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CONGRATULATING THE IRVING
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

(Mr. VEASEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. VEASEY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Irving Independent School District for being recognized by the College Board as the 2015 Advanced Placement District of the Year in the mid-sized category. This award recognizes the efforts Irving ISD has made in ensuring the academic success of our local school children.

Since 2008, Irving ISD has increased by 70 percent the number of students taking AP courses and has increased by 83 percent the number of students who scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam. Not only are more students taking AP courses at Irving, but they are also earning good scores, and that is really important.

I represent almost all of South Irving and District 33. Three out of the five high schools in the Irving ISD are located in South Irving.

To every teacher, principal, staffer, and parent at Cardwell, MacArthur, Nimitz, Singley, and Irving High, congratulations on this outstanding academic achievement. Thank you for making all of us Texas proud.

PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS HOUR

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. MIMI WALTERS of California). 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.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from New Jersey?

There was no objection.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Today, low-wage workers across the country rallied in small towns and big cities. Their request is very simple: a livable wage and the right to organize.

This isn't rocket science. These folks turn on the news and see reports on stock market gains on Wall Street. They see companies reporting record profits. They see the prices for bread and a carton of milk rising every month. Then they open their paychecks and see the same amount that they have seen for the past 10 years.

This is a crisis that my colleagues across the aisle keep trying to brush under a political rug. That may have worked in the past, but it is just getting too big to be hidden.

According to UC Berkeley economist Emmanuel Saez, the Nation's 100 richest families have as much wealth as

the 80 million families that make up the bottom 50 percent in wealth. Meanwhile, Republicans keep trying to peddle the same, tired "work hard and get ahead" rhetoric.

Madam Speaker, American workers are doing just that. They are stringing together 40-hour weeks whenever they can. In many cases, they are not given the opportunity to even do that, but they are being paid wages that cobble together to just over \$15,000 a year.

Even when McDonald's raises wages for the fraction of its workers behind the counters of their corporate stores, they will only get a raise of \$5,000. \$5,000 will make a huge difference for those families, but at \$20,000, they have gone from drowning to just barely keeping their heads above water.

That is not enough to pay for a college education or to buy a home. That is not enough to save for retirement. That is not enough to pay for medical bills. Madam Speaker, that is not enough to achieve the American Dream.

My Progressive Caucus colleagues and I are here on the floor tonight to stand with workers in the fight for \$15, that is \$15 an hour and the right to form unions.

It is time to support working families, and it is time to make it possible to work hard and get ahead.

It is now my pleasure to yield to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. ELLISON), one of the chairs of our caucus.

Mr. ELLISON. I thank the gentlewoman for yielding.

Madam Speaker, I had an interesting story today. I was talking with a young lady named Stacy Mitchell, who is a researcher.

She does a lot of research on this issue of what is the economic effect of raising the minimum wage because what you hear so many conservatives say is, if we raise the minimum wage, maybe there will be a lot of workers who simply will not be employable because they don't have the skill level to be employed, they don't bring enough value to the business to pay them \$15 an hour.

What she showed—and this is through research—is that low wages lead to workers who have a lot of high turnover. High turnover leads to mistakes, leads to errors, leads to training errors, leads to bad customer service when the workers don't have a firm grip on what they have been doing. High turnover and the need to retrain then leads to a loss of money, and they have calculated that to about \$12,000 a year for the average small business.

Now, folks who are interested in learning more about this can contact the Institute for Local Self-Reliance. This is a small-business organization that says that we can have more economic viability if we focus on small business and not just the big-box retailer.

Of course, it is interesting because, whenever you talk to the big-box retailer about raising the minimum wage

or whether you talk to McDonald's or Walmart, they always say: yeah, we are making record profits; but what about the small business?

It was pretty surprising to hear that there are a lot of small businesses that have decided to pay people a better wage, keep them on the job, and as they stay on the job, they learn the job better, serve the customer better, and end up making the business more profitable overall.

A lot of businesspeople, whether it is Costco or Ben & Jerry's, are challenging this idea by the rightwing conservative business types that squeezing the most out of the worker, hurting the worker, taking the most out of the worker, paying the worker the least you can possibly afford—not any health care, not any sick days—just squeezing the life out of that worker is not a good business model. There are other ways to do it. There are ways for everyone to succeed.

Now, sometimes, my friends on the other side of the aisle like to say: Have you ever run a business? In fact, I have. I am a businessowner. I ran my own law firm for years. I employed investigators. I employed legal assistants. I even hired some lawyers.

When people arrogantly talk about, Oh, I know business, and you don't, it always makes me chuckle a little bit because I actually have run a business—owned a business—and actually have run fairly large nonprofits, which are also businesses.

It is clear to me that the real thing that I cared about as a businessperson is customers coming through the door. I needed people with money who could pay me. That is what I needed. If nobody was making any money, they couldn't pay me.

What was always better for me is being in a vibrant, strong community with an economy where prosperity was shared so that people had some business for me.

It is funny; I never worried about taxes too much. I can't imagine too many small-businesspeople staying up all night worrying about taxes. You know what they are worried about? Customers coming through the door, clients coming through the door, people who need haircuts, people who need meals, people who need a lawyer to do their will—that is what you have got to have.

But if the average working class person is broke because they have been getting paid \$7 an hour or whatever, they can't spend money with you.

It was interesting to me, when I first got to Congress, this was right before the real hit in the financial system in 2008. I was at a committee hearing. I will let the gentlewoman know, and I asked one of the witnesses at the committee hearing what their opinion was about Americans having negative savings because I found a statistic that Americans had a negative 2 percent savings rate.

That meant that you were borrowing to consume. That meant that you

didn't have money, and you had to go to the credit card, the payday loan, title loan, something like that, to make it through the week.

This person looked at me and said: Well, there is so much equity people have in their homes; that is not a problem.

This is an economist I will never listen to again. The bottom line is, when you pay people more, they can save. They can save for retirement. When you pay people more, that makes them more loyal to you. I actually paid people as much as I could—way over minimum wage—and the reason why is I needed my legal secretary to know how to prepare documents the way I needed them.

I needed her to know how to prepare the document so that I could read it over, make sure that this divorce or this will or whatever it was that I was doing for them was right; and the better she got at what she was doing, the faster I could work. I was happy to pay her because the customer was happy to pay. The real job was getting customers in the door, and paying workers better was smarter and more profitable for me.

I absolutely reject this model that you squeeze the life out of the worker and try to make sure that they don't have anything except for the bus fare to get back to work the next day. This is absolutely wrong. Yes, you can run a business like that; you can make a lot of money like that, but you will ruin society doing things like that.

I actually liked paying taxes so we could have the Metro rail to get people to work, so the bus would come. I didn't mind being able to turn on the spigot and have clean water come out of the faucet in Minnesota.

I don't understand these people who claim to be for business, don't want to pay any taxes, don't want to train anybody, don't want to pay any decent wages, and hate health care. It is the craziest thing in the world. It is actually bad for business and leads to very extremes in society, the extremely rich and the vast ocean of the poor.

How many people have you talked to who sit back and say, You know what, you used to be able to get into the middle class by becoming a small-businessperson or getting a good union job?

The conservative rightwing attacks both. The conservative rightwing attacks unions. The conservative rightwing doesn't like unions, and they are union busters, so union membership has declined. As they have pushed this right-to-work garbage, what we have seen is wages go down at the very same time.

It is a funny thing about these big, big business types. Whenever they come to my office asking for whatever, they always talk in terms of the small business. I always find it somewhat amusing when the big businesses that pay poverty wages say: well, if we raise the minimum wage, it is going to hurt small business.

I think to myself: Man, when was the last time you were ever running a small business? You don't pay any taxes because you have got lawyers trying to figure out how to get around them. You don't deal with what the small-businessperson has to deal with.

They actually have to earn a living and come up with a product or service that people really want, and they don't get tax breaks the way you do. They don't have an army of lawyers to help them escape their responsibility to help fund the U.S. Government.

What does all that have to do with today? Well, low-wage workers have finally gotten sick of it. Today, over 200 cities are standing together to call for \$15 an hour. Thirty different countries are standing in solidarity with low-wage workers, calling for \$15 an hour.

I am proud that, in my own city of Minneapolis, low-wage workers have gone out and are on strike to demand \$15 an hour. These are the people who make the hamburgers, they fry the chicken, they sweep the floors. They do the stuff that, if it doesn't get done, the business crashes.

I am going to tell you honestly, in the business I ran, if I wanted to go on vacation for a day or two, I probably could; but, if my legal secretary and my investigator and the lawyer that I hired didn't show up, I would be in trouble. I couldn't go anywhere.

I guarantee you that you can't show me a CEO of a business that is a big business who can't show up or go on a long golfing trip, whatever; but, if you let the people who actually fry the chicken not show up, this place will grind to a halt.

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So I was very glad to see tens of thousands of low-wage workers in more than 200 cities standing together to call for \$15 an hour. These workers are White, they are Black, they are Latino, they are Asian. They are young, they are old. Some of them are senior citizens.

These workers, some of them were born in the United States, and some of them came here from other places. They are diverse, but they are unified in the idea that in America we ought to have a fair economy that makes sure that everybody can climb the ladder of success, not just a few who want to concentrate wealth at the very top.

Then after they get to the top, they don't want to pay any taxes, they don't want to pay for public services, and they want to divide people. They want to divide people.

These workers, they don't care if you are straight or gay. They want to know, Are you down with raising the wage?

They don't care if you are Latino or maybe you are Black. They don't care. They care about, are you for an economic ladder that everyone can climb if they work hard.

We are in an America today where the people at the top, many of them

are highly divisive. They want to split the straight from the gay, the Black from the White. They want to break everybody up because they know that is the only way they can keep the control that they have.

So we are unified around our common humanity, our love of this country and our belief that this is the land of opportunity. That is just not some slogan. It has got to be real, and it has got to mean something. And anybody who puts in a hard week of work ought to be able to do well by their family.

Here is one of the most amazing things. This statistic really blew me out.

And by the way, please just ask me to yield when you are sick of me going on.

I just thought I would share this little statistic with you because it really did shock me, because, you know, the conservative rightwing is very proud of how they claim, Oh, we are self-reliant. We don't ask anybody for anything. We believe people should work for themselves. And they are real hard on folks with government assistance.

But did you know that—I am looking for this statistic right here. I had it just a moment ago. It blew my mind when I saw it.

It showed that if you add up all of the public assistance that low-wage workers have to rely on because their bosses will not pay them properly—Uncle Sam has to pay if the people don't have a livable wage. If they don't have enough for rent and food because their job won't pay them enough, then these people go on public assistance.

If you add up all that public assistance, it basically is a subsidy to Big Business, and I think that number is about \$150 billion. It is about \$150 billion of welfare, welfare that some of these conservative corporate types are mooching off the American people.

And their chest is always poked out about how we work for ourselves. We don't rely on anyone.

Well, wait a minute. These folks work hard every day, getting splattered with grease, pushing a broom, making hamburgers, customer after customer, on your feet all day long. These folks work hard, but \$150 billion of accumulated subsidy to the working poor.

I will never forget how Walmart—yes, I said the name. And by the way, I want to congratulate them for raising the wage. You ought to say what is good when it happens. Thank you, Walmart, for raising the wage.

But I do have to tell on you a little bit because last Christmas, which is the spirit of giving, they put out a bucket asking their customers to put canned goods in the bucket so that their customers would give canned food goods so that they would distribute them to their workers. I am sure somebody thought that was a clever business idea.

Wait a minute. You want the customers to give free canned goods to

your workers because you will not pay them?

You know, McDonald's had this proposed budget that was proposing, I don't know, all kinds of crazy things that—undignified things people were asked to do.

At the end of the day, though, I just want to say that these workers who have gone out, over 200 cities, where workers are going out on strike, saying that we need to get paid more, I am very proud of these people.

This is a great American tradition. Civil disobedience, striking has been something in America, sometimes when you don't have any bargaining power, when you don't have a union, when the National Labor Relations Board will not protect you quickly enough because it has been weakened by the conservative wing, then you have got to strike. What else are you going to do?

America's elected leaders and CEOs are finally waking up to the reality that a low-wage economy, in which many can't afford basic necessities and are forced to rely on public aid, isn't good for working families, or the economy, or the taxpayer.

Last year, the President issued executive orders that ensured the minimum wage and workplace protections for Americans working under Federal contracts.

And over the last few months, what we have seen is that employers like Walmart, Target, T.J. Maxx, McDonald's, have announced raises for the employees.

Do you really believe they would have done it without these strikes? Absolutely not. They wouldn't have given these poor folks a penny. They had to go on strike. They had to. They had no choice. They were pushed to the brink.

I am about to yield back to the gentlelady, but I just want to tell folks about the model employer and labor rights.

In Congress we can help support this movement by continuing to join workers in their strikes and by fighting for action at the Federal level.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus is calling for a model employer executive order that gives preference for Federal contracts to companies that do more than just pay the minimum by providing things like livable wages, paid leave, health benefits, and respecting their employees' right to collectively bargain.

That will restore the American middle class.

As I take my seat, I just want to point out to the gentlewoman from New Jersey, in 1957 there were a lot of things that America needed to improve. We had racism, segregation. Women could not rise to their potential. There were a lot of things America needed to do better at.

But in 1957, about 35 percent of the American workforce was in a union. And guess what? One person could feed a family of four. One person could feed a family of four.

Now, because people have been pushing trickle-down economics, Reaganomics, whatever, and we say we are going to squeeze the workers, we are going to offshore their job, the rich won't pay any taxes, and we are not going to provide any services, and we are going to break the unions, now, for 40 years, we have seen wages flat, and we have seen this thing happen. We have seen these bad outcomes.

But you know what?

Today is a new day. People are wise to it, and they are unifying together to push back and make a brand new economy where we can have the public sector and the private sector work together for the betterment of the American people.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I thank the gentleman for the fine points that he has made. I can speak from a personal perspective. I am one of four siblings, and my father was the bread earner and my mother was the woman who was taking care of our family. And he, indeed, did provide a good and wholesome living for his family.

Madam Speaker, right now, tens of thousands of American workers in fast food and child care and home care and airport services, and even in professional positions in higher education, are not being paid enough to survive. And what that means, and I believe that my colleague did mention it, it becomes a drag on the economy.

Our economy does rely on consumers buying products. They want not just products that they need. Spending is what gives companies, big and small, the revenue to expand and hire more workers. Ideally, it is also what gives companies the revenue to increase wages.

But if you ask the workers who are fighting for \$15 an hour, they will tell you that a wage increase has been nowhere in sight.

Madam Speaker, I yield to my colleague from the great State of California, Congresswoman LEE.

Ms. LEE. Let me thank you, Congresswoman WATSON COLEMAN, for yielding and for hosting this important Special Order on the need to provide all Americans a good-paying job and the right to form a union.

I want to thank you for your tremendous leadership each and every day, for making sure that we stay on point on all of these economic issues that mean so much to people who are working yet still live below the poverty line. So thank you again.

This afternoon, the Congressional Progressive Caucus, which I am proud to serve as the whip of, welcomed experts and low-wage workers to the Hill for a forum.

Now, each of the workers told powerful stories, and I hope that these are stories that Members here on both sides of the House will listen to. They spoke of struggling to get by, despite working full time on paychecks that are just too small. I hope we will take their struggles to heart and join the

Congressional Progressive Caucus in our efforts to ensure a good-paying job for all Americans.

Too many Americans are still struggling to find a job that pays more than the bare minimum. They don't want to just get by. They want to get ahead, and they want to live the American Dream. They deserve to live the American Dream.

They are looking for a job that pays an actual living wage, a job that will provide them with paychecks big enough to lift themselves out of poverty into the middle class, a job where they can take care of their families and make sure the bills are paid, and maybe save for retirement. These are American values that everyone wants to live by and to achieve.

A few decades ago, these jobs were accessible to most Americans. Yet, because of the Great Recession and wage stagnation, too many Americans are working harder and harder for paychecks that keep them trapped in poverty. In the world's richest and most powerful Nation, this really is a disgrace.

A report released just 2 days ago from the University of California at Berkeley, in my district, found that allowing companies to pay workers wages that keep them in poverty costs taxpayers \$152 billion a year. That is outrageous.

Instead of doing the right thing and paying for a living wage, these corporations are reaping record corporate profits while leaving families to struggle and taxpayers on the hook.

Now, as a former small-businessowner myself, I can tell you that paying poverty wage is no way to run a business. Paying a living wage with benefits is good for business, and it is the right thing to do.

As we continue to build support for the Good Jobs Movement, I know that more and more businessowners will see the benefit of paying a living wage and will join our cause.

Everyone deserves a job that allows them to make a living and provides them with the right to form a union. It is the economically sensible thing to do. You can ask any college or high school student who has taken Economics 101.

When we empower workers to fight for themselves and provide them a big paycheck, our country becomes fairer and our economy grows. People who are working should not be living below the poverty line. So \$15 an hour, that is the minimum that we should be paying our workers.

Certain parts of the country, \$15 an hour just barely, barely helps them put food on the table. So we need to get to a living wage, and we need to talk about what that means in different parts of the country.

So I want to thank you, again, Congresswoman WATSON COLEMAN, for your leadership, for bringing us together. We have got to stay focused on this because everyone deserves a path out of

poverty into the middle class. Everyone in our country deserves to live the American Dream.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I thank the gentlewoman from California for sharing her insights with us and the very important points that have been made.

As I stated a moment ago, our economy relies upon consumers buying products that they want, not just products that they need. But \$15 an hour is what we are trying to fight for, and even with that, that will barely provide the needs of these families.

They can barely cover their rent or keep food on the table. They can't buy new cars and support the American auto industry. They can't afford new clothes, supporting American retailers, and they can't buy computers or smart phones, supporting Silicon Valley.

Six out of the ten largest corporations with median wages of less than \$15 also rank among the most occupations projected to add the most jobs in the coming years. And as the low-wage workforce grows, the declining purchasing power of Americans means that there is less demand for goods and services in the economy.

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If we want to grow our economy, if we are focused on creating jobs, we need to support the people that do just that.

I would like now to yield to my colleague from the great State of Texas, who stands up for working-class families every single solitary day and has even introduced legislation to secure a living wage for the families in our country.

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Thank you very much. And I especially appreciate your remembering that I was reared in Florida. That is important to me. I now dwell in Texas, of course. But not many people remember that, so thank you so much. I am honored to be on the floor with you this evening.

I think this is a very timely topic that we are having an opportunity to give some opinions on, and I think that it is important for us to remember that America is not a poor country. America is not a poor country, and I want to emphasize that because too often we come to conclusions about what we should do based upon our lack of resources. I think that is appropriate to come to conclusions based upon a lack of resources, but the truth is that we are still the richest country in the world.

We are still the richest country in the world. As a matter of fact, in America, 1 in every 12 American households—1 in every 12—have investable assets of \$1 million or more; 1 in 12 have investable assets of \$1 million or more. As a matter of fact, in the United States of America, in 2013, we were fortunate enough to have the average CEO make \$11.7 million. That is 331 times what the average worker made. The average worker made \$35,293. So the average CEO did well.

And by the way, I don't begrudge the CEO who makes \$11-plus million. I do not. I believe in capitalism. I believe that in this country you should succeed on your merits or fail on your demerits. And if a CEO can make \$11-plus million, I think that is great. I do think that that CEO ought to pay a fair amount of taxes, just as the person who makes \$35,000-plus pays a fair amount of taxes. But I think it is a wonderful thing, \$35,000 versus \$11.7 million.

Now, a full-time worker, a full-time worker, the average CEO that year made 774 times what a full-time minimum wage worker made—774 times.

We are in the richest country in the world; 1 in 12 households has investable assets of \$1 million or more.

In 2007, an interesting thing occurred. A man made \$3 billion. I don't begrudge him. I salute him for making \$3 billion. I don't envy him for making \$3 billion. I commend him for making \$3 billion. I would note, however, that he did not pay ordinary income tax on that \$3 billion. I think that if you are going to make \$3 billion, you ought to pay your fair share of taxes on it.

Mr. Speaker, \$3 billion, that is a lot of money, and it is very difficult to get your mind around it. So let me help you understand what \$3 billion is. It would take a minimum wage worker working full time 198,000 years—198,000 years—to make \$3 billion. I don't begrudge the person who made the \$3 billion. I salute him. That person made about \$400 a second.

This is the richest country in the world. People are making money in this country. Just because those of you who are at home, you don't know these people, I want you to know they are there. They are there, and they are doing quite well, and they ought to be the first in line to talk about raising the minimum wage.

It would take 198,000 years for a minimum wage worker to make \$3 billion. A hedge fund manager made \$400 a second. At \$400 a second, it would take that hedge fund manager about 37.7 seconds to make what a minimum wage worker makes in a year—37.7 seconds. I don't begrudge him. I commend him. I salute him. But I do think he should pay a fair amount of taxes on it.

I think that paying a fair amount of taxes is the American way. Others pay their taxes, a fair amount. I think people who make billions of dollars ought to pay a fair amount of taxes as well.

When Dr. King gave his speech, when they had the March on Washington back in August of 1963, they had a list of 10 demands. Number eight on that list of 10 demands was to have a wage that people could make a living on. At that time, it was thought that \$2 an hour would be a sufficient amount of money. Today we would call that a living wage. It was \$2 an hour in 1963. Well, today, that \$2 an hour would be about \$14.90. So there is a rationale for the \$15-an-hour hue and cry that we hear.

A lot of things have changed. A lot of things have also remained the same. Fifteen dollars an hour is not an unreasonable amount of money in the richest country in the world, in a country where we have people who can make \$400 a second, hundreds of times what a minimum wage worker makes, more than 700 times what a minimum wage worker working full time makes in a year.

This is the richest country in the world. However, in the richest country in the world, we still have people who work full time and live below the poverty line.

For edification purposes, I believe every person ought to work his or her way out of poverty. I would like to see subsidies ended and people have wages that will allow them to work their way out of poverty. If I had my way, we would have people without subsidies who work hard, succeed on their merits, fail on their demerits, and elevate themselves out of poverty by simply working full time and not living below the poverty line.

It is interesting to note that, in 2015, the poverty threshold for a family of four is \$28,850—for a family of four. I pray for the people who have to live off of that amount of money with a family of four, but that is what it is.

I believe that we should not only raise the minimum wage, but we should index it. I think that we should index it to poverty because right now a full-time worker with a child makes about \$15,080 a year. That is below the poverty line of \$15,930 a year—working full time, living below the poverty line in the richest country in the world where at least one person made \$400 a second, where the average CEO made more than \$11 million a year. It seems to me that we are talking about trying to bring a balance between the CEO's salary and the workers'.

At one time in this country there was a sense of moral responsibility that CEOs had for their workers. CEOs would literally sit and talk to the board of directors and talk about the needs of workers and how workers should be paid so that they could take care of families, so that they could educate children. There really was, at one time, this sense of moral responsibility to workers that CEOs had.

I saw an example of that just today. A CEO decided that he was going to cut his salary so that his workers could have a better quality of life, with higher earnings that would be paid to them.

We have a responsibility to each other in this country. We who happen to be blessed are not blessed so that we can just enjoy it all ourselves; we are blessed so that we may be a blessing to others. That sense of moral responsibility to those who are less fortunate than we has to return. If we don't get that sense of moral responsibility so that others can receive some of the blessings and some of the goodness of the richest country in the world, we do ourselves a disservice.

Dr. King reminded us that life is an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. What impacts one directly impacts all indirectly. What happens to people who are living below the poverty line directly will indirectly impact all of us.

How does it happen? Well, here is how it happens:

When they live below the poverty line and they are being paid a salary and they don't get health care, they are going to get health care in the richest country in the world. It is just that it is going to cost us a lot more. When they live below the poverty line and they are working full time, they are going to get subsidies. Taxpayers are going to take care of that.

So there is an indirect impact on you, taxpayers, who are listening to me right now. You are paying for it. They are not getting it on the job. We are paying for it. We are subsidizing very wealthy people by paying a minimum wage on the job and then providing subsidies for people from the Federal Government such that they can have a decent living in the United States of America, the richest country in the world.

What impacts others indirectly impacts all directly. Health care, food subsidies, this is all coming out of the pockets of taxpayers. Why not have a wage that allows people to take care of themselves?

In this country, we tend for some reason to equate our net worth to our self-worth. That is unfortunate. We shouldn't do it, but a good many people do. A good many people do. And a good many people don't feel so good when they work full time and live below the poverty line, taking care of a family, playing by the rules.

Some would say, well, that living wage, that minimum wage is just a wage that you start out with. It is just a wage for young people. The statistical information does not bear that out. Unfortunately, too many people find themselves in minimum wage jobs for more than just a few months.

If you think about it, a good many of you who are listening to this, you know people who have been in minimum wage jobs for years and years and years. You know people who are doing their best to make ends meet at \$7.25 an hour.

This is the richest country in the world, and 1 in 12 American households have these assets that I have talked about, have these investable assets of \$1 million or more. I think that in such a rich country we should be able to allow people who are willing to work—willing to work; not people who are asking for a handout, but people who want to work, they want to earn their way through life—we ought to be able to pay them a decent wage.

What we have in Congress would raise it to \$10.10 an hour, far below what I think it should be; because I am of the opinion that it should be \$15 an hour based on what Dr. King said in

1963 with that list of 10 demands, number eight, which was to raise it to \$2 an hour, which, by today's standards, is right at \$15 an hour.

□ 1830

I think it should be 15, but I don't believe we will get 15 through the House, and I regret to say that. I support the bill that would raise it to \$10.10 an hour.

My bill, Mr. Speaker, the Original Living Wage Act, would raise it higher than \$10.10 an hour and would index the minimum wage to poverty so that as the poverty rate goes up—at some period of time, I'm willing to negotiate what that period is—the minimum wage would go up, too; and we wouldn't find ourselves on the floor trying to debate what the minimum wage ought to be, as we are doing currently.

I know that not everybody thinks that there should be a minimum wage at all. There are some people who think that market forces should control. Well, market forces have, in this circumstance, produced some very unpleasant circumstances for people who are working and trying to make ends meet on jobs that pay what we will call entry-level wages if we don't have a minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, I am of the opinion that we ought to raise the wage, and I think we ought to index it to poverty. The bill that seems to have more support, and I confess that it does, would index it to the CPI. I am not a hard person to get along with. I can live with indexing it to the CPI, but I do think that it should be indexed, and I do think that we should raise it.

I say this to you, my dear friends, because Dr. King, who was so far ahead of his time—so far ahead of his time—was the preeminent fighter for those who live in the streets of life and those who are trying to eke out a living on little, who have learned how to take very little and do a lot with it, Dr. King was a fighter and a champion for these folk.

I think that as we continue to celebrate the anniversary of his birthday—now, he is being recognized on the Mall, there is a statue on the Mall—I think we ought to go further and recognize what he asked for in 1963, and that was a living wage. I think that it is time for us to honor the request of Dr. King which has not, to this date, been honored; and let us let everybody work his or her way out of poverty.

I thank you so much for this great opportunity to speak, and I pray that you will continue to be strong and carry on. You have done a stellar job. What you are doing now, you don't do for yourself. What you do now, you do for people you will never meet and greet, people that will never get to touch your hand, but they will be blessed by what you are doing to help them elevate themselves to a better standard of living.

God bless you, my dear sister, and I pray that you will continue to be strong and continue to carry on.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Congressman, it has been an honor to share this moment with you in this Special Order hour. It has been a blessing to me. Texas is very, very lucky and very fortunate to have you as a Representative. Florida must be very proud because you were born there.

Thank you, and God bless you.

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. God bless you, too.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, how much time is remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WESTERMAN). The gentlewoman has 15 minutes remaining.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on something that my colleague had alluded to, and that is the impact of low wages and the government's need to subsidize. I think that he sort of spoke to it in a generalized way, but I would like to just share with you what I think happens with an individual and a family that has a \$15,000 income.

Since it is not enough to keep food on the table, those Americans have to turn to food stamps. Since the jobs don't come with health care, we have got to rely on Medicaid. Because \$15,000 a year doesn't pay for the rent in most cities, those Americans rely on low-income housing or subsidized housing through Section 8 vouchers, or they are homeless and living in shelters.

These workers' children are enrolled in children's health insurance programs, and these families are getting support through Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, the TANF program.

Fifty-two percent of fast-food workers rely on public assistance programs; 46 percent of childcare workers rely on public assistance; 48 percent of home care workers rely on public assistance; and, Mr. Speaker, 25 percent of part-time college faculty—highly educated adjunct professors—rely on public assistance.

According to a Berkeley report, the Federal Government spent \$127.8 billion on working families in these programs. California spent almost \$3.7 billion because of low-wage workers; New York, \$3.3 billion; Texas, \$2.1 billion; and Illinois and Florida both spent a little more than a billion.

This isn't funding for Americans that are uncharacteristically down on their luck or temporarily out of work or in some other moment of crisis. This money is spent on full-time, hard-working Americans who simply are working for corporations who maximize the CEO's benefits at the expense of the workers' salaries.

Mr. Speaker, if my Republican colleagues are so adamant about reducing government spending, shouldn't we be worried about why these folks are trying to work full-time but still need food stamps to make ends meet?

We have also spent a lot of time in this Congress debating tax breaks for the wealthy and for corporations. In fact, earlier this afternoon, we argued about whether or not the 5,000 or so

wealthiest families in this country, the only people who have enough money in their estates to qualify for the estate tax, should get a \$2.5 million tax break.

Every year, we let corporations deduct unlimited amounts of bonus pay for executives, regardless of whether or not the companies' workers get pay raises or not, unlike that one special CEO who sees life differently and believes that to whom much is given much is required.

Corporations have written off \$66 billion between 2007 and 2010 while letting the low-wage workers who make up the rank and file of their companies struggle.

My colleague, CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, has a solution for this, requiring companies to raise wages for their workers if they want to keep qualifying for that tax break. It is a simple solution that wouldn't mean companies suddenly have to raise pay for their workers; they just need to stop expecting the government to cover the exorbitant salaries of their executives if they can't pay the rest of their employees a liveable wage.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I stand with the millions of workers fighting for 15. Lifting pay for low-wage workers will boost their purchasing power, pumping more money into our economy and giving businesses the revenue to create more jobs.

Lifting pay for low-wage workers will reduce government spending. Lifting pay for low-wage workers will open the doors to the American Dream for the millions who have already demonstrated that they are ready and willing to work and to work hard for it.

By standing together and fighting for the \$15, these workers have already made their voices heard in the living rooms, the boardrooms, and the statehouses all across this country. It is time for D.C. to lend an ear as well.

It is my privilege and my honor to stand with those who are simply seeking a fair wage for the work that they do.

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

YUCCA MOUNTAIN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DOLD) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. DOLD. Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honor for me to be here today with several colleagues to talk about and highlight a very serious environmental risk to our communities.

For the last 58 years, this Nation has embraced nuclear power as an inexpensive, clean, and nearly inexhaustible power source for our growing society; yet, in all that time, we have not yet addressed a key problem caused by nuclear power, and that is how to safely dispose of spent nuclear fuel.

We have gathered a good crew of folks here, Mr. Speaker, and it is an

honor for me to yield to my good friend from Washington (Mr. NEWHOUSE).

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman from Illinois' indulgence in allowing me to speak on this important subject this evening.

Mr. Speaker, located in my central Washington district is the Hanford site, which has played a pivotal role in our Nation's security and defense for decades. As part of the Manhattan Project, the Hanford site produced plutonium for the bomb that eventually brought an end to World War II, and continued work at the site was critical during the cold war.

However, this work also resulted in massive amounts of nuclear defense waste. Today, Hanford is the world's largest and most complex nuclear cleanup site, with over 56 million gallons of radioactive and chemical waste in 177 temporary underground storage tanks.

The Federal Government has a legal and a moral obligation to clean up this waste. The importance of Yucca Mountain cannot be overstated. Hanford is scheduled to send more nuclear defense waste to Yucca Mountain than anywhere else in the Nation.

The high-level defense waste at Hanford will be treated at the waste treatment plant, which is currently being constructed, to turn this waste into glass that can then be sent to Yucca.

The waste treatment plant is over 70 percent complete, and the glass produced will meet the geological specifications of Yucca Mountain; yet the Obama administration has moved the goalpost by illegally shutting down Yucca, which will take us back to square one and harm the already challenging Hanford cleanup.

Mr. Speaker, the Federal Government has spent decades and billions of taxpayer dollars studying the right place for the repository. The conclusion was Yucca Mountain, the subject of one of the most thorough and extensive reviews of a major government project ever conducted.

It is the lawful repository for nuclear waste, and Congress has reaffirmed this fact many times over. There is no scientific reason why Yucca cannot and should not move forward.

Earlier this month, I visited Yucca Mountain and was impressed by the substantial work that has already been completed. The development of the site has taken decades and has come at great taxpayer expense, costing Americans over \$15 billion.

Because DOE has failed to begin accepting used nuclear fuel, as required by contracts signed with the electric utilities that own the reactors, liability and settlement estimates now range from \$13 billion to \$50 billion—a blow to taxpayers and ratepayers—all due to the failure of the President to move forward with the legal repository.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, we do not have the time or the resources to just start over. Doing so would change

Yucca from being the Nation's most secure national repository into a monument of government waste and all in violation of the law. After getting a firsthand look at Yucca, I can see why it was selected as the best place for our Nation's defense waste and commercial spent nuclear fuel.

I am disappointed the administration has continued efforts to push ahead with its plan to circumvent Yucca, as well as the repeated affirmations by Congress that Yucca is the lawful repository. I look forward to working with my colleagues here in Congress—especially the members of the Nevada delegation—to ensure that the law is upheld and Yucca Mountain moves forward.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Illinois.

Mr. DOLD. I thank the gentleman from Washington.

I just want to highlight, again, if I may, you mentioned a statistic just a moment ago that was talking about the fact that because the government hasn't moved forward with Yucca Mountain, the fact that we are actually paying to store this material all over the country to Exelon and other companies along those lines, it was anywhere between \$15 and \$50 billion.

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Over the course of those contracts, that is correct.

Mr. DOLD. That is astounding. I thank the gentleman from Washington for your leadership.

Mr. Speaker, it is my honor to yield to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS). He is the dean of the Illinois delegation and someone whose leadership, when it comes to Yucca Mountain, has been extensive.

He is certainly someone who understands what we need to be doing in terms of making sure this material gets off the shores of the Great Lakes and from our neighborhoods all around the country and put into a safe location about 150 miles from any inhabitant in Yucca Mountain.

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the time and just for having this national debate. The State of Illinois is a large State with a lot of nuclear power.

We are very fortunate to have that, not only to have the power generated, but to have the jobs, high-paying jobs, to be located around our State and paying a lot of taxes to our local communities, our local schools, and the like. It would even be better if the Federal Government would keep its promise.

Part of the movement to promote nuclear power was a promise by the Federal Government. In fact, they enforced a fee on those States that have nuclear power to go into a fund, the nuclear waste fund, to fund long-term geological storage.

□ 1845

Now, you might say: Why a long-term geological storage? Why a centralized location? Because the world