

are going to take care of Medicare but we have to slow the rate of growth. To say we are destroying and devastating the program, that is wrong, and all you are doing is getting senior citizens scared. I have got too many senior citizens to have scared like that. I think it is wrong and we need to stand back and say this is a bipartisan issue. Let us work together to save the Medicare Program.

THE MINIMUM WAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of May 12, 1995, the gentlewoman from North Carolina [Mrs. CLAYTON] is recognized during morning business for 4 minutes.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, every person who works desires to earn a livable wage. That is the reason for working.

That is not true today.

Some 12 million workers earn a mere minimum wage.

What is a minimum wage?

A minimum wage is the least, the lowest, the smallest wage possible—a minimal wage.

It is not a wage that reflects the cost of living.

It is a wage that the law allows an employer to pay, without regard to the cost of basics—food, clothing, and shelter.

A worker can work very hard and be productive—40 hours a week—and his boss is only required to pay the least, the lowest, the smallest possible wage—a minimal wage.

Mr. Speaker, is it fair to allow employers to pay a wage that is 50 cents less in value than it was when the wage was set 5 years ago? That is a 40-year low.

The price of living has steadily risen, while the pay for working has steadily fallen.

The proposal to increase wages to make them more livable is a constrained proposal.

The increase would be a barely significant 90-cents per hour—in two installments of 45 cents each, over 2 years—raising the minimum wage from \$4.25 to \$5.15.

Yet, while the 90-cent increase is barely significant when compared to wage and income increases among managers, politicians, and other professionals—it is an increase that could make life livable for millions of Americans.

A 90-cent raise in pay for minimum-wage workers would add \$1,800 in additional income over a year.

That amount of money—\$1,800—could buy 7 months' worth of groceries for the humble and unassuming family.

That amount of money—\$1,800—for a single mother, with children—could cover 4 months of basic housing costs; 9 months of utility bills; more than a full year's tuition at a junior college; and 1 year of health care costs.

That amount of money could make a substantial difference in the quality of life for the working poor in America.

Who are the working poor in America, Mr. Speaker?

Most are adults—20 years old or older. In fact, more than 7 out of every 10 of the working poor are adults.

Also, most are women, and many are single, heads of households, with children. In fact, about 6 out of every 10 of the working poor are women.

Mr. Speaker, the least, the lowest, the smallest possible wage—the minimum wage—that the working poor can earn has increased just once in the past quarter of a century. That one increase in 25 years was by 90 cents in two installments as well.

Thoughtful economists and scholars throughout the United States have closely monitored and studied the impact of minimum wage increases on the economy.

An impressive list of those economists and scholars have concluded that increasing the minimum wage had no significant, long-term, adverse impact on employment.

Indeed, a higher minimum wage can make it easier to fill vacancies and can decrease employee turnover.

We will soon debate welfare reform proposals. How can we realistically expect cooperation from those on public assistance when, at current minimum wage levels, a person who leaves welfare and takes a job would simply move from one poverty status to another?

In 1955, more than four decades ago, the value of the minimum wage was a little less than \$4. Today, the value of the minimum wage is a little more than \$4. Surely, we should not expect a worker in 1996 to live on 1955 wages.

Historically, the issue of a fair minimum wage has enjoyed broad, bipartisan support. The issue deserves no less today.

I urge all my colleagues, Republicans and Democrats, to join in supporting a livable wage for all Americans.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 940, a bill with a modest increase in the minimum wage.

MORE ON THE MINIMUM WAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of May 12, 1995, the gentleman from California [Mr. RIGGS] is recognized during morning business for 5 minutes.

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to rise to address the minimum wage issue for just a moment as one of seven Republicans who a few weeks ago voted for a procedural motion on this floor that would have allowed the House to then consider actually a vote on increasing the minimum wage and as 1 of 20 Republicans who have now joined together to introduce our own version of legislation increasing the minimum wage. This is our competing version with the version that has been offered by our Democratic colleagues.

What I wanted to first point out before this minimum wage bandwagon gets too far along in the process is that some of our Democratic friends, espe-

cially those in the other body, are not leveling with the American people. They are not telling the American people, for example, that during the past 2 years, when they controlled both Houses of the Congress and of course the Presidency, they did not entertain legislation to increase the minimum wage. That sort of begs the question: Why, if you think it was such a high priority, if you think it is such a high priority now, why did you not address it when you had the chance, when you controlled both Houses of the Congress and the Presidency?

Second, Mr. Speaker, let me say that one reason, in fact the main reason that I supported increasing the minimum wage is because I believe we have to make work more attractive than welfare. I campaigned in 1994 on a promise of supporting an increase in the minimum wage provided it was coupled with meaningful welfare reform. I was concerned, first of all, that the minimum wage has lost a lot of its purchasing power to inflation and that we ought to increase the minimum wage to at least keep pace with inflation. Second, we ought to increase the minimum wage, as I said before, to make work more attractive than welfare.

Over the past 15 months, the new Republican majority in the Congress has been attempting to help President Clinton, who, as candidate Clinton back in 1992, campaigned on a promise of ending welfare as we know it, made good on the promise. We have been dealing with meaningful welfare reform. We want to end the Federal entitlement for welfare. We want to make block grant programs which the States would administer. We want to impose a time limit of 2 years or less at the discretion of the States on receiving welfare benefits and a 5-year lifetime limit on receiving welfare benefits.

Second and probably even more importantly, we want to require able-bodied welfare recipients to work at least part time or enter a job training program in exchange for their benefits. That is emphasizing work over welfare. We recognize because so many welfare recipients are single mothers and that they struggle against heroic odds that we have to increase funding for child care and transportation to help those welfare recipients make that difficult transition from welfare to work. But again part of making that transition from welfare to work, at least in my view, is to increase the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I am co-sponsoring legislation which would increase the minimum wage, the Federal minimum wage to \$5.25 per hour over the next year. If we are going to reform welfare by moving people from welfare to work, they need to be able to earn a more living wage. They ought to be in a position as a former welfare recipient to enter the work force in an entry level position, at least being able to meet their own needs, hopefully as well as the needs of dependents.