

That is actually a little more than \$84,000 of debt to every American citizen right here today.

Now, on this day 1 year ago, in 2020, the U.S. national debt was \$23.4 trillion, that was \$72,309 in debt per person. We have actually borrowed \$10,000 per person in 1 year. I mean, that is out of control.

And when you hear about these bills—I plan to vote against this one tomorrow; I think many of us do—they say, oh, we are going to give this and give that.

No. They are taking it from you. This is debt that your children will have to pay.

This \$2 trillion—nearly \$2 trillion spending package is full of liberal priorities. We are going to grow our debt to \$29 trillion. That is even more debt owed per citizen.

There is a lot of misinformation about where the debt is going. The top two countries we owe the debt to are China and Japan, not actually our friends. We are at global competition with China all the time. They are holding a lot of the debt. We owe China over \$1 trillion and we owe Japan over \$1 trillion.

The people who are loaning us the money we have to pay back are not necessarily people who have our best interest at heart. Brazil, we owe \$258 billion. India, we owe \$216 billion. And the list goes on the debt that is owed to foreign countries.

The national debt was \$5.6 trillion in 2000. It increased. Under Obama, it actually doubled. Since the 8 years Obama was President, we doubled our national debt. And we are adding another—projected here—a completely out of control debt-to-GDP ratio.

So I urge my colleagues to consider the future. Don't buy into the—the government has no money it doesn't take from you that you are going to have to pay back. We need to be judicious with these dollars, and most of this is not going to coronavirus relief anyway.

Mr. ROY. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman from West Virginia for his remarks. And I would echo that—and I think the gentleman would agree—that I believe that, of the \$2 trillion, only 9 percent is directed to COVID relief.

And I really just can't believe that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle can really market this as a COVID relief bill when, by the way, we have \$1 trillion remaining from the \$4 trillion last year and only 9 percent of it is directed to COVID.

Does the gentleman agree?

Mr. MOONEY. I would agree. And I would add that 27 percent of this bill, over \$510 billion goes to State and local governments. So the taxpayers of my State of West Virginia and your State of Texas and other States are literally bailing out States that have failed to manage their own budgets.

West Virginia taxpayers shouldn't have to pay for New York and Illinois

and California that are completely out of control in their spending. \$510 billion is going to bail out these State and local governments. It is not a good use of taxpayer dollars.

Mr. ROY. Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the gentleman from West Virginia, and I appreciate his comments.

I have 1 minute left and I will simply just say this: This chart showing debt is not just about the big number. It is not just about the \$30 trillion of debt. This is about tyranny.

That money, that debt that we owe to our kids and grandkids is being used to fund an education system that teaches our kids that America is evil.

It is being used to fund an education system that won't even put teachers back to work.

It is being used to fund a DHS that won't secure the border and is turning it into a catch-and-release agency.

It is being used to fund the very institutions that are coming after our precious Bill of Rights.

And I would just say to the Speaker and my friends on the other side of the aisle: It is time that we come together and protect the rights given to us by our Creator, that are reflected and defended in the Constitution of the United States.

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

INCREASE THE MINIMUM WAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2021, the gentlewoman from New Mexico (Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

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

There was no objection.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Mr. Speaker, for years, the Congressional Progressive Caucus has fought to give working families the dignity they deserve for the work they perform for our communities and our economy. The increase of the minimum wage to \$15 an hour is an important step to accomplish this goal.

Our caucus is pleased that 14 years after Congress last increased the minimum wage, we are finally close to seeing an increase become law. The American Rescue Plan is intended to help those most impacted by the pandemic's financial hardships. The increase in the minimum wage will help those most vulnerable essential workers. It will put money into the economy and into our local businesses. It will help jumpstart our recovery.

This is also about the dignity of work. This is a bill that will grant peo-

ple the dignity of work with a living wage. When we don't provide a living minimum wage to American workers, they have to work several jobs or rely on food stamps or other government subsidies to put a roof over their head or food on the table.

Rather than subsidizing corporations who pay their workers poverty wage, let's invest in families. Our workers put value and love into the work they do day in and day out. But Congress hasn't raised the minimum wage in over a decade. It is set so low, it is unsustainable for anyone. It was unsustainable before the pandemic, and now it is impossible for anyone to survive off the minimum wage alone.

If we don't raise the wage, we will be turning our backs on the essential workers, on the same workers who have been keeping our country running for the last year. We will be turning our backs on working families.

Everybody—we hear it all the time—is thanking our essential workers. Thank you, essential workers. We recognize now that those who work in our grocery stores, who care for our elderly, who pick our foods, who keep our schools and hospitals clean are maintaining our country through this pandemic.

So while we are thanking them, we are thanking them for putting their lives at stake every time they go to work. You know what? That thank you is hollow if we don't back it up with action. That thank you is meaningless unless we say we are willing to not only thank you, but to actually pay you a wage that will allow you to live and pay your rent and buy your food and take care of your children.

Finally, we are going to put that thank you into action. We are going to do that tomorrow because tomorrow we are going to fulfill our commitment to workers and we are going to include the minimum wage in the American Rescue Plan.

So let's not lose sight either of the fact that this minimum wage is about our values, but it is also about family values because this is a bill, the American Rescue Act, that includes the minimum wage, that values families.

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And why? Because we have all heard the stories of those families, those parents—whether they are a single parent or two parents, or two parents and their kids—are working. We have all heard those stories, that the minimum wage we have now set at \$7 in many places, that that is not enough to pay the rent.

And so what do people need to do? They need to take a second job. They need to work longer hours. They need to do overtime.

And what happens when you are working two jobs or overtime? Do you then have time to coach Little League, to coach your daughter's soccer team, to spend that extra time reading to your kids? The reality is you don't.

So if we value families, we will pay the parents enough so that they have enough time to spend with their families.

Mr. Speaker, this is about taking families out of poverty. This is about taking children out of poverty. And this is about allowing them to come out of poverty through their employment.

Now, there are criticisms out there that raising the wage will close businesses and that people will lose their jobs. I am here to tell you from experience that that won't happen. We have had many economists who have talked about the fact that that won't happen.

But let me tell you, I have got experience. Because in 2002, Santa Fe increased the minimum wage. We called it back then—and that is why I will sometimes fall into saying, “a living wage.” We increased the minimum wage, and we did it because we wanted to help people. We wanted to take the first step to bring people out of poverty.

So the living-wage effort that we did in Santa Fe was a broad coalition that included businesses, it included grassroots activists, it included governments, it also included the faith community and the Catholic Church.

This faith community and the Catholic Church, they saw it as a Christian value, that people deserve to earn a living wage for their hard work. And the first 5 years after passage, not only were businesses not harmed, but the number of establishments, the number of small businesses in Santa Fe grew.

From 2012 to 2017, both the number of small businesses and the number of people employed by small businesses in Santa Fe increased, all while seeing higher wages every single year. Because what we did in Santa Fe was, we said we need to make this decision now, and then do what we are doing in our bill, which is index it so that we don't have to have this fight all the time, and so that we don't set a minimum wage, which is then a poverty wage, if we don't act.

So in Santa Fe, we did that. And it didn't kill job growth. It didn't harm businesses, but it did help families. It helped stimulate our economy. It made our communities stronger. It was so successful that the county then adopted a similar living wage. And it was so successful in the city and the county that the State of New Mexico raised the minimum wage as well.

Here in the House, we will do what we did in Santa Fe and New Mexico. We will do our job to provide workers across the Nation with a wage that reflects the hard work that they do for us. We will thank them with our legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to also urge the Senate to lead with the kind of empathy and compassion that our citizens and our constituents and our communities expect of us. And if you lead with empathy and compassion, you will also pass an American Rescue Plan that includes the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be on the floor today with my Progressive Caucus colleagues this evening.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN).

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congresswoman LEGER FERNANDEZ.

Let me start by saying what an honor it is to serve with you, and I think this is our first action on the floor. I am really glad you are here, and I appreciate your leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight because too many workers across the country have not received a raise in far too long. They include the frontline and essential workers who have kept our economy going during the worst public health crisis in nearly a century. These workers deserve better pay. That is why we must raise the minimum wage, step-by-step to \$15 an hour by 2025, and we have to start doing it right now.

The Federal minimum wage has been stuck at \$7.25 an hour for over a decade. This is the longest stretch of time that we have not raised the minimum wage since it was first introduced in 1938.

Mr. Speaker, \$7.25 is far too low. That is not an adequate wage for anyone, regardless of age or occupation. It is a poverty wage which prevents workers from realizing the American Dream. By gradually raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, 27 million low-wage workers will get a raise—27 million people. We will lift nearly a million people out of poverty, including a lot of kids. And we will put an extra \$333 billion in the pockets of poor and working-class Americans and their families over the next decade.

This money will be a lifeline for the working men and women of this country. It will go towards food. It will go towards rent. It will go towards shoes, other basic necessities, and that will stimulate local economies from coast to coast.

Some detractors say this policy will hurt the economy, and that it is too much too fast. But that is just plain wrong. This proposal raises the minimum wage responsibly over a period of 5 years. Its effective date is 3 months after the bill's enactment, giving employers adequate time to adjust even before the initial increase.

Mr. Speaker, 20 States just raised their minimum wage, going into this year, 2021. And a total of 30 States—red and blue—now have minimum wages higher than the Federal minimum wage. That includes my home State of Michigan, which raised its minimum wage in 2018 and currently has a minimum wage of \$9.65. So the first increase under this bill won't even raise wages in Michigan. It is very gradual.

We have not seen the catastrophic predictions of job losses and higher prices on goods come to pass in States that have raised their minimum wage. Representative LEGER FERNANDEZ just talked about Santa Fe and her county and her State, but we have a lot of

studies showing this to be true from coast to coast.

Indeed, workers have got more pay to buy groceries, to pay for prescription drugs, to shop on their local Main Streets. It is time to make this happen for families in every part of the country.

Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour is a commonsense policy that every Member should support. It is the right thing to do morally and practically for the economy, and I am glad that President Biden included it as part of his American Rescue Plan.

Now, let me talk about how the American people feel about this. If Congressional Republicans want to oppose this, they are really out of sync with many of their own voters.

According to a recent poll from Data for Progress, 66 percent of voters support increasing the Federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. In addition, 57 percent of voters support using non-standard Senate procedures, like the budget reconciliation, to pass this minimum wage increase.

Mr. Speaker, 20 States just raised their minimum wage, as I said, in the last year, but let's focus on Florida.

In November of 2020, Florida voted for Donald Trump—I am not positive of my data here. I think it was by 50.5 percent to 48 percent, I think President Trump won Florida. Well, guess what? A \$15-an-hour minimum wage clocked Donald Trump. The same Republican voters and Democratic voters and Independent voters all across Florida who voted for Donald Trump by a slight margin, voted for a \$15-an-hour State-wide minimum wage by 61 to 39 percent. It was overwhelming.

In the midst of a pandemic that has killed 500,000 Americans and an economic crisis that has the worst food lines in unemployment since the Great Depression, corporations have been raking in billions while workers are earning poverty wages and they are forced to live off food stamps. That is why so many Americans support this.

Now, what about the argument that \$15 an hour is too high?

By 2025, \$15 an hour will be the equivalent of \$13.62 in 2020 dollars. So it won't even be as high as it appears now, but it will be the minimum amount that a single adult working full time will need to earn a living and to cover core basic living expenses.

Now, check this out: Even in the area with the lowest cost of living in these United States, Beckley, West Virginia, in 2025, a two-parent, two-child household, in which both parents earn \$15 an hour and pay taxes, will be \$360 short each month to cover basic living expenses. The lowest-cost place in the country, \$15 an hour in 2025 won't fully cover basic living expenses.

Furthermore, if the minimum wage had kept pace with productivity, with the increased productivity we create by working, since 1968—so productivity gains from 1968 to today—if the minimum wage had increased at the same

rate, it would be over \$20 an hour today. And we are proposing just \$15 an hour.

So, Representative LEGER FERNANDEZ, I am so grateful for you bringing me into this conversation. I feel like this is a question of basic decency, of basic dignity, of the value of work in this country. Every person who gets up and goes to work should be able to provide for their family. And every person, just as you said, should have one job, and that should be enough. One job should be enough. And by the way, that includes everybody.

One of the great things about what we are doing is, we are getting rid of subminimum wages across the board. No subminimums for tip workers, who are overwhelmingly women and workers of color, no subminimum wages for workers with a disability.

We have an opportunity here to bring so many people out of poverty, to give a raise to 27 million people. It is time to do this. We have got to pass it. The Senate has got to pass it. We have a President named Joseph R. Biden, who is ready to sign it. Let's go.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Congressman LEVIN, I think you raised exactly the points that we have been talking about.

This minimum wage, it should be a floor. And it is something that everybody supports. Everybody supports it, whether you are a Republican, whether you are a Democrat, and it is time to get it done.

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, let me just mention, the gentlewoman is so right that it is a floor. One of these arguments that we hear is, "We don't want one-size-fits-all," right?

Well, first of all, as a labor lawyer, the minimum wage has been one national wage the whole time since 1938. It is simply a floor of decency.

And guess what? You already explained how in 2025, it is not very likely that the minimum wage in Santa Fe, New Mexico, will be \$15 an hour. Because in Santa Fe and San Francisco and Los Angeles and New York and Denver—and whatever—places all around this country—the odds are overwhelming that they will have to raise their minimum wage beyond that.

It is a floor of decency. Let's go. Don't you think? Let's go.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Congressman LEVIN, I love the way you describe this as a "floor of decency." And it is our moral compass that tells us that we must vote for this and we must vote for families now. And so we have heard what is happening in your State.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. ADAMS), so she can explain why this is supported in her district and her State.

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Ms. ADAMS. Mr. Speaker, I thank Representative LEGER FERNANDEZ for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to give voice to the millions of Americans who are calling on us to raise the wage.

Our minimum wage workers, many of whom we have come to call essential workers, have a base pay of \$15,080 a year. It doesn't take a Ph.D. to know that you can't survive on \$7.25. Yet, we expect millions of our neighbors to do it, even during a pandemic and an economic crisis.

From the North Carolina General Assembly to the U.S. House of Representatives, raising the wage has been part of my life's work. I know how a couple of dollars an hour can be the difference between prosperity and poverty. I know it because I have lived it. You see, my mom was a domestic worker. She cleaned other people's houses so I wouldn't have to, so I could focus on going to school and getting a good education. Day in and day out, I saw that no matter how hard she worked, her earnings were barely enough to get us by.

Colleagues, this is not because she didn't work hard enough. It is because she didn't make enough.

Now, decades later, that reality has only gotten starker and the need to address it more pressing. The minimum wage has been at \$7.25 for over a decade, the longest stretch in U.S. history.

Mr. Speaker, it is simply impossible to pay the rent and feed your family when you are only making \$1,250 a month. That is not far off from the average monthly rent of an apartment in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Make no mistake about it, \$7.25 is a poverty wage. That is why it is time to raise the wage to \$15 an hour.

A \$15 minimum wage would give 27 million low-wage workers a raise and lift nearly 1 million people out of poverty. In my district, in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, it would mean giving a raise to 80,000 working women. 146,000 workers in the 12th District would see an average pay increase of over \$4,000 a year.

In this moment of crisis, as we grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, a \$15 minimum wage is more important than ever.

It is also important to note that essential and frontline workers make up a majority of those who would benefit from this wage increase. I believe in essential wages for essential workers. That is why we can't pay an essential worker or any worker a poverty wage.

We must take action to deliver on our Nation's promise of equal opportunity for all. In the strongest possible terms, I urge support for increasing the Federal minimum wage to \$15. If it can't happen in tomorrow's package, I urge our committee and this body to take it up next week because America cannot wait.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Congresswoman ADAMS, that was such a forceful description of why it is so necessary for us to act, to act on this moral imperative, which we are facing in this moment.

We have to remember this is a historic moment, so this is our time to take historic action. When we say

thank you to those essential workers, we must express our gratitude in things like the minimum wage because without that, then they are just words.

Ms. ADAMS. Mr. Speaker, the gentlewoman is exactly right. We have to do it, and we have to do it now.

Essential workers need essential opportunities to get a decent wage so that they can take care of their families. Working hard is not enough if you don't make enough. Right now, folks who are making this \$7.25 do not make enough to make ends meet.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Working hard enough is not enough if you can't make ends meet. Those are wonderful words.

Ms. ADAMS. That is right.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield to my colleague from Michigan (Ms. TLAIB).

Ms. TLAIB. Mr. Speaker, I thank my good colleague from New Mexico. It is truly an honor to be able to serve with her.

Yesterday, she shared with me a young student in her district sent her a beautiful letter. It was her first letter from a young child in her district, and I lovingly called the child Teresa's truth-teller. I hope it starts a trend in her community.

Mr. Speaker, to many of my colleagues here, I ask them all to please come and tour my district. I lovingly call them 13th District Strong because they never stop fighting for justice even when many here across the country are always being asked to wait: wait for this, wait for change, wait for us to be able to tackle poverty wages. Those that can afford it, they wait, but our folks can't afford it anymore.

Raising the Federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour has never been more urgent for my residents, and it is long overdue. You see, I represent the third poorest congressional district in the country. I want you to think about that for one moment.

I have an elderly couple who has to melt snow in a bucket so that they have the ability to flush their toilet because they can't afford water. Water has been increased by 400 percent in rates. I have a mother in my district who is pleading for me to find a place where her daughter can eat twice a day. More than half of my residents pay a third or more of their income for housing.

Our economy is structured in a way to benefit the few over the many. It is no surprise that the many it is not working for are the working people in our communities.

If we want to truly look and peek at the economy, measure the amount of debt our families have compared to their incomes. Look at the productivity numbers that are up compared to the wages that remain stagnant.

At the same time that our people are suffering, large corporations are seeing record-breaking profits, and CEOs are being paid record-high salaries. It is simply unfair and immoral.

Raising the minimum wage is also a matter of racial justice. Workers of color are far more likely to be paid poverty wages than their White counterparts, and Black and Brown workers are far more likely to be victims of wage theft. I know because I used to represent them and fight for their fair access to their wages that they have earned.

A \$15 Federal minimum wage would increase the earnings of 38 percent of Black workers across our Nation, a raise that will be life-changing.

It is time for all of us right here in Congress to earn our own pay and deliver this overdue minimum wage increase without delay. I hope folks understand, \$15 is already the compromise. It is. If the minimum wage had kept up with worker productivity, it would already be at \$24 per hour.

Workers aren't asking for anything they aren't already earning for their bosses. Without workers, there is no profit. It is high time for us to end the pattern of exploiting workers, our neighbors, family members.

Raise the wage. It is the right thing to do for our Nation. It is so incredibly supported outside these Halls of Congress. Listen to the people who sent us here. They are urging us to please stop waiting.

We have been given the power to change their lives for the better. Mr. Speaker, I thank, again, my colleague from New Mexico.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Mr. Speaker, Congresswoman TLAI B talked about the fact that now is the time. There is a call and an urgency for us to do this because it is the time of the pandemic. It is the time of such great suffering.

My father had a saying that when it was time to get important stuff done, he would say, "Ahora es cuando," it is time now. His saying is ringing through your words, and it is calling upon us to say what we need to say so that we do what we need to do and raise the wage. So, ahora es cuando. It is, indeed, time now.

Thank you for explaining the urgency of what it is like to have to boil your water because you can't afford the utility bill. That should break all of our hearts, and it should urge us each to act and to act now with the power that we have been given by our constituents.

I would now like to turn to one of my colleagues, one of our freshman class from New York City, Congressman TORRES.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. TORRES).

Mr. TORRES of New York. Mr. Speaker, I thank Teresa for those kind words.

I have the honor of representing New York 15, the South Bronx, which is often said to be the poorest congressional district in America. The unemployment rate in the South Bronx can be as high as 25 percent compared to 5 percent in the Upper East Side, so we are living through a tale of two cities.

But COVID-19 has shown the South Bronx to be the essential congressional district. It is the home of essential workers who put their lives at risk during the peak of the pandemic so that the rest of us could safely shelter in place. We owe it to those workers to give them a fighting chance at a decent and dignified life.

Our society will be judged by how we treat the most essential among us. There is a gap between the value of what our essential workers do and how poorly we treat them and how poorly we pay them. Bridging that essential gap is one of the great moral imperatives of our time.

Raising the minimum wage is long overdue. The minimum wage in America has been lagging behind inflation. It has been lagging behind the productivity of the American workforce. It has been lagging behind the historic average.

We have gone more than a decade, the longest we have ever gone, without raising the minimum wage by even a cent. By every metric, whether it is inflation or productivity or the historic average or the length of time that we have gone without raising the minimum wage, it is time to finally lift the minimum wage for the most essential workers among us.

The statistics are clear that raising the minimum wage would lift 900,000 Americans out of poverty. It would raise incomes for 17,000 Americans.

For me, the minimum wage is exactly that. It is the minimum of what we should do for our most essential workers. If we fail to raise the minimum wage, then shame on us. Shame on us for failing to do right by the essential workers who did right by all of us in our moment of greatest need.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman TORRES.

What he has told us today is about the fact that there are districts in the country, including mine, including so many that we have heard about, where the minimum wage is too low. What we can't do is we can't have a United States of America where what you earn depends on where you live. That is what we are trying to do today, is say that where you live does not impact what you earn or where you work.

Today, at a Senate hearing, Costco announced that it would begin paying their workers a \$16-an-hour minimum wage. They have already recognized that that \$15 level is too low, and they want to keep their workers.

The reality is, we know that when people are paid well, then the turnover is less. The commitment is better, and paying a minimum wage, paying something where somebody can go home to their children, can put that food on the table without relying on SNAP benefits, that they can then say: I have done it. I can go work. I can come home.

And it doesn't matter whether I live in your district, whether I live in Seattle, or whether I live in Coronado. It

doesn't matter because there is a floor that is the same across the country, and it is not a poverty wage.

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What we have now is a poverty wage. That is very clear. If you cannot use the minimum wage that we have now to pay your rent, to buy your food, and to pay your utilities, then that is the equivalent of a poverty wage. We know that. We know that because of the wages we have across our country.

We have all worked. Congressman TORRES, you have worked and looked to see: When does the Community Development Block Grant come in? Does it look like we are a distressed community or not? They look at what that median income is, and if you are earning the median wage, you are in poverty, right?

Mr. TORRES of New York. Mr. Speaker, she is exactly right. The promise of America is that if you work hard and play by the rules, then you should have access to a decent, dignified life. Too many of our essential workers are paid starvation wages.

You have people who are doing everything right. They are working their heart out for the country and for their families, and they are struggling to survive because the cost of living in America, especially in cities like New York, is spiraling out of control.

So the promise of America is broken as long as we continue to pay our most essential workers poverty wages. It is no longer defensible.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Mr. Speaker, earlier we spoke about the fact that to say thank you to these essential workers regularly and over and over again but to refuse to pay a living wage, a minimum wage of at least what we are asking for in this bill, is really not saying thank you at all, is it? It rings hollow.

Mr. TORRES of New York. Mr. Speaker, we cannot simply honor our essential workers with hollow words. We, as a country, have to put our money where our mouth is and do right by them.

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

Ms. LEE of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. I want to thank my friend and colleague Representative Teresa Leger Fernandez from New Mexico's 3rd district for convening this special order hour. Raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour is one critical step towards ensuring an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The federal minimum wage has been at \$7.25 for more than a decade. This is the longest period of time without an increase in the minimum wage in US history. Inflation has eroded this amount to a fraction of its previous value. We must increase the wage and we must do it now.

Someone working a full time job at the current federal minimum wage only earns \$15,000 a year. That is a disgrace. A full time worker in this country should be able to put

food on their table and a roof over their head and be able to pay their other expenses with their earnings. Many of these minimum wage workers are essential workers, helping our communities endure this pandemic.

Raising the minimum wage to fifteen dollars an hour isn't a cure-all. In high cost urban areas, such as the one I represent in the Bay Area, fifteen dollars an hour still is not enough to get ahead. But raising the federal minimum wage has been shown to help lift wages across the board for people at the lower end of the income scale.

A fifteen dollar minimum wage would give 27 million low-wage workers a raise and lift nearly one MILLION people out of poverty. But this isn't just an economic need—it's a racial justice imperative. Many people of color have been paid poverty wages for too long—deepening the long standing racial and economic divisions in this country. African Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans are all much more likely to make only the minimum wage.

Recent polling shows that 72 percent of Americans, a vast majority, support raising the minimum wage, including Republicans and Independents. We need to ensure workers get paid living wages, especially in times of crisis. Raising the minimum wage is a necessary first step to growing our economy and recovering from this pandemic. Additionally, it will also lessen the need for full time workers to be receiving public assistance. When you raise the wages of the lowest-paid workers, it is good for our communities and our country. Those workers can then spend money in their communities, boosting local small businesses and our entire economy.

HONORING HOMETOWN HEROES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2021, the Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. CAMMACK) for 30 minutes.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate and honor hometown heroes in my district and across the Nation, these proud Americans embodying the persistent, giving, and fighting spirit of our national creed.

The COVID pandemic has put our country and our communities to the test, pushing us to seek positivity and hope in each day as we have weathered the storms that have come our way.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight the great work and service of my constituents who have shown bravery and empathy in these trying times.

Last week, I invited the constituents of Florida's Third Congressional District, the Gator Nation, to submit their nominations for individuals they would like to honor for their dedication to our communities over the last year. I received several nominations with the names of constituents who have gone above and beyond the call of duty, who put service above self, so many nominations, in fact, that we have pledged to continue this series throughout the year to highlight their great work.

Included in this group are first responders, law enforcement officers, teachers, nurses, and Good Samaritans. They are the backbone of our commu-

nities. I am honored to be able to represent them in Congress and share their stories with you today.

The first is my friend, and the only woman sheriff in the great State of Florida, Sheriff Michelle Cook. Sheriff Cook, in her long tenure in law enforcement, has walked the beat and fought against the scourge of the opioid epidemic and human trafficking in Clay County.

She is also the proud mother to four foster children, who she lovingly brought into her own home to prevent their separation. She works every day to protect our community and our great county of Clay County. I am so grateful for her service.

Thank you, Sheriff Cook.

Now, much like Sheriff Cook, Sergeant Kim Miller put service above self as a member of the Green Cove Springs Police Department. While Sergeant Miller celebrated her retirement earlier this year, she has spent the last 15 years of her life dedicated to the children of Clay County and their safety and development.

She is proud to have been the first Black female sergeant for the Green Cove Springs Police Department and continues to make the citizens of Clay County proud.

It was always a pleasure seeing Sergeant Miller's smiling face when I visited the department, and I congratulate her on her retirement this year. Although she is not on the force any longer, her service to the Green Cove Springs community is remarkable. I am honored to celebrate her here today.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. CARL).

Mr. CARL. Mr. Speaker, what an honor to get to speak before you. This is a thrill.

I rise today to honor several hometown heroes from my district who have made an impact on the community over the course of the year.

First, I would like to thank my colleague from Florida, Congresswoman KAT CAMMACK, for organizing this Special Order hour.

I also reached out to my community, and I asked for the leaders in our community to give us some of what they think to be hometown heroes. Let me just run through a few real quick.

Last year has been tough on millions of Americans across the country as we battle the COVID pandemic and endure countless hardships, but I am proud of so many folks in south Alabama who have made our community a better place. Many of them are unsung heroes. I would like to take a moment today to honor a few of them.

Brian Copes, manufacturing instructor for the city of Chickasaw School System, is a leader in the effort of developing inexpensive prosthetic limbs that will change many lives of amputees throughout Latin America.

Students from all disciplines have been working together to create a real nonprofit business. Eventually, these

students will travel to Latin America, not only to fit the amputees but also to aid the amputees in rehabilitation as they learn to walk and use their new limbs.

Another one is Natalie Fox, assistant administrator and chief nursing officer for USA Physicians Group. That "USA" stands for University of South Alabama, which we are very proud of. And USA Healthcare has been a leading coordinator in the University of South Alabama Healthcare System community testing and vaccination sites for the Mobile region.

To date, she has overseen the successful implementation of over 26,000 COVID-19 vaccines administered since December 15, and over 50,000 coronavirus tests performed since the pandemic began. Natalie has worked tirelessly to meet the high demands on the healthcare system for the past year, and I am incredibly thankful for her hard work and her dedication to the people of south Alabama.

Jennifer Myrick of Fairhope, Alabama, has been a critical figure in the recovery efforts after Hurricanes Sally and Zeta, which hit the area. Jennifer worked through the Fairhope United Methodist Church to set up an independent point of distribution to hand out critical supplies to the public.

She has also headed up a feeding program for those supplies and is an active member of the Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster through Baldwin County Emergency Management, where she helped fulfill many needs throughout the county.

Jennifer also worked with the Fairhope Police Department to keep police officers, dispatchers, and correction officers fed through this long stretch between both of these hurricanes.

Kathy Couey, a recreation supervisor for the city of Chickasaw, Alabama, goes above and beyond her duties every day in her day-to-day responsibilities to make sure the city is a better and healthier place for families to live. Her creativity is limitless, with a true servant's heart.

With so many people working and learning from home over the past year, staying active and getting outdoors has been critical to people's physical and mental health. Kathy's hard work has made Chickasaw a better place to live and raise a family.

Virtually no person across the country has not been impacted in some way by the pandemic, natural disasters, and the countless other challenges that we have faced. We have come a long way. Although we are living in difficult times, I could not be prouder than I am to be an American today.

And I couldn't be more thankful for so many incredible people all over my district and all over the Nation who have worked hard each day, not for fame, not for recognition or for money, but for the betterment of their friends and neighbors. This is what makes America strong.