FDR and President Lyndon Baines Johnson literally ended poverty among the elderly, for example. And we have seen poverty, as compared to what it would have been, cut at least by half because of Medicaid, because of Medicare, because of food stamps, because of other sorts of programs.

Yet, I guess Mr. RYAN believes that if you just keep saying it enough times, it will come true. We have heard Mr. RYAN lecture all of us, all over the country, about how the so-called entitlement programs are going to down our economy. He doesn't believe that the \$618 billion worth of corporate tax breaks that he passed last week is a detriment to our economy, but he has called for, on a consistent basis, for privatizing Social Security, for block-granting Medicaid—not in this particular plan.

In case people don't understand what block-granting is, just think chopping block. You give the States some certain amount of money, and when they run out, they just run out. You are no longer categorically eligible.

He has proposed voucherizing Medicare, giving seniors some certain amount of money. You do very well if all you need is a flu shot. But if you have a heart attack or a stroke, that is not going to go very far toward your health care.

He has consistently—and now, in this particular proposal, block-granting one of the great entitlement programs, the SNAP program, which worked beautifully in the last recession. We now see the food stamp rolls going down, as

the economy improves. And when the economy is bad, the food stamp rolls go up.

That did not happen with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Act. It was not responsive to our countercyclical economy. So what that really means is that these block-granted programs were fixed, framed, and frozen, starting out with a \$300 billion cut. Eventually we will see that they will become totally inadequate toward ameliorating poverty, and we will see the poverty rolls creep up, and it will be particularly egregious on women and children.

Women and children: women, are disproportionately adversely impacted and benefit from these safety net programs. Food stamps: women disproportionately need food stamps, disproportionately use these programs.

The pay-fors, it is just egregious to say that we will provide the earned income tax credit and we will start by cutting programs like Meals on Wheels for the elderly and the food and nutrition programs for children.

Go right for the food, right at the bottom of the hierarchy of needs. Go right straight there and take food, literally, out of poor people's mouths in order to pay for the earned income tax credit expansion.

I wish we had sort of done that last week when we passed the \$618 billion of corporate welfare without a pay-for at all.

So I just say that this is yet another chapter in a book we have seen before. This is just another incarnation of an idea that there is some moral hazard to helping poor people, that you have got to restrict and limit how much you do for them, and that most of the money that is generated through our economy ought to be plowed back into helping corporations and not people.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you, Representative MOORE. You have been an advocate your entire life for those who are most needy, those trying to aspire to be in the middle class. Thank you for all that you do, and so articulately explaining the problems with PAUL RYAN's proposal.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to now yield to another colleague of mine, a colleague from the great State of Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO), who is the chair of our very important policy and steering committee, and a good friend and colleague of mine in the Progressive Caucus.

Ms. DELAURO. I thank the gentleman. I can't thank you enough for the great work that you are doing and being such a leader on issues that focus on what this institution has, by way of offering opportunity for people. That is its mission. We know that.

I thank you for coming to the Congress for the right reasons, and for helping to try to make a difference in people's lives.

A rose is a rose is a rose. Once again, Chairman RYAN has come forward with what he and the Republican majority

purport to be a serious plan for addressing poverty in America. And once again, the centerpiece of his plan is the same old bad idea.

Chairman RYAN wants to dismantle all of the major Federal antipoverty programs that have long been proven to work for families in need. He wants to convert them into a block grant for the States. He now calls them Opportunity Grants.

That is a message. It sounds good. They are block grants, pure and simple. They put decisions in the hands of the States. They cut the funding, and they take all of the safeguards out and they fray the social safety net. That is what it is about. They have been consistent about this year after year after year.

I will just tell you about the food stamp program. Congressman POCAN, you were not here 17 years ago. I was, when the then-Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, said we need to block-grant the SNAP program, Medicaid, and a variety of other programs. It is the same failed policy over and over and over again.

Let me talk about food stamps for a second. Food stamps helped to lift 5 million Americans above the poverty line in 2012, 2.2 million of them children.

Every single dollar invested in food stamps generates \$1.79 in local economic activity. But what would Chairman RYAN do?

He would end food stamps, our Nation's most important antihunger initiative, in favor of a block grant, just like he would end the low-income energy assistance program, LIHEAP, child care fund, weatherization assistance, public housing, temporary assistance for needy families, community development grants, and dislocated worker grants.

If you read his report, it is almost diabolical in the sense that the language that is used, and it is language, and it is a message, and it does nothing to provide opportunity or to help the poor in this country.

There are some good parts of his antipoverty plan. Expanding the EITC for childless workers. But even that issue is infected with bad ideas.

To pay for this EITC expansion already introduced by the Democratic Party, Mr. RYAN would end programs like the social services block grant, which helps roughly 23 million Americans, half of them children, with child care assistance, child abuse prevention, and community-based care for seniors and disabled persons.

He also wants to end the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, which—it is madness—which reaches over 115,000 students in 14 States with healthy foods. And then he will decry people who are on food stamps and say they are selecting the wrong foods for their families, when he will just cut the Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program.

What have we come to here?

What is this harshness that has come over our public policy, that mean-spir-

itedness that has come over our public policy?

For over a year now, Chairman RYAN has tried to pretend that he wants to put forth serious proposals to alleviate poverty in America. But the proof is in the pudding.

Look at his most recently proposed budget. Two-thirds of the cut in that budget fall on low and middle-income families. It tries to turn Medicare into an underfunded voucher program, shreds our social safety net, block-grants food stamps and Medicaid, slashes the WIC program, that is Women, Infants and Children, by \$595 million.

It cuts spending that we do every year on health issues, on worker training, on education. He tries to cut that program by \$791 billion over the next 10 years.

It slashes the child care assistance program, as I said, job training program, Pell grants, and medical research.

I am a cancer survivor. I am alive because of the grace of God and biomedical research. Why shouldn't other people have the advantage of biomedical research?

Why would he want to cut that?

And he does this all while cutting taxes for the wealthiest.

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I am glad to see that Chairman RYAN at least recognizes that he and his party need to be doing more to help end poverty and hunger in our Nation, and I hope we can engage in a constructive dialogue on issues like the EITC expansion and sentencing reform.

If Chairman RYAN and the Republican majority want to get serious about helping families in need, they can start tomorrow. They need to make sure that their Republican child tax credit bill—so generous to those who can afford it—that they need to make sure that that helps low-income kids as well.

That child tax credit program will cut the child tax credit for 450,000 veterans. What are our veterans doing? They are serving. They are sacrificing themselves and their families, and he wants to cut their child tax credit. That is what is in there.

Then he talks about the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. Let me ask Chairman RYAN: What about low-income kids? What about them? What about the infants and toddlers? Tell us, Mr. Chairman, who are the "deserving" infants and toddlers? Who are the "undeserving" infants and toddlers? We need an answer to our question.

Our colleagues could join us in raising the minimum wage, something that is long overdue, but until then, actions speak louder than words.

The bulk of this new plan, I am afraid, is the same old snake oil, the same tired, discredited, ideological attacks on the social safety net that Chairman RYAN and this majority have been putting forward time and again

since coming to power in 2010. It will not wash. It is harsh. It is cruel, and it is mean-spirited.

That is not why we came to this institution, Mr. POCAN. It is not why you came. It is not why I came. It was the hope and the dream and the opportunity to provide opportunity for the people of this Nation, to make this institution do what our Founding Fathers thought it should do and to give people a chance.

This Expanding Opportunity in America will take away people's opportunities, and the American public knows it.

Thank you for what you are doing. It is an honor to work with you and the gentlewoman from Wisconsin (Ms. MOORE), Congressman RYAN of Ohio, and our other colleagues who stood on this floor tonight to decry this shame of a document.

Mr. POCAN. Again, thank you so much, Representative DELAURO, for your many years of service to this body and to the people of the country and fighting for those who need help the most.

I now would like to yield to another colleague of mine, but I am not going to say "Representative RYAN" because that might be confusing, given the conversation we are having, but let's say maybe the Budget Committee's other Representative RYAN, the Democratic Representative RYAN from the State of Ohio.

So I yield to another Budget Committee member, Representative TIM RYAN.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I thank the gentleman.

My office does get a lot of phone calls against this budget, but they are not realizing that I am supporting them against the Paul Ryan budget. I think these reforms—and I was able to come a little bit earlier and listen to some of my colleagues talk about what is in this document that is supposed to be a new idea, a new way, a new approach—and while I commend Chairman RYAN for trying to come up with some new ideas, I am all about innovation. I am all about a new approach.

I think the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO) hit the nail on the head when she was talking about the fruits and vegetables and the healthy food.

If we are going to move forward as a country, if we want to make sure we take care of the issue of half the country in the next 10 years is going to either have diabetes or prediabetes—and it is going to drive up Medicaid costs, it is going to drive up Medicare costs, it is going to drive up private insurance—one of the issues we need to focus on is how do we get more money into programs that are going to make sure young kids have access to fresh foods, period.

We don't need to get really complicated. We don't need to come up with any new grand scheme. We have already got it. It is already in there,

and Chairman RYAN is taking it out, deinvesting in the very things that are going to drive down health care costs, make kids better able to learn and focus and concentrate on the classroom, so they are not having a Fruit Roll-Up and think that it is fruit. They are having fruits and vegetables and access to food over the weekends and all of these things.

I find it extremely interesting that a majority of the cuts that the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. RYAN) proposed to reduce poverty—and in his budgets, two-thirds of the savings in the FY15 Republican budget came from programs that serve these populations, including moving millions out of the SNAP program.

So a new approach is great, innovation is fantastic, but we know what we need to do, and it starts with diet. It starts with wellness. It starts with some of these other things that are going to allow that person who may be living in poverty to be as strong and capable, as healthy as they possibly can, so they can work themselves out of poverty.

Nobody here is defending the status quo—oh, great, people are accessing public funds or public programs—we want to get people on a ladder out of poverty. That is what America should be all about, but we are failing miserably, and this program and the cuts that Chairman RYAN is talking about are going to make it worse.

I think we rank 10th or 11th in people coming up from poverty, lower socioeconomic status, and finally making their way to the middle class. We rank down from other countries—Nordic countries and the rest.

I want to thank the gentleman for doing this. I think this is an amazing opportunity for us to provide some contrast to what Chairman RYAN has proposed, but let me say I think one of the most direct benefits for the war on poverty is an increase in the minimum wage, and today—ironically enough—is the 5-year anniversary since the minimum wage has been increased.

Some States are higher than the \$7.25 Federal minimum wage. In Ohio, it is \$7.95 and is indexed for inflation, which is better, but it is not anywhere near where we need to be.

I wanted to come and talk for a couple of minutes about what we need to do and what the benefits would be, and I know we normally hear from somebody who is going to say this is going to cost jobs, this is going to slow down economic growth and all the rest, and I will share with them a study that just came out from Labor that said that the 13 States that increased the minimum wage this year had some increase—whether indexed for inflation or through legislation—saw an increase in the minimum wage, had more rapid job growth than all of the other States.

For those people who don't understand how that could be—because we hear so much rhetoric: this is going to cost jobs, this is going to cost jobs—if

the average family has more money in their pocket to go out and buy things, that is good for the economy.

Imagine if the Walmarts and the Sam's Clubs and all the rest had a higher minimum wage, if those folks were making an extra couple bucks an hour—and it doesn't have to happen tomorrow. We can do it and stage it over the course of the next few years to make sure it doesn't have a dramatic impact on business—but if all of those folks made an extra \$16 or \$20 a day, an extra \$100 a week, an extra \$200 every two weeks of pay, an extra \$400 a month, that is a lot of money.

That is enough to go out and get a Chevy Cruze made in Lordstown, Ohio, and pay the insurance and the rest on that. What does that do for the economy if the 1.5 million people in the country—the 62,000 people in my congressional district who make the minimum wage go out and have a little bit of extra money? That is how you are going to move the economy.

Maybe we could get rid of some of these programs because that family will have access to the food because they will have a little bit more money in their pockets, so they will be able to afford the fruits and vegetables and the kinds of food they need to stay healthy, prevent disease, and be able to concentrate and focus in the classroom.

I just want to make two last points. The first is zero increase in the minimum wage, and if you are in the private sector, you have seen a 10 percent increase in earnings, just 10 percent over the past 4 or 5 years since 2009. If you want to go out and get apples, 16 percent increase—bacon has gone up 67 percent; cheddar cheese, 20 percent; milk, 20 percent; eggs, 30 percent; gas, there has been a 44.5 percent increase in gas since 2009.

Now, if you are making minimum wage and all of these costs are going up—for eggs and milk and gas and bacon and coffee, coffee went up 27 percent, the kinds of things that are basic staples to the American diet—how are you going to keep up? How are you going to say, oh, I want to send my kid to a basketball camp in the summer or maybe an afterschool program or I need a baby sitter or I need to catch a cab? You don't have any extra money. You just don't.

I think it is essential for us, if we are going to close the income inequality gap between the wealthiest in our country and the poorest in our country, if we are going to close that, if we want people to work hard and play by the rules and then benefit, this is something that is very simple.

We get a lot of rhetoric. We heard it in the last Presidential election: 47 percent of the country are takers, they want to be on the dole, they don't want to work.

Then we have something that is going to benefit the people who are working, doing the jobs that many Americans don't want to do, cleaning

the hotel rooms, working at the gas station, the wear and tear on their bodies over the years, the long hours, swing shifts, and the whole lot. This increase will not just benefit minimum wage workers. It is going to go up and benefit everybody.

The last point—I promise—we need minimum wage workers who are out there to be organized. We didn't always have a 40-hour workweek. We didn't always get time-and-a-half over 40 hours. We didn't always have a 5-day workweek. We didn't have a National Labor Relations Act. We didn't have Social Security. We didn't have Medicare.

These were things that came about because average people got organized, and they said enough is enough. We are not going to have our senior citizens work until they die. We are not going to have our senior citizens not have health care. We are not going to have people working in unsafe factories—and you are going to work 40 hours a week.

From our side, we expect people to go out and work and work their butts off to get ahead. Our job is to stay organized, to make sure that policies are in place that are both good for the economy and good for families in the United States.

I thank the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. POCAN) for the opportunity to come here and share just briefly. I look forward to working with you. Hopefully, we can get a vote on the House floor sometime soon. I don't think we will. I am not really optimistic about it, but I hope that we can organize over the next few months and years to make this a reality for all of those families in the United States.

Mr. POCAN. I thank the gentleman from Ohio, Representative RYAN, for all you have done in your relentless fight on behalf of the workers in your district, and thank you so much, again, for being here today.

Finally, I would like to yield to a colleague of mine—another freshman colleague of mine from the great State of New York, Representative HAKEEM JEFFRIES.

Mr. JEFFRIES. I thank my good friend, the distinguished gentleman from the Badger State, for yielding to me, as well as for the tremendous leadership that you continue to exhibit week after week in leading the Congressional Progressive Caucus' Special Order hour, championing issues important to working families and the poor and the sick and the afflicted, those who need our government to be more compassionate, giving them the assistance they need in order to pursue the American Dream.

I appreciate that advocacy, and I appreciate this opportunity to speak briefly on the plan presented by Chairman PAUL RYAN, Expanding Opportunity in America.

I would like to believe that that is the objective, and I certainly am of the view that the chairman is acting in good faith, as it relates to his willing-

ness to try to tackle the issue of poverty in America, but if you put it all in the context of the Ryan budget that has come to the floor of the House of Representatives year after year after year since the Republicans claimed the majority, which passed with overwhelming support from their caucus, the question is: Is their real interest in expanding opportunity in America, or is the fundamental objective really to expand inequality in America?

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What PAUL RYAN are we talking to in attempting to have this conversation? Is it the Chairman RYAN whose budget cut \$125 billion in supplemental nutrition assistance in a country where 50 million people are food insecure, 18 million of those individuals children? We can't have a real conversation about opportunity if that is still the position of Chairman RYAN, his Budget Committee, and the majority.

Are we having a conversation with a chairman whose budget cut \$260 billion in higher education funding, threatening to rob young Americans from their pursuit of their dream of obtaining a college education and being all that they can be in America? We can't have a real conversation about opportunity with individuals who want to cut \$260 billion in higher education spending.

I want to believe that we can proceed in good faith and try and tackle this issue. But are we entering into a discussion with the same group of individuals, the chairman whose budget cut \$732 billion in Medicaid, a program designed to benefit, in significant numbers, poor, elderly, and disabled individuals? That is not expanding opportunity in America. That is expanding inequality in America.

Certainly, there are some proposals contained in the document that was unveiled today that we can embrace and have a meaningful discussion about in trying to arrive at common ground—sentencing reform as well as the notion of expanding the earned income tax credit. But there is no minimum wage enhancement. There is no infrastructure investment. There is no unemployment compensation insurance renewal. There is no equal pay for equal work, and there is no real effort to deal with the issues that we are prepared to work on to solve the problem of poverty for millions of Americans. For that reason, I am skeptical that this is a step in the right direction.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you, Representative JEFFRIES. I, too, am skeptical. Having served on the Budget Committee with you, we have seen two different PAUL RYANS. We are hoping that maybe this is a reformed PAUL RYAN, but we are also fearful this is just a repackaged PAUL RYAN. So thank you so much.

Finally, I would like to yield to a colleague from the Progressive Caucus from the great State of Texas, Representative SHEILA JACKSON LEE.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I can't thank you enough for leading this Special Order. Again, the passion that you have shown in your service here in the United States Congress really speaks to what Americans send their representatives to the Congress for, to be problem solvers.

I am going to use the word "pray." I pray that there is a reformed Chairman RYAN, Congressman RYAN, because I have come from my district, you go to your district, and we see the pain. I see the pain of those who have not been able to secure an unemployment insurance extension. I live with the value of the earned income tax credit. I am going to spend a little time on that.

My son, some many years ago as a young man, volunteered with the HOPE Project. He went to New Orleans right after Hurricane Katrina and was able to work with the victims—the survivors, they like to be called, and they were—of Hurricane Katrina in applying for their earned income tax credit. It was a lifeline for people who had worked.

So I just want to end on this note by thanking you, by saying that there are people who are waiting for the Congress to act, to pass the earned income tax credit, raise the minimum wage, extend unemployment insurance, pass the middle class package of the Democrats, and work on behalf of the American people.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you, Representative JACKSON LEE, and I yield back the balance of my time.

BILLS LANGUISHING IN THE SENATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. COLLINS of Georgia). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time and appreciate being here on behalf of my colleagues and to have a discussion that is going to focus on what we are doing with our time.

Mr. Speaker, it seems like it never fails. When we are out and about in our districts talking with our constituents, people will approach us, and they want to talk about how concerned they are about the cost of living and what they see happening to the price at the pump and to the price at the grocery store. They want to talk about how concerned they are with how much more education seems to cost them. They are concerned about our national security. They are concerned about the border security. They are concerned about their retirement security. The list goes on and on and on.

They will look at us and, Mr. Speaker, without fail, they will say: Tell me exactly what you are doing about this. I want to know what you are doing to address this problem or that problem