

the rule and consult with the States and stakeholders first or repropose the rule and allow a new round of public comment.

Mr. Speaker, there is too much on the line to continue down the current path.

ADDRESSING THE WEALTH GAP

(Ms. MAXINE WATERS of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. MAXINE WATERS of California. Mr. Speaker, today, I have introduced the addressing the wealth gap resolution which calls on Congress to recognize the wealth gap and the racial wealth gap as national economic crises and focus its efforts on their elimination.

This country is facing the widest wealth gap since 1983. The statistics are alarming. Wealthy families make nearly seven times as much as middle class families and 70 times as much as lower class families. African Americans have 13 times and Latinos have 10 times less wealth than White households. White households have \$100,000 more in retirement savings than African Americans and Latinos.

The cause of the record-level wealth gap stems from a structural crisis that started well before the Great Recession. The recession hit, and the housing market collapsed and made everything worse.

In the aftermath, middle-income families and people of color have had to endure income inequality, slow wage growth, skyrocketing student loans, and continued unequal access to quality education and barriers to the housing market. These are problems that widened the gap and require Congress to implement pragmatic solutions.

We cannot sit idly by and expect things to change. This is why I am introducing the addressing the wealth gap resolution. The first step to resolving this problem is acknowledging that it exists, and I encourage all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join and focus on the goal of rebuilding wealth in America.

CONGRESSIONAL PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS: THE PEOPLE'S BUDGET

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KATKO). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from New Jersey (Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am here today representing the Congressional Progressive Caucus and to discuss our budget, the people's budget. I pray that I am not the only one that is speaking for the 60 minutes allotted.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the House of Representatives released their budget proposal. Although they have a new chairman, they are following the same

game plan: privatize Medicare, slash spending on safety net programs, and hope that tax cuts for the rich trickle down from top earners to the rest of the country.

That is not what the American people need. They need a plan that levels the playing field, that gives them an opportunity to succeed, and puts their interests above the interests of corporations and the wealthy. They need a budget that is of the people, by the people, and for the people. That is what we are offering in the people's budget.

If you need a way to pay for affordable child care while you are at your job, we have got it in the people's budget. If you need access to quality education for your children, teachers that are trained to give them the knowledge they need to be great, we have got it in the people's budget.

If you worked hard to get into college but now need a way to pay for your tuition, we have got it in the people's budget. If you can't make ends meet, if the pay you take home barely keeps a roof over your head and you are making important choices between food and shelter and you are looking for a livable wage, we have got it in the people's budget.

Mr. Speaker, in the hands of the GOP, this Congress has offered tax break after tax break after tax break after tax break for corporations and billionaires while cutting the very programs that working Americans rely on to pull themselves up the economic ladder that has given generations of American families access to the middle class.

If anyone deserves a tax cut, it is not millionaires. It is the folks that are loading the trucks, the folks that are scanning the groceries, the folks that are cleaning the office buildings, the folks that are working as clerks, the folks that are working as secretaries, and the folks that are doing the important service jobs that our society so needs.

The people's budget would invest in priorities that will keep the American people strong, just for everyone. It offers jobs that will restore our middle class. It addresses our Nation's most pressing challenges, issues like climate change, aging transportation infrastructure, access to education at every level, and good-paying jobs.

This, Mr. Speaker, is about restoring Congress' commitment to serving hard-working Americans who are playing by the rules but still not getting ahead. This, Mr. Speaker, is about the lives that regular Americans are able to live.

Some say that it is not hard to find any old job and get a paycheck, but does that job offer a high enough wage or enough hours to pay the rent? Can you take time off for illness or to take care of your kids? Do you know that you will have enough to pay for child care while you are at the job? Do you have health insurance in the event that you need it?

My Congressional Progressive Caucus colleagues and I think that taxpaying Americans deserve to confidently answer "yes" to all of these questions, and that is what we are fighting for.

Today, we were given the distinct opportunity to present tenets of our budget to a group of interested people—everyday working people—people who are working for decent-paying jobs.

They are not looking for handouts. They are looking for recognition that they are part of this American Dream, and it is our responsibility to ensure that we are not impediments, but that we are facilitators of that American Dream for everyone.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I yield to my colleague, the chairman of the Progressive Caucus, Congressman ELLISON.

Mr. ELLISON. Let me thank the gentlewoman for yielding, the Congresswoman from New Jersey, BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN.

As I said earlier today, BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN may have just got sworn in as a Member of Congress a few months ago, but she is no stranger to fighting for people.

That was on full display when she spoke at a rollout of our Progressive Caucus budget where she talked about how you can look at any aspect of the Progressive Caucus budget and you will find the same thing in every place: prioritizing people, making sure people can get their needs met in this government, making sure that workers can get access to a job, making sure that people who are sick but who are working can actually get a sick day so that they don't bring that sickness back to their workplace and don't have to abandon their children that might be sick, too.

You pointed out, Congresswoman WATSON COLEMAN, the fact is that job creation should be the primary metric of any budget. How are we doing putting people back to work in good jobs? How are we helping take care of them while they are on the job? If they are sick, can they take time off? How are we educating people? You focused on the key elements of the Progressive Caucus budget, and I was proud to hear you do it.

The fact is this is our fifth budget that we have put out. It is a budget that is about working people. That is why we call it the people's budget. We urge people to check out the people's budget online at the Congressional Progressive Caucus Web site.

Let me name a few things about the Progressive Caucus budget that are important to highlight. It creates 8.4 million good-paying jobs by 2018.

Now, you just take the Republican budget that was put out yesterday. It was interesting to me that none of my Republican colleagues wanted to tout how many jobs their budget would create, how many jobs the economists—after looking at the Republican budget proposed—would create because that is not what they consider to be a priority;

but it is a priority to the Progressive Caucus budget. Our priority is 8.4 million good-paying jobs investing in America, making sure Americans are working again.

Now, you might correctly ask: How are you going to get all these jobs? One way we are going to get the jobs is we are going to invest \$820 billion to repair America's rapidly aging roads and bridges and upgrade our energy systems to address climate change, keep our communities safe, and prepare for the next generation to thrive in our society and workforce.

I would like to share with the Speaker that I come from a town—Minneapolis, Minnesota—where, 6 years ago, the I-35 bridge fell into the Mississippi River because we had not taken care of it. We had not done adequate maintenance on this bridge.

Thirteen people died when that bridge fell. They were Black. They were White. They were wealthy. They were low income. They were born in America. They were born abroad. They were America. That is who lost their lives on that bridge, and 100 more people got injured.

This Progressive Caucus investment in infrastructure repair is not just a job creator and a productivity increaser; it is public safety to have decent, safe infrastructure. I am very proud of that.

We also provide \$945 million to help States and municipalities hire police, firefighters, health care workers, teachers, librarians, and other public employees.

Mr. Speaker, I have got to tell you, I met with my chiefs of police in the Fifth Congressional District about a week ago. Of course, all of us here tonight represent more than one city.

I met with the chiefs of police—I am very proud to represent a city where law enforcement is dedicated—and they were asking me: What's going on with the Byrne grants? What's going on with the JAG grants? What's going on with the COPS grants? These things that have helped us be a better police department have shrunk. Our ability to protect the public is weakened by our limited resources.

□ 1500

Well, we are going to do something about that. We are going to rehire teachers. So if you have got a teacher with 30 second graders in the classroom trying to keep up with all of them, we can hire a teacher's aide who might be able to actually help that teacher do what that teacher does most effectively.

We put \$1.9 trillion in America's future by investing in the working families. This restores and enhances funding for vital programs that Americans rely on, like SNAP, like food, nutrition, so that young people can be in the classroom and can be fully fed and ready to learn.

So these are just a few things about the Progressive Caucus budget. But I

wonder if the gentlewoman from New Jersey or the gentlewoman from Michigan will yield to a question.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I yield to the gentleman from Minnesota.

Mr. ELLISON. Should a budget be a moral document which lists the priorities of the Nation?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to respond to that question, Congressman.

As a State legislator, I spent many years in appropriations and on the budget committee, and I came to realize that there is no other document that represents the values and the priorities of the governing entity than the budget statement.

So where we put our money is where we think our interests lie; where we put our money represents our priorities; where we put our money represents our values. And that is one of the major reasons that I am just so proud to be associated with the people's budget as crafted by the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Thank you for giving me that opportunity.

Mr. ELLISON. Will the gentlewoman yield for another question?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I yield to the gentleman from Minnesota.

Mr. ELLISON. So the Progressive Caucus budget was not just written by members of the Progressive Caucus. We didn't just sit in a room and write up a budget. We actually pulled in our partners, like the Economic Policy Institute, labor.

How important were our progressive partners in pulling our budget together?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Well, I certainly would like to yield to the gentlelady from Michigan. I just simply want to say that the associations, the affiliations, and the organizations that you identified just very quickly represent the interests of working class people, represent the interests of those who wish to be part of the middle class, and represent those individuals who are responsible for the standards that we have that protect people in the working environment, that protect jobs here in America, and that protect the aspirations and hopefulness of those who recognize that things like public education are great equalizers.

Congressman, I would very much appreciate the opportunity to yield to the gentlewoman from Michigan, my classmate and my friend, Congresswoman BRENDA LAWRENCE.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Mr. Speaker, and to my colleagues, thank you for yielding.

I am here today to speak in my support for the Congressional Progressive Caucus alternative budget and their fight for greater access to affordable housing.

As you know, I was previously a mayor, and the quality of life in America is determined by our housing options, and the CPC budget acknowledges that.

We have an affordable housing crisis. Only one in four families eligible for housing assistance receive it. There is a shortage of low-income apartments and rental homes that are affordable in low-income households.

We have seen the results of sequestration taking housing assistance from 70,000 families, and the CPC budget moves us from trying to preserve existing affordable housing to making significant improvements and investments in new production.

When you are an elected official or a mayor of a community, you see firsthand the challenges from unemployment, the challenges of jobs that are being reduced, the unemployed, and trying to maintain housing.

It is important that we realize that in this budget we call for two new sources for affordable housing, the National Housing Trust Fund and the Capital Magnet Fund, to be fully funded by contributions from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, as is already required by law. This budget gives families and communities devastated by foreclosure the resources to renovate and resell homes and maintain overall property values.

I come from Michigan, and I represent Detroit. Here I have an article that states: "Downtown Detroit Tenants Rally to Demand Decent and Affordable Housing." This conversation is happening all over the country while we see some communities where families are actually being displaced as a result of the upper class of our communities being able to buy and push prices up while those in the bottom of our economic class are being challenged every day to find the simple thing that we call quality of life in America, and that is housing.

In my State of Michigan, we have a campaign to end homelessness, to promote housing, first, through the prevention and rapid rehousing activities.

We understand in Michigan that in order to effectively approach homelessness, a community needs a clear, deliberate, and comprehensive strategy. The low incomes of so many families across this country make this increasingly difficult for them to manage the rising cost of housing. This puts them at risk, and some lose their housing and fall into homelessness. We may call this a homelessness crisis, but it is primarily a housing affordability crisis.

Permanent housing subsidies like section 8 need to do a better job of addressing the family housing crisis. However, as this body knows, such subsidies are severely underfunded. Nationally, only one-quarter of the need for such subsidies are being met.

Before I conclude, I want to be clear that we, as members of the Progressive Caucus, stress strongly that we present a budget that is funded, that will ensure that in America the American Dream and the basic quality of life right to have a home is maintained through our budget.

Mr. ELLISON. I represent Minneapolis, Minnesota, and I was talking

with my Housing Authority people who were here in town the other day, and I bet your Housing Authority folks were in town, too. One of the things that they said to me is that they opened up their list, and for 2,000 available units, they had 37,000 people who applied for those positions.

Here is another separate fact which I would like you to react to, if you don't mind. In Minneapolis, we pride ourselves on being a progressive town. We have got 4,000 kids who leave shelters every day to go to a public school, and those kids are asked to take standardized tests.

How important is it for a budget, particularly a Progressive Caucus budget, to house America's people?

Mrs. LAWRENCE. It is extremely important.

Thank you.

It is extremely important, and those of us who understand the cry of the people for housing, and understand the impact of homelessness on Americans today, funding of housing, affordable housing, is critical.

I served on the local government board, and one of the things we looked at consistently is: How do we sustain the low-income or sustainable housing for our population?

Children repeatedly, every day across this country, awaken, go to school, and then their families, they are living in cars or they are living in shelters, and they have to take on that responsibility, as a child, and adjust to an environment that they can learn. We know that this is a total distraction. Some of them, through this homelessness, the school is the only stable place for them to go to every single day.

So now we are in a position where we are looking at cutting back on education. We are cutting back on housing. In America, are we sending a message through a budget that will not support sustainable housing for American citizens who are not in the top 1 percent, who some, by no fault of their own, are unemployed? Are we, in this country and as a government, turning our backs on those people?

That is why we have, through the Progressive Caucus, a budget that will awaken the minds of so many in this country and this government, and we want our colleagues across the aisle—and all of our colleagues—to look at this budget and say that this is the time in America we need to step up and fund sustainable housing in America.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, can you tell us just how much time we have left?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman from New Jersey has approximately 40 minutes remaining.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I appreciate the comments that have been offered by both of my colleagues here. I think that you can certainly understand that a lot of work went into the creation, the development, and the evolution of this budget. We are happy to note that, over the years, some of

those issues that were identified by the Progressive Caucus have now become part of the regular budget that is presented by the Democratic Caucus.

I want to highlight a couple of other things, because I think we just talked about the need for housing. And we recognize that not only did we lose a lot of housing during the predatory lending crisis, a lot of that housing is still vacant, and we need to figure out a way to recapture that housing and use it for affordable housing purposes. Our budget proposes the extension of the use of vouchers for housing because we recognize how fundamental the need is to have safe and secure housing.

We recognize that, over the last several years, millionaires, billionaires, and corporations have been getting tremendous tax breaks, that the very wealthy have received extremely generous credits.

We want to see working people get credit for work, get tax advantages for the work that working people do, get additional child care credits so that they can provide the kind of safety and security and healthy environment for their families.

Everybody has the desire to have a healthy family. Everybody has a desire to be able to participate in our society, to even pay taxes, Mr. Speaker. They just need to have the mechanisms, the infrastructure, the opportunity, the policies that will provide those opportunities, and this budget does just that.

It is known that one in five children live, in the United States of America, in poverty. One out of three African American children live in poverty. That is unacceptable for any child to live impoverished in a nation that is as rich and that has so much wealth concentrated in so few hands.

To whom much is given, much is required, and it is pay now or pay later.

We need to recognize the significance of our budget that recognizes that education is, indeed, the equalizer here. Not only are we looking to expand access to preschool care, but full funding of K-12.

In addition to that, we recognize that higher education is what distinguishes our middle class from those who never can get into the middle class. But we want to make sure that students have access to education without being overly burdened with debt. So we want to look at creating opportunities for students to refinance their debt.

Let's look at this country as a country of diplomacy, of humanitarianism. Let's look at this country as a country of peacefulness and hopefulness for goodwill for all nations. Let us move away from the sort of cold war mentality; look at modernizing our militaristic events; look at what we are doing with our resources; invest our resources here in America, not overseas; seek to bring humanitarian aid; seek to bring diplomacy. Seek, first, peace; seek, first, coalitions; but seek, first and foremost, to invest in America.

□ 1515

Our unemployment rate is supposedly somewhere around 5 or 6 percent, but that is so misleading. It is so misleading on so many different levels.

Number one, that is not true in rural areas, and that is not true in urban areas, and that is not true for minority communities, and that is not true for those who simply aren't looking anymore because they have been so dog-gone discouraged that they don't even think that there is any hope for them to have a job. For those people, for that cohort that I am speaking of, unemployment is double digits. It could be 25 percent. It could be 13 percent. It is something that we really don't even know exactly what it is, but we need to be focusing on lifting up all of our communities.

And if we truly, absolutely want the American economy to expand, then we need to know that we need more consumers. We need more jobs. We need more paychecks. We need more customers. And we do that by investing in our middle class. We do that by investing in small businesses, in new businesses, in startups, in education, and in research and development. This budget recognizes that if we are going to be the great America that we are supposed to be, that we need to make these investments.

Today was monumental for me because I got to articulate and to stand with individuals who expressed things that I have believed. Even as a legislator in the State of New Jersey, I believed that if we are to experience an America that really works, an America where our communities are safe because there is full employment—so no one is trying to rob anybody or no one is feeling a need to engage in illegal activity simply to put some food on the table—if we are going to be competitive globally, then we need to be investing in education. We need to be building schools. We need to ensure that even the schools in the poorest districts across the United States of America have all of the 21st century technology and opportunities to learn and produce. And we need to have high expectations. We need to have high expectations for everyone.

So I thank you very much for this opportunity, and I will take this moment to yield back to my colleague, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. ELLISON), the cochair of our Progressive Caucus.

Mr. ELLISON. I thank the gentlelady for yielding.

I was really intrigued by the things that you were saying about the Progressive Caucus budget because I have always believed that you know someone's treasure by how they prioritize their expenses.

You can look at a family's budget, and if you see a lot of money being spent on television and movies and candy, you know that they care a lot about that. And if you see people spend a lot of money on books and education, you know they care about that.

What does it mean if you have the budget of a nation where the biggest amounts of the budget are spent on helping rich people get richer and cutting health and safety regulations? What does that mean at a time when income inequality is at its height since the Great Depression?

My problem with the Republican budget is that they have been acting like rich people don't have enough money and poor people have too much for 40 years. What it has brought us is massive income inequality. And their answer to that is to do it some more.

It has hurt this economy to prioritize the well-to-do over everyone else. It doesn't even help rich people very much because rich people own stores and factories and stuff like that. If regular folks, ordinary people don't have any money, how can they even help boost the consumer demand?

This economy that we have, it is important to point out that the United States is a country of tremendous resources. This is still the richest country in the world. Not only is America the richest country in the world but America itself has never been richer.

If you look at per capita income and you scale it on a graph and compare it over time, you are looking at a steadily rising line. Yet the American budget, our governmental expenditures as a proportion of it, we have seen one of the lowest proportions of government spending relative to GDP in a great many years.

The fact of the matter is, the reason the proportion of government expenditure to GDP has been going down is because America has been giving away the resources that it needs to take care of the needs of its people. I am talking about lifesaving research in medicine. I am talking about dealing with issues of climate. I am talking about infrastructure investment.

One of the things that the Progressive Caucus budget does to try to recapture some of the money that the government is due and owed is we end corporate inversion and deferral.

What is corporate inversion? Corporate inversion is where the company does not actually physically move anywhere, but they sell themselves to a foreign corporation with a lower tax rate or no tax rate, thereby escaping the payment of moneys in taxes as an American corporation but not really moving anything. In fact, they might even increase their physical footprint in the country that they are in.

We have had that happen in my own community. And before I went to criticize the company that did it, I had to deal with the fact that it is legal to do.

How are you going to blame a corporation for trying to get money when it is legal to do? Well, I say, rather than blame the company, I will blame Congress, you know? So we went and did something about it. We went to the Progressive Caucus budget and we ended inversions. You can't do that anymore.

We are also in this process of deferral, this idea that corporate profits don't have to be paid as long as they are deferred and kept overseas. We end this process. We end deferrals. I think that these two things alone will bring money back to the United States Government so we can invest in roads and bridges and infrastructure, so we can make sure that no 5-year-old kid is leaving a shelter and going to a public school in the morning, so we can make sure that there is enough SNAP, that kids have a decent meal to eat, and that our seniors can actually hope to one day be able to beat Parkinson's and Alzheimer's and all of these kinds of diseases. These things take public investment to solve these kinds of medical problems.

So the Progressive Caucus budget, I am very proud to be a part of it because it is a budget that looks at the needs of the American people and does something about it.

Let me just talk about the education side of it. We have universal pre-K. Now, it doesn't matter if you are a conservative economist or if you are a liberal economist; they all agree that the best return on investment is educating little kids. You educate those little guys and it will keep them out of trouble. It will put them on a path to college or some form of higher education. And they will not become a government expense; they will be a government asset. They will not be an expenditure on the taxpayer; they will be paying taxes.

Yet the Progressive Caucus doesn't just know that, we actually do something about it by funding universal pre-K. I am so happy about that because, you know, those little guys are so cute, and we definitely want to see those bright-eyed little children maximize their talents. They are actually really smart. And if you put them in an educational environment, an academic environment where they can do more than just learn how to count—they can maybe even learn how to use a computer—you never know what tremendous benefits they will bring to our society. And we move from there.

In K-12 education, we help fund municipal and local public employees who need that kind of help. We have placed \$95 billion in that, where we can, again, put a teacher or a teacher's aide back into the classroom. Ever since the recession in 2008, local governments have been shedding public employees, including teachers.

Now, what does this mean? To the average teacher, the average teacher used to have a classroom of 28 kids, 19 kids. Well, those classes are bigger because you have got fewer teachers. You used to be able to have a little budget to decorate the classroom, to put inspiring messages and notes and pictures up there.

I would actually like to ask the gentlelady from New Jersey a question. Have you had the experience of talking to a teacher where they tell you that

they are going into their own pocket to decorate the classroom? Have you ever heard that?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Not only have I heard it, but I have helped some of the teachers buy the supplies for their classrooms.

Mr. ELLISON. Right. So the fact is, we need to respond to these kinds of things.

I would also like to ask the gentlelady, What does it mean to a police department that needs about, you know, 40 people to protect the people of the city but only has 20 folks? What does that mean? Does that mean the officers aren't getting out of their cars and forming relationships? Does that mean they are just running from call to call to call? Does that mean they may not have the equipment that they need? What does it mean?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you for that question, Congressman. It means all of those things.

What it means for communities like the capital of the State of New Jersey, which is the city of Trenton, it means that our neighborhoods are unsafe. It means that police are running to situations that have already occurred, as opposed to having the resources and the capacity to understand what is happening out there and be proactive and preventative in nature. So it certainly does negatively impact the quality of life for those who live in the city—and cities particularly—and those who work there.

I am particularly concerned about the seniors who invested in the cities years ago when the cities where the thriving environments, Congressman, and now they are still living there because they can't afford to move. So they are finding themselves in communities where, because of the housing crisis, there are vacant houses all around them. Members of gangs have settled into some of those houses, creating almost prison-like environments for the people who can't even go outside and sit on their porch. And all of this has been the function of our disinvestment in our cities.

Mr. ELLISON. The Progressive Caucus budget is trying to step up and address these issues. When you talk to officers and firefighters, health care workers, teachers, librarians, all of these local government functions have been cut.

I would like to ask the gentlewoman another question:

What does it mean to see the library hours cut in your city because the Federal assistance or the local municipalities just don't have enough funding for the library, so the hours get cut, the library staff gets cut. What does that mean to a local community?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I thank you for the opportunity to address this because I know this firsthand. In the capital city in the State of New Jersey, they have had to actually close libraries.

Now, we already experience a digital divide in urban centers and in poor environments, and sometimes the only

access that students have to computers and the Internet and the capacity to do research is in the libraries, in the local libraries. So it has negatively impacted their ability to get the information that they need to succeed in school.

It has also negatively impacted those who are looking for jobs, who go to libraries to be able to research jobs on the Internet. It has had a devastating impact on the community.

So when we look at our budget, the Progressive budget, and we recognize that we wish to restore services, restore funding to programs that empower our communities, it is giving them a chance, again, to become productive, productive in the work environment, productive in the school environment. It restores hope where hope has been taken away for so long.

Mr. ELLISON. That is right.

If I could just say, putting workers back on the job who are firefighters, librarians, police officers, teachers, these are very important to the quality of life.

I would like to refer to these people as everyday heroes. They may not wear big letters on their chest. But when I think about the people other than my parents who helped inspire me, it was probably a teacher, probably a cop who saw me hanging on the corner and said, Hey, man, we know you are smart. You can do better than what you are doing.

You know what I mean? All of these people are the everyday heroes that make neighborhoods run every single day. So I just think it is important for the Progressive Caucus to say, We are going to prioritize rehiring these people who have been let go in the course of this recession.

We have seen private sector employment increase every single month. But you know what? We have also seen public sector employment actually go down.

□ 1530

One of the things I would also like to get your take on, if you wouldn't mind sharing your views on this issue, is restoring and enhancing emergency unemployment compensation. As you know, back on December 26, 2013, the long-term unemployed were just cast adrift by the Republican majority. These are people who were working but just couldn't find a job soon enough. Some people tried to imply that they were lazy and just didn't want a job, so we had to kick them off unemployment so they would actually look for a job.

I wonder what your thoughts are about this.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. First of all, let me just say for those individuals who, without any fault of their own, were victims of the trickle-down economics that have failed us from 40 years ago to even today, those individuals who but for the shift in policies and having this negative impact because of trickle-down economics which doesn't work except for perhaps on an essay paper, they struggled. They

struggled. They lost their homes; they lost their family; they lost their health care; and they lost their health.

The people's budget recognizes the responsibility that government has to those individuals. So to extend the unemployment benefits for the 99 weeks, I believe it is over a 2-year period, gives people an opportunity, as well as gives the policymakers an opportunity to create opportunities for these people to find jobs and to have some meager form of income while they are looking, because they basically have been left with absolutely nothing. So it is a further illustration that the people's budget is a reflection of the people's needs. I am so very fortunate to be associated with it.

One last thing I wanted to raise as it relates to our urban centers, Mr. Speaker, right now in Washington, D.C., there is a conference of the urban mayors from the State of New Jersey. I am going to have an opportunity to speak to them later on this evening. I tell you, I am very excited to talk to them about what it means to support the Progressive budget, the alternative Progressive Caucus budget, and what it means to their communities, whether it is for education, for teachers, for aides, for paraprofessionals, for police, for nurses, for hospitals, whatever. They will understand that this is a budget that recognizes that where the majority of the people live in this country there is a budget that acknowledges that their needs are paramount to the success of collective success of our economy and our country.

I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. ELLISON. That's right. I thank the gentlelady for yielding back to me.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out that, again, the Progressive Caucus budget is in dramatic contrast to the Republican budget. Take the Republican budget, for example. The Republican budget calls for repealing the Affordable Care Act. This is a piece of legislation that has extended health care access to literally millions and millions and millions of people. The Republicans want to snatch health care access out of people who now, for the first time in their life, have acquired it; and they are doing it by saying: Oh, we want you to have freedom, and we think ObamaCare infringes on your freedom, so now be free to be sick with no access to health care other than an emergency room.

That is their idea of freedom, I suppose.

They want to partially privatize Medicare. Is that what we need is privatization of Medicare?

A few years ago, the Republicans wanted to privatize Social Security. They wanted to say: We are going to take all the money you saved, and we are going to put it in some Wall Street account. Of course, they will be administered for a "reasonable fee"—I put that in quotes—but don't worry about it. Everything will be fine.

Then we see stock market prices fall and plummet. They go up and they go

down. But when you are talking about something like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, these have to be stable and reliable, and they want to privatize it as they have proposed to other important programs.

They want to turn Medicaid and food stamps into block grants for States. What does that mean? In some States, maybe the Governor will do the right thing. I am pretty confident in Minnesota our Governor would do the right thing. Our unemployment is at a record low. In our State, our wages have been climbing. We actually have a surplus in the State of Minnesota. Our next-door neighbor, Wisconsin, is run by Scott Walker. They have a big, ugly deficit, which is embarrassing, given that he is supposed to be this fiscal conservative. But facts don't seem to bother some people.

My point is that the Republicans want to block grant these programs. If you block grant it in Minnesota, it will be less money. Whenever there is a budget pinch, they will use that money for other things other than the intended purpose. But if you send it to a State like Wisconsin with a Governor like Scott Walker, the people who are intended to benefit from that money may never ever see it at all. And so this is a very important program not to block grant these programs.

Tax reforms that lower rates and eliminate any taxation on profits reported abroad—come on. As a matter of fact, if just cutting taxes to the bone and cutting taxes for rich people as much as we possibly can would be good for the economy, wouldn't we have avoided the recession of 2008? We should have more jobs than we could possibly imagine with these guys. We should have never had any recession, and every American should be paid, I don't know, \$100,000 a year if just cutting taxes was good for the economy. Cutting taxes is good for some people, but it is not good for the economy overall. The evidence is all around us. The Republicans want to turn the rest of the world into a tax haven for multinationals.

Now, the President has been trying to set the record straight. He has been trying to signal what an economy where there is shared prosperity should look like. But the fact is that, if you look at the Republican budget and you contrast it with other proposals, it certainly fails the test of being good for the American people. The Progressive Caucus budget, on the other hand, passes the test. We do programs that actually help the American people: universal pre-K, robust support for title I, and debt-free college to ensure every child gets a quality education. When you contrast their budget and you look at our budget, it is clear which one the American people find to be most meritorious.

So we ask people to look at the Progressive Caucus budget. We ask people to read it; share it with your friends; offer your views on it. We ask people to

just support the budget that they think makes a lot of sense.

Probably we will be debating the budgets next week. Probably we will have a vote. We think it is important for Americans to tune in to this debate. Because if you are an American person and you are busy, you are trying to raise kids, you are trying get to work on time, and you are trying to earn a living, you don't have time to be plugged in to politics like some of us who do this our whole lives. You are busy. But you are smart and you know what is going on.

I am going to ask Americans to actually slow down and say: Hey, look, what is going on in this budget? What does the Republican budget look like? They want to cut taxes. They don't want overseas corporations to return those profits and pay taxes on that. The Progressive Caucus wants to let the little kids go to school, let the teenagers and the young adults go to school. They want to train our workforce, and they want to invest in our Nation's infrastructure.

I guarantee this is what the people in this country want to see.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman for upholding the Progressive Caucus message, and I wish you very great success in the people's budget.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for this opportunity to share the good news about the Progressive budget and to inform those who are here as well as those who are at home what this budget represents.

One last issue that I think I would like to address that we may not have clearly or substantively articulated has to do with environmental issues. This budget acknowledges the devastating impact that we have had on the environment, and it takes concrete steps to reverse it, forcing polluters to pay for the carbon that is causing so much of our climate change, eliminating fossil fuel subsidies for Big Oil that, frankly, don't need government support, and ensuring EPA has the resources it needs to help reduce our carbon footprint.

We have spent this last 45, 50 minutes—I am thankful for this opportunity—sharing the good news about the people's budget, the Progressive budget, and I hope that anyone who has a need for additional information will seek this information out online.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

STRENGTHENING HIGHER EDUCATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KNIGHT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, today, too many Americans struggle to realize the

dream of higher education. Our current system is unaffordable, inflexible, and outdated, and it has resulted in too many students unable to complete college, saddled with loan debt, and ill-equipped to compete in our modern economy.

In recent years, burdensome Federal regulations, a lack of transparency, and a dizzying maze of student aid programs have only contributed to the problem. Students and families deserve better.

Mr. Speaker, when my husband and I were in high school and contemplating the possibility of college, we were penniless people. In his case, his parents had no formal education—they couldn't read and write—and my family had very limited education, but we understood then that the way out of poverty was to go to college, work hard, and get a good job. Folks like us who had no resources could do that. It is very difficult for people in this day and time to do what he and I did. He graduated from college with a very small debt. I graduated from college with absolutely no debt because of working my way through. It did take me 7 years to do it, but I was able to do it.

Mr. Speaker, we want to be able to provide an environment in this country where people with very limited resources can do what my husband and I and millions of other young people did in the past, which is get a higher education without going deeply into debt to do so.

The upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act provides Congress an opportunity to help every individual—regardless of age, location, or background—access and complete higher education if they choose.

To inform the reauthorization process, the Education and the Workforce Committee has held 15 hearings over the last several years. After receiving feedback from students, institutions, innovators, administrators, and researchers, the committee established a set of key principles that will guide our reform of the postsecondary education law.

First, we must empower students and families to make informed decisions when it comes to selecting the institution that meets their unique needs. Today's higher education resources are incomplete and inaccurate and often complicate the financial aid process, misleading students about their academic and financial options. Developing a more streamlined and transparent system, as well as enhancing financial literacy services, will help students better understand the higher education landscape and make choices based on easy-to-understand, relevant information.

Second, we must simplify and improve student aid. Currently, the Federal Government operates more than 10 aid programs, each with its own set of rules and requirements. Many students, particularly first-generation and

low-income students, are overwhelmed by the complexity of the current system, which can ultimately deter them from accessing the aid that will help make college a reality.

□ 1545

Consolidating this patchwork of aid programs will simplify the application and eligibility process and help more students understand, manage, and repay their debt.

Third, we must promote innovation, access, and completion. In recent years, as the postsecondary student population has changed, many institutions have developed new approaches to delivering higher education, including competency-based curriculums and online classes.

The Federal Government should make every effort to support these innovations, as they have enabled more Americans to earn a degree or certificate faster with less cost and without additional disruption to their daily lives.

Finally, we must ensure strong accountability by limiting the Federal role. The current administration has subjected institutions to onerous regulations and requirements, which have created a costly and time-consuming process, hampered innovation, and jeopardized academic freedom.

Eliminating ineffective Federal burdens will provide States and institutions the flexibility they need to deliver effectively a high-quality education to their students.

We are confident that these pillars will translate into meaningful Federal reforms that reflect the evolving needs of students and the workforce.

Yesterday, the Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training held its first hearing of the 114th Congress, where we heard policy recommendations on how we can strengthen America's higher education system to serve students, families, workers, and taxpayers better.

Former Indiana Governor and Purdue University President Mitch Daniels testified:

It is my great hope that this Congress will have the courage to see the challenges and treat reauthorization of the Higher Education Act as an opportunity for reform.

He continued:

The country needs a reauthorization that will reduce the costs of higher education's regulatory burdens, simplify and improve student aid, and create an environment more conducive to innovation in higher education.

Dr. Christine Keller, vice president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, stressed the need for "access to clear, meaningful data . . . to answer questions and provide essential information for higher education stakeholders—for students and families to make more informed decisions about where to attend college, for policymakers to determine allocations of public resources and evaluate institutional effectiveness, and for college leaders to facilitate innovation and successful student outcomes."