contribution to Las Vegas. His untimely death was a surprise to all of us. We will mourn him, we miss him and we love him.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to come before the House once again and the 30-Something Working Group, as you know and the Members know, we come to the floor day after day to share with the Members what we are doing right and what we are doing wrong.

So many times we focus on this side of the aisle on the plans that we have here on the Democratic side of the aisle in helping Americans to continue to prosper, need it be they are in small business or they wake up and go to work every day, educating our children, making sure that we have a healthy and prosperous and safe America.

Before I get started, I know Mr. RYAN will be joining me momentarily, Mr. Speaker. I just want to share with the Members a few plans that we have on this side of the aisle that we would like to implement. The only thing that is stopping us from bringing these plans to the floor and implementing action, well, we are moving in the right direction with great force, is the fact that we are not the majority here, Mr. Speaker, to be able to bring these issues to the floor.

As you know, in the past, I have talked about energy. I encourage Members to go to housedemocrats.gov to pick up a copy of our energy agenda, talking about alternative fuel, talking about bringing about flex vehicles in the industry to be able to allow more Americans to purchase vehicles that are flex vehicles that they can use E–85 and gasoline.

Real security plan, it is there dealing with homeland security. We have already said on this side of the aisle if we are in the majority that we would implement all of the 9/11 recommendations to make America safer. This is a bipartisan commission, as the Members know, that was appointed, and this House was part of it, and they did outstanding work. Those recommendations have still not been fully implemented to protect America.

We have our initiative that we have been trying to promote for the last 3 to 4 months in a very forceful way, which is allowing working Americans to be able to earn more money. It has been 9 years, Mr. Speaker, since the American people have received an increase as it relates to the minimum wage. It is very, very unfortunate that we have Americans that are working for $5.15 an hour. The minimum wage has been the same since 1997, which is now approaching 10 years.

As you know, many Americans have suffered under the low minimum wage that we have now, that is throughout for individuals that are working every day, and I have a few facts here.

Of the last 50-years, I mean, this is the lowest it has been in the last 50 years. Also, 6.6 million Americans will benefit from an increase in the minimum wage, and something that I must add, the Republican leadership has said that they vow not to raise the minimum wage again this year or next year. So I think that is something that the American people need to pay very close attention to.

Three-quarters of the minimum wage workers are adults that are over the age of 20, many of whom are responsible for over half of the family's income. One day of work, it takes an entire day's wage for an earner to buy a tank of gas.

Also, studies have shown, Mr. Speaker, that zero jobs have been lost when the minimum wage has been increased.

Eighty-six percent of Americans do support an increase in the minimum wage. Twenty-one States have moved in the direction of increasing the minimum wage. I do not know what is going on here with the Republican majority in not moving in that direction to allow more American people to have money in their pocket to be able to provide for their families.

We have talked many times on this floor in the 30-Something Working Group about the new weight that has been placed on the heads of the American people as they start to send their young people to college.

□ 1730

Just yesterday we had a town hall meeting downstairs in this building, in HC5 here in the Capitol Building, with some young people who are third-party validators with the student loans they have out now, Mr. Speaker. And this is very serious, because now people are starting to prepare their young people to go off to college in the month of August and late July, many of whom are now having to take out these student loans at a very high interest rate. They are going to end up paying almost $100 more a month in interest to pay for their college, and I think that is something we need to pay very close attention to.

It is very unfortunate that on the majority side, Mr. Speaker, on the Republican side, all due respect to all the innovation that one tries to come up with on the other side of the aisle, it is costing the American people more, and it is putting our young people in debt in this country even before they can grab their college degree and earn a living. They are already, on average, somewhere around $25,000 or $30,000 in debt when they step across the stage. That is very, very unfortunate.

We cut student aid here. We increase student loan rates here. The States in turn have to cut, and the cost of college is increased. It increases on these individuals. It is an increase on these individuals.

I think it is also important, Mr. Speaker, for us to talk about the fact that we have the will and the desire on this side of the aisle to move America in the right direction. I talked about this last week, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is very, very important to bring this up here again today; that we are willing to move this country in the right direction, in a new direction, making sure that Americans have more opportunities.

I think it is important for us to point out the fact that on this side of the aisle we have committed again to raising the minimum wage. We have committed to helping this country become energy independent, investing in the Midwest versus the Middle East within 10 years. We have also committed on this side of the aisle, I mentioned it earlier, to implementing all of the 9/11 recommendations.

But one of our major commitments on this side, Mr. Speaker, and also to the American people, is that we have said that we are willing to bring this budget back into balance within a reasonable time; not that we are going to cut the deficit in half, or we are going to balance the budget, but we are going to be able to bring us out of this deficit spending that the Republican majority has led us into with record deficits as far as the eye can see.

We have the resume. On our resume we have the accomplishment of being able to do that. We have accomplished that before in the past, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is something that one needs to pay very close attention to.

When we say a commitment to making sure our fiscal house is in order, it is not a slogan. It is not something that someone says, well, the polls say you need to say you are going to bring spending under control. We have actually attempted to do that.

You have seen this chart before. We can't talk about it enough, because the facts are in. Regardless of the floor speeches that may go on on the Republican side of the aisle, I think it is important for us to outline the fact that we have put our legislation where our mouths are.

We have said that we want to see this House say that if you are going to spend, then spend in a way that almost every American family has to spend. If you are going to buy something, you have to know how you are going to pay for it. You can't put everything on a credit card. And what is unfortunate is that we have allowed other countries to be a part of our country financially not because the American people have made a bad decision, but it is because the majority and the White House have made some bad decisions.

Here I have, Mr. Speaker, a PAYGO rule that on this side we have adopted; that we are willing to pay as we go. If you are going to buy it, you have to show how you are going to pay for it. It is not that you spend or you buy and

then you borrow. JOHN SPRATT, who is the ranking member on the Budget Committee, on the 2006 budget resolution, and this is the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, this is not something the 30-something Working Group put together, this is rollcall vote 87, March 17 of 2005. Republicans voted 228 against this pay-as-you-go amendment that we put forward.

Again, Mr. SPRATT and the ranking member's substitute amendment to House Concurrent Resolution 393, this is also rollcall vote number 91, March 25, 2004, 224 Republicans voting against pay-as-you-go on a rule we tried to put in place.

When I say try, Mr. Speaker, that is all we can do at this particular point because until Democrats are in the majority, we are not going to be able to put this country into the fiscal position it should be in.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, and I do say once again, I pull my chart out. This is almost my exhibit A here. Third-party validator. And the source that has given us this information happens to be the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Here we show that 42 Presidents over 224 years were only able to borrow from foreign nations, and this is money that the United States has borrowed from foreign nations in 224 years and 42 Presidents, $1.01 trillion. Through World War I, World War II, the Great Depression, a number of other conflicts, slowdowns in the economy, and other issues that have faced this country, 42 Presidents have only borrowed $1.01 trillion.

In 4 years, 4 years with President Bush, $1.05 trillion with the Republican Congress. Just in 4 years, Mr. Speaker. If someone came to me and said, KENDRICK, you have to throw all the charts out but one, if you just wanted one chart, this would be the one that I would pick, Mr. Speaker, because I think it reveals what has happened here in this House, how it has been so easy for the Republican majority to put runaway spending on a credit card and allowed foreign countries to be able to own a part of the American apple pie.

What is so very, very unfortunate here, as all of this borrowing has taken place, you would think that student loans would have a lower interest rate, you would think that alternative fuels would have an opportunity to be a part of the marketplace, and that we would be moving towards more cleaner-burning fuel. You would think that we would have a world-class health care system, and that companies as big as General Motors and as small as a mom-and-pop store that has five or six employees in it would be able to provide health care for their employees, and you would also think, Mr. Speaker, that a number of States would not be suing the Federal Government because of the underfunding of the Leave No Child Behind with all of the money that has been borrowed from foreign nations.

But what has happened is that the superwealthy in this country have gotten the biggest tax cut in the history of the Republic. What has also happened is that Republicans have been allowed to spend in record-breaking, I mean, just off the charts. For Republicans to come down here and blame Democrats for spending—I mean, really, I know it is kind of hard for them to keep eye contact with someone like me and those of us in the 30-something Group who knows better, who know what the facts show, that $1.05 trillion has been borrowed from foreign countries. They are weakening our country as they start to move and allow these other countries to be able to own so much of the American apple pie.

And I will close with this before I yield to Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, who came in before Mr. RYAN. I think it is important, Mr. Speaker, for us to look at it from this standpoint; that if you borrow money from someone, the relationship has changed. I heard someone from the White House say this morning on the Today Show we are the last standing superpower. Okay, well, you must be talking about militarily, because financially we are getting weaker every day under this administration's policy and the rubber-stamping of this Republican Congress.

I think it is important that everyone understands that we have borrowed money from countries that we have never borrowed money from before in a record-breaking way. The Republican majority has done so without our help, but because they are in the majority, that has happened, and now they are looking at us under a different light.

We still have budgets that are being passed here on this floor that is going to even make the American people more indebted to foreign nations, some that we have questions of their links to possible terrorism and other questionable measures.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to yield to Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

My good friend Mr. MEEK really illustrates the point that we have been trying to drive home for all the time that I have been here now, and for several years before my arrival with the beginnings of the 30-something Working Group, and that is that with the illustration that you just had up there, that literally we have racked up as much debt under this President than all the Presidents combined, all 42 before this President.

That really is illustrative of the point we have been making; that America is truly going in the wrong direction, and that in order to right the ship, to start us on the path that Americans want us to be going down, we need to make sure that we elect Democrats in the fall that will no longer support the rubber-stamping that goes on in this institution on the other side of the aisle.

Mr. MEEK, I think what we try to do during our 30-something hour is show people what some of these more macroconcepts mean in terms of their daily lives. The economy, which the Republicans talk about so often, and actually, I guess, what it is, Mr. RYAN, is that they think that if they say it enough times, it will become true.

I have heard so many of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle say, oh, the economy is great, the President said it, it is gangbusters, we are in the best shape we could possibly be in. Well, how is that possible if you have health care, gas, housing, and college costs that are all skyrocketing through the roof? I mean, the median family income has dropped every year of the Bush administration. The typical family is paying $1,200 more a year for health insurance, college tuition has gone up about 40 percent in real terms, gas prices have doubled to nearly $3 a gallon, housing is the least affordable it has been in 14 years, and real wages have been flat since 2001. And we have a chart that illustrates that graphically, but that is the economy that our constituents are living in.

Now, maybe our Republican colleagues are living in some kind of alternative bizarro world. Is there an alternative universe that I am not aware of that perhaps some of them are living? Because this is what reality is: College tuition, up 40 percent under the Bush administration; gas prices up 47 percent; health care costs up 55 percent; and median household income down by 4 percent.

That is good? I don't know. I bet if we looked up ''good'' in the dictionary it wouldn't reflect any of this reality. Just have a hunch that Webster wouldn't define ''good'' this way. It wouldn't look like that.

So I want, and I know we all want, to move this country in a new direction, and we have an agenda that would do that; that would deal with the health care crisis that we are in with 46 million Americans without health insurance, people who have to go to the emergency room for their primary health care. We would make sure that we increase the minimum wage, which hasn't been done since 1997. I mean, that is just unbelievable.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I just read today in a paper from American Progress, Scott Lilly, former staff member here, who wrote on the minimum wage, and I think he said in there that the minimum wage has the lowest value since the Eisenhower administration.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Fifty years.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. So it is unbelievable to think exactly where we are and the lack of leadership that we have here.

On that one poster you just had up, President Bush said the economy is benefiting all Americans. I find that interesting. I had some steelworkers in my office just today from all over Ohio, and they certainly don't think that the current economy is benefiting all Americans, that is for sure.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. We are going to take up the estate tax tomorrow, and as much of a deal as our Republican colleagues have made out of this, it benefits about 5,000 people in the country. I mean, 5,000 people. And they are making this such a high priority. It is going to cost over $200 billion, and this is what they think is a priority, as opposed to dealing with health care, gas prices, college costs, and housing costs.

□ 1745

Yet another example is when they passed their tax reconciliation bill, their tax cut bill earlier this year. Just to give people an idea of what kind of benefit we truly doled out to most folks, if you made between $10,000 and $20,000, you would get enough back from the tax cut bill we passed earlier this year, enough back to buy a Slurpee.

There are a whole lot of things that are a priority in my life and the lives of my constituents that I want to make sure that I can buy, my constituents want to be able to buy, and a Slurpee is not really mentioned in the letters written to me in my office.

Now let's go down to the people making between $40,000 to $50,000 a year. That is a working family. They would get back enough to buy a gallon of gas. I think that probably most people would think if we are going to pass a tax cut measure, if we are going to really provide revenue and give folks back their hard earned tax dollars, it should be more than the value of a gallon of gas.

But if you are fortunate enough to make more than $1 million, you get back the equivalent of a Hummer. Now that is something that most people could probably write home about. But how many people in America make more than $1 million.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And in the context of this, where do we get the money to give the millionaire to get the Hummer, we don't have it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. And tomorrow we are going to do more.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We are borrowing this money. That is the kicker. As Mr. MEEK pointed out earlier in the hour, where we are getting the money from to borrow to give to the people who make more than a million a year, and now we have to pay interest on that money. This is what we pay in interest on the debt, just the red, $230-some billion compared to what we spend on education, homeland security and veterans.

So a disproportionate amount of our budget dollars go just to pay interest on the debt. We get no value from that. We are just giving the Chinese, the Japanese, the OPEC countries, our money that they will continue to try to invest and take jobs away from us. We do need to go in another direction.

I think this goes right to the heart. There are two belief systems here. There is the Republican belief system that says cut taxes for millionaires, give corporate welfare to the oil and health care industries, okay. That is their belief system. Let's make sure that the pharmaceutical industry has no ability or we don't have any ability to negotiate down the prices with them. That is their belief system.

But the Democratic belief system is that everybody needs to pay their fair share and make some sacrifice. Why is it just the middle class, the poor and the small business owner making all the sacrifice while the wealthiest people get their tax break.

Our belief system is that they need to pay their fair share, those making more than a million a year because they are benefiting from the largess of the United States of America, and we need to take that money and invest it into research and development, stem cell research, 21st century technologies, broadband for every household, making sure that our schools are functioning, No Child Left Behind is funded, and that we reduce the amount of interest that you have to pay on a college loan.

Mr. Speaker, what the Republicans are doing with college loans is ridiculous.

Now the Democrats want to cut student loan interest rates in half for both parents and students. The Republicans want to increase it and give tax breaks to millionaires. The Democrats are for raising the minimum wage. The Republicans will not bring a bill to the floor that actually passed out of committee that raises minimum wage.

The Republicans are for giving corporate welfare to the oil industry. The Republican Congress put that money in, $16 billion went to energy companies, corporate welfare at this time of great profits.

All of these things, it is about beliefs and we have our share of beliefs, they have theirs, and the American people are going to choose.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I would just like to go back to energy prices and gas prices. Just to zero in on one of the things that is the most galling about the direction that the Republican Congress has taken us in, gas prices are up.

I am one of those minivan moms. I have little kids and when I go home, I am going to dance class and soccer games and shuttling them all over my district. It is a lot of driving. With three kids, you have to have a large enough vehicle to fit the car seats and the stuff and the athletic equipment and the dance bags, and so minivans are an essential piece of life when you are a mom or dad with little kids. It costs like $55 to fill up the gas tank of a minivan.

I have reached the conclusion that the only explanation for the continued direction that our Republican colleagues have taken us in when it comes to gas prices and refusing to deal with the energy crisis and refusing to adequately fund, if fund at all, alternative energy sources is because they obviously haven't filled their own tanks of gas since gas pumps looked like this.

This is a replica of a gas pump from the 1950s or thereabouts. I truly believe they must not pump their own gas, or the last time they did, pumps looked like this or they would be feeling the pain. You cannot stand there for as long as you stand there for squeezing the pump and watching the tally click by, $10, $20, $30, $40, $50. You can't do that, even if you can afford it, without it being somewhat painful.

Think about it, think about the mom or dad who is just barely making ends meet. They are barely making ends meet before gas went over $3 a gallon. When is enough enough? Where is the outrage? Where is the legislation? Where is the oversight? Why aren't they calling the CEOs of the oil companies and asking is it possible that they are not in collusion, that they are not conspiring to set prices the same. It is mind boggling. I don't understand why they don't care. That is clearly the message that is sent here.

What we would do, we would make sure that we could, within 10 years, be independent of foreign oil by pursuing alternative energy research like ethanol. Brazil has done it. This is our innovation agenda. For anyone on the other side of the aisle who wants to continue to perpetuate the myth that Democrats have no agenda, here is a big piece of it in several colors, not just black and white.

This innovation agenda includes a number of things, not the least of which is our ability to truly end our addiction to foreign oil which the President talked about in his State of the Union, and only talked about and did nothing to change it. Our innovation agenda would help us get there. It would also make sure that we give people universal access to broadband in 5 years. It also does a number of other things to take us in a new direction.

I know I have focused specifically in on one part of the problem, but because that is something that people deal with every single day or every couple of days when their gas light goes on and their tank runs empty, and I know you both agree with me that it is something that we need to put the magnifying glass on.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Knowing a lot of members on the other side of the aisle, I am not sure that they don't care, but clearly it is weak, passive leadership. We need strong leadership. We need not only a new direction, but strong, bold ideas that are going to take us forward. This whole idea, the whole political realm is about ideas.

Our friends on the other side of the aisle are dinosaurs. They are still working in the old oil days and those countries that are going to be on the cutting edge are going to be into these alternative energy sources. But you can't have weak, passive leadership that fails to step up to bat when the country needs them.

One gentleman who was in my office said we need leadership. We need you to help us. We are losing control. We feel less and less like we are in control. And the things that the Democrats want to implement are to make sure that people have control of their own lives to the extent that they can, and that is education, that is being healthy, that is making sure that there is opportunity through these investments and research and development that we want to do. We want to make sure that these ideas are getting out there through strong, bold leadership that is going to move the country forward. I know Mr. MEEK supports that. I have had conversations with him about that.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am trying to be as calm as possible.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. You are calm today.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Well, I am pleased because the Miami Heat has taken care of business in four games straight. There is going to be a great parade in Miami celebrating the Miami Heat's achievement of achieving the NBA championship, and that team consists of a lot of young guys and older guys that have really worked hard.

I would just like to say this is the first time I have given the Dallas Mavericks any charitable words since I have been here on the floor and in this building, that they played hard. It was a great series and I appreciate the folks that are in Dallas, Texas, for their sportsmanship and the fans. But in Miami, we are very, very excited about it.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And that is not what he was saying last night about Dallas when we were watching the game.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Let me just say this, I am saying that this whole thing is about sportsmanship and be able to enjoy and have a good time. It is a great lesson for young people about mental mistakes that people can make.

Life is like basketball, things happen and you have to adjust to those things. Folks were thinking I was going to talk for 30 minutes about the Miami Heat, but I don't want to waste the House time dealing with that, and they will be recognized later on. So we will move on.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I just wore the colors.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ wore the colors. I am not wearing the beads that I was wearing. We were down 0–2. I put the beads on and the Heat just went four games all the way.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I thought we were going to move on.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Let me say, Mr. RYAN, you were talking about leadership and Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ was talking about leadership. I think it is important when we look at leadership, that is not just in the White House. That is here in the U.S. House of Representatives, and it is very, very important that we have a body of Members here that have the will and the desire to lead.

As you all were talking, I was pulling out a couple of examples to show you a lack of leadership. Remember the Wizard of Oz when they said let it be green and let it be red and let it be blue, and that is fine for a movie; but that is not fine for the United States of America as it relates to policy in any area.

Let's start off at the top of the week when the White House said let's talk about the great things that are happening in Iraq or not happening in Iraq. It seems to be just the opposite at the end of the week of what is not happening in Iraq and what is happening in Iraq.

But the bigger question is what is happening here in this House. We spent all kind of time running back and forth into last week, Members coming down to the floor making speeches, getting all puffy in the chest and talking and carrying on about who loves the troops and who doesn't love the troops.

□ 1800

No, I love them more than you do. I have a tattoo, you know, that said I love the troops.

It is not all about how you say it. It's what you do. And the bottom line is, Mr. Speaker, nothing came out of the resolution that was passed. I mean, it is not like the resolution was passed and all of a sudden some great policy measure, some sort of major dollars going into veteran affairs or some direction to the Iraqi Government of how we really, where we really stand as it relates to it and relates to the war in Iraq. And I think it is important that, some of the things that I wrote down, Mr. Speaker is, following the Bush administration, and its rubber-stamp Congress has allowed the Bush administration to continue to carry out poor planning as it relates to the war in Iraq. Also, no plan for success. It is okay not to have a plan. Because we are in the majority, we are going to write a resolution that we are not going to even allow a Democrat to even put a period or a comma in, and because we are in the majority, we are going to endorse it, no oversight whatsoever from the U.S. House of Representatives. No oversight, Mr. Speaker. No accountability, no investigations of what is going on with the taxpayers' money that has been stolen in record numbers, no-bid contracts, $17 billion for Halliburton alone.

The Democrats, what do we want? We want accountability. We want to make sure that 2006 is a significant year as it relates to transition and plan for Iraq. We want to make sure that the Iraqi people know that they are going to have to take responsibility for their government more sooner than later. And as long as we start saying we are going to stay as long as we are going to stay, they are going to keep saying it is going to take us as long as it is going to take us. It is in the U.S. taxpayers' pocket, and the American troops that are there will continue to pay the price with life, limb and blood and time away from their families as long as the Republican rubber-stamp Congress continues to rubber-stamp whatever the White House has said.

Another point I wanted to make here. Some troops are on their fourth deployment. What does that mean if you are a soldier? That means you are going back for the fourth time. And it may be 12, 15 months. If you are a marine, many of the marines are definitely on their fourth deployment. A little shorter time, tougher duty, and it goes on and on and on.

Recruiting standards have been loosened. The National Guard units have just 34 percent of the required equipment that they need once they go back into the theater. And that is something that we have to pay very close attention to.

And the last point here as it relates to the no plan and the continue to throw the rock and hide your hand philosophy that this Republican Congress has is the fact that veterans' copayments are going up as it relates to prescription drug care. No plan for veterans when they come back with all of the issues that they are going to come back with to their families. We deserve to give them the attention that they need, and there is no plan for that.

So to come and do the John Wayne, if I could use his name as a tough guy, and to say that, oh, we are going to do this, and using slogans about how we need to, people, anyone that talks about anything about Iraq outside of I am with the President, they are not really with the American people.

Well, let me tell you something. I want a news flash to the members of the Republican side of the aisle. The American people are not feeling your rhetoric. And I think we will know in November about where we are because the American people are looking, Mr. RYAN and Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, for some leadership.

I think on the Republican side of the aisle, some folks need to go see the wizard, get some courage and some leadership, and to be able to say we are willing to work in a bipartisan way. I say this with great confidence because a lot of my Republican colleagues know it, and a lot of them tell me. You know, they say, KENDRICK, you know, you 30-somethings, you come kind of hard sometimes, but you know something, I can't get upset with you because it is true. Third-party validators know that it is true.

I am sick and tired of seeing these parents get on the Today Show in the morning, Mr. Speaker, and trying to bring some sort of understanding in their own mind of why we are there without a plan, and why are we sacrificing our troops on the front line when it is now taking, going on 3, 4 years to train Iraqi troops, when we have had individuals that were in sophomores in high school that have been trained and

sent into theater and now on their second deployment. It is just kind of hard to explain that for Mr. RYAN and I that are on the Armed Services Committee. It is just hard to understand that, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ.

So this game of saying that we are going to stay as long as we have to stay, don't ask any questions, I think those days are over. I think the American discourse is going to take over what this House has not done, and I know that they are going to speak in a very positive way towards the party that has the plan.

Now, we have plans and ideas on the table here in the House and in the Senate. But guess what? We are at least talking about a plan, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. We are just not saying, oh, excuse me. What did they say at the White House? Oh, they want to continue a war without a plan? Okay. That is fine. We will just rubber-stamp that. And what else can we do for the President? So shall it be written, so shall it be done, at the price of the American taxpayer and the price of some families as it relates to never seeing their father or mother again.

So I think it is something that is very serious. I am making fun of the fact that there is a rubber-stamp Congress here, but I have to say, ladies and gentlemen, that it is a reality. It is a reality. No questions asked. Rubber stamp. And I hope that the American people pay very close attention to it.

So I am glad that the Democratic Caucus has put their foot down and have said that enough is enough. You won't hear me talk about why can't we work in a bipartisan way, because we have been saying it since I have been here going on now 4 years, Mr. Speaker. So the will and the desire is not on the Republican side to even work with the Democrats. So now you have to move in the campaign that we have now and moving this country in a new direction, and that new direction is going to be inclusion. We are going to include Republicans in a bipartisan way, and moving this country and all the things that we talked about, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ talked about, Mr. RYAN is talking about, and when folks can go on housedemocrats.gov and find our plan in moving this country in a new direction. We have the will and the desire, and we will definitely do it.

With that I would like to yield to Mr. RYAN.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. You brought up the Republican lack of plan or planning or any agenda really. But I think we are living, as we said the last time we were here, we are living in the midst of an implemented neoconservative Republican agenda. Here it is. We are living in it right now.

You want to know what the Republicans will do? Go to the gas pump. Look at your health care bills. Look at your college tuition. Just look. Look at Iraq. Look at Afghanistan. This is the neoconservative agenda as ordered. This is exactly what they wanted to do. They have the House, they have the Senate, they have the White House, and here it is. Look no more.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. You know, you are just absolutely right, because what we are talking about is the direction that we would take this country in if we were given an opportunity, that we would expand access to health care and make sure the 46 million people who don't have it now, that far more, if not all of them, would have it; that we would truly invest in exploring alternative energy resources so that oil was not our only option; that we would make sure, and we committed.

We had a town hall meeting with 30-somethings with Leader PELOSI and Ranking Member MILLER, had a town hall meeting just the other day where we talked about that on the first day that we take the majority back in this House of Representatives and Leader PELOSI becomes Speaker PELOSI, we would halve the interest rate on federally subsidized loans, literally saving potential college kids thousands and thousands of dollars.

But you know what? The attitude of the administration and the Republican leadership, Mr. MEEK, you said you are sick and tired. I think people are sick and tired of being sick and tired. And I think that Americans have reached that point.

And it never ceases to amaze me what their leaders, what the Republican leaders actually say. I mean, that they say out loud; never mind the thoughts they harbor, because you know we will obviously never, we can only guess what those are. But what they say is unbelievable.

A few days ago we sadly marked the death, we were talking about the war in Iraq and how they have no plan; that this is an interminable war that has no end in sight, no plan, no ability to phase ourselves out. The other day we marked the death of the 2,500th soldier, American soldier. And White House spokesman Tony Snow said this about that milestone. He said, ''It is a number, and every time there is one of these 500 benchmarks, people want something.''

Yeah. They want no more kids to die. They want no more of our American men and women to die needlessly without any possibility in the near future of knowing that they are coming home.

A number? Sure. There are plenty of numbers that we could throw out there, the numbers that people care about beyond just 2,500 of our soldiers being lost. For example, 18,490 American troops were wounded in Iraq. And we have third-party validation for all of these. About 40,000 Iraqis have been killed, beyond the American troops. $8.8 billion. Here are some more numbers: $8.8 billion is the amount of Iraqi reconstruction funds the military has failed to account for, according to the Department of Defense's inspector general; 68 journalists killed in Iraq; 2.2 million Active Duty soldiers and veterans at risk of identity theft. Actually that is more. Now with the theft of the computer it is 26.5 million; 382 days since Vice President CHENEY claimed the insurgency was in its last throes. Ask the parents of the two American soldiers that were kidnapped and killed by insurgents the other day if they think that the insurgency is in its last throes; 1,140 days since President Bush declared mission accomplished in Iraq; 37 million people living in poverty in the United States; 13 million children living in poverty in the United States; $8,375,365,051,008.48. That is the amount of the deficit, yet tomorrow we are going to consider an estate tax that benefits 5,000 people; 45.8 million Americans without health insurance, just to be exact; $16,000, which is the median debt of graduates of public colleges; $20,000 is the median debt of graduates of private colleges, yet after July 1, the interest rates for a college loan will be hiked up significantly, thanks to the Republicans' leadership here; $36 billion Exxon/Mobil's profits last year, more than any other corporation in history. Those are the numbers that the Republicans should find important.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, we spend so much time talking about the budget, and those are great numbers that you have shared here. And I see Ranking Member SPRATT here on the floor, JOHN SPRATT, who has done such an outstanding job on the budget. And as you know, I always hold this chart up about the foreign-owned debt and where we are going and what is being spent.

Mr. RYAN spoke to how we are paying more on the debt than we are paying on education, veteran affairs and a couple of other areas, too, homeland security. And I saw Mr. SPRATT, and I just couldn't resist, sir. I know that you were here to put in a RECORD statement, but can you just share, just kind of bring into focus what has happened here and what will continue to happen, if the Republican Congress continue to have their way?

Mr. SPRATT. There are lots of ways to present it, and you have got some ingenious devices there on the table. I found this back-of-the-envelope summary of how much we have increased the debt ceiling of the United States, the legal limit to which this government can borrow, which is set by statute, over the years that George Bush has been President of the United States.

When the Bush administration first came to the Congress back in 2001, with their proposal to do 1 trillion, 800 billion in tax cuts over a 10-year period of time, they told us we could do these tax cuts and still we won't be back here to ask for an increase in the debt ceiling, the legal lending borrowing limit, until 2008.

The next year, June 2002, hat in hand, they were back here at the Congress saying we missed it. We overestimated the surplus. The tax cuts have taken effect. We need a $450 billion increase

in the debt ceiling of the United States.

□ 1815

That was June of 2002. Within a year, May, 2003, they were back, and they were asking this time for a phenomenal sum of money, a $984 billion increase in the debt ceiling of the United States.

If you go back to 1981, just before I first came to Congress, when Mr. Reagan became President of the United States, the entire debt of the United States was less than $984 billion. In 1 year, they needed to raise the debt ceiling by that amount to accommodate the budgets of the Bush administration. Well, that was May of 2003.

Fourteen months later, November 2004, there was another $800 billion increase. And when we passed the supplemental for the budget this year, the supplemental spending bill, there was slipped into it a provision increasing the debt ceiling by $781 billion. And still pending there is another increase. It is hard to believe. Back of the envelope sums it up better than any possible way I could. When they passed the budget resolution in the House this year, it included an additional increase of $653 billion. If you add all of those debt ceiling increases together, you will find that the total amount of debt ceiling increase in the Bush administration comes to $3.7 trillion. $3.7 trillion, that is how much we have had to raise the debt ceiling, the legal borrowing rate of this government, in order to make room for the deficits caused by the Bush administration's budget.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. SPRATT, I am so glad that you are here because here I hold a letter that former Secretary Snow wrote you about the emergency situation we are in of raising the debt ceiling.

Again, Mr. Speaker, third-party validators. U.S. Secretary Snow, who is like the accountant, or used to be the accountant, of the United States of America, literally begging you, wrote you a letter and said, We have to raise this thing or I am going to have to shut down normal government operations.

Mr. SPRATT. That letter was in February.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. That letter was in February. And then there is another one, Mr. Speaker, on March 6 that he wrote, again saying that we have to raise the debt ceiling.

So we have the Bush administration appointees. I use these rubber stamps here, Mr. SPRATT, as the rubber stamp Congress that we put here. So this wasn't a part of the letter, but we highlight here the begging, saying that they will not be able to pay into the G fund and other investments that they have to pay into to be able to assist. It is saying they are going to have to suspend investing in the Federal employees retirement fund.

So, Mr. SPRATT, I just wanted to bring that out, a third-party validator's saying that they have to raise the debt ceiling. But we spend a lot of time here, sir, as you know, in the 30-Something Working Group because we are working with the fact that young Americans and the future generations, what this is going to mean and what it is meaning right now to American families. And we also highlight the two amendments. This is almost like having the man that has made it happen here on our side of the aisle trying to move into a pay-as-you-go to stop exactly what you are pointing out there, sir.

Mr. SPRATT. Exactly. That simple rule worked better than any budget resolution, any budget rule we enacted during the 1980s and during the 1990s. I was here, involved in the process. I can stand witness to it. PAYGO worked.

But don't take my word for it. Last year, while he was still chairman of the Fed, Alan Greenspan testified before our committee three times, and on each occasion we asked him, What is your assessment of the budget process rules we adopted in the 1990s and let expire in 2002? He said, I was a cynic then. I thought it was a diversionary tactic. But I have to acknowledge that those budget process rules had an enormous impact on the success we achieved, moving the budget from $290 billion in deficits when George Bush left office in 1992 to $236 billion in surplus in the year 2000. PAYGO, he said, works. And he recommended that it be renewed, extended in its old form, affecting both tax cuts and entitlement increases. That was Alan Greenspan saying it accounted for a lot of the success of the budget discipline we displayed in the 1990s.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Thank you, Mr. SPRATT.

I yield now to Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the congressman. I have a question. I was in my office and I got a notice across my desk that perhaps tomorrow we may be debating the estate tax for millionaires.

And my question is that we can't get the minimum wage up that affects close to 7 million Americans that are working every day that can't make ends meet, but yet we are talking about an estate tax that is going to only affect about 6,700, the top 1 percent in the entire country. But my question is how are we going to pay for it? We are in a war that we are paying $450 billion for, and we are spending about $600 billion a month. So how are we going to pay for this?

Mr. SPRATT. The bottom line is we charge the tab to our children. We have a deficit today. This fiscal year the deficit will probably be somewhere between 300 and $350 billion. If we adopt additional tax cuts, they will go straight to the bottom line and only make the deficit larger.

Now, the tax cuts envisioned by this estate tax extension will come in the outer years because we are still increasing the exemptions and lowering the rate applicable to decedents' estates right now under old law. This will mean that in the first 10 years that this estate tax provision is fully implemented, the first 10 years when it is fully effective, the cost will be somewhere between 700 and $800 billion in revenues lost or foregone. Seven to $800 billion during that period of time. And that will be a period of time when the baby boomers will be beginning to retire in big numbers and starting to draw Social Security and Medicare, and we all know both of those programs are going to be strained under the load of the baby boomers' retirement.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Congressman, how long have you been here in Congress? Over what, 30 years? How long have you been a Member of Congress?

Mr. SPRATT. I have been here for 23 years

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Twenty-three years. And in that time period I know you have seen always checks and balances, whether it is the House, the Senate, or the administration. The problem that we are experiencing now is that we have every branch of government controlled by Republicans, whether it is the House, the Senate, or the administration. And so therefore there is no restraint. That is why 77 percent of the American people say that Congress is out of step with them.

Mr. SPRATT. No question about it. That is one of the problems you have with the line item veto. It says we need to let the President get involved even more. I voted for an expedited rescission, a line item veto before, here on this House floor. But really I think that Congress itself should turn to its own problems and start addressing those as opposed to going outside the Congress for solutions. We know what the problem is. We do not have a budget resolution this year adopted by both Houses. One of the things we learned in the 1980s and again in the 1990s was that you need a multi-year plan. Typically a 5-year plan. Not just a 1-year budget but a 5-year budget so you can see the implications on the tax side and on the spending side of what everything you are doing does to the bottom line. And we do not have a 5-year budget at this point in time. And the budget process rules like the PAYGO rule and the discretionary spending caps that we adopted in the 1990s no longer apply. The law elapsed. The Republicans allowed it to elapse and did not renew it. And consequently we do not have those disciplines that we had in the 1980s and 1990s that finally brought the deficit to heal and, furthermore, in the year 2000, put it in surplus to the tune of $236 billion. The last full fiscal year of the Clinton administration, that is where it was, $236 billion in the black.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. I want to thank the leadership that we

have here that come and discuss these issues. And it seems that the major problem that we have in this country is that we do not have any checks or balances. The House, the Senate, and the administration are all controlled by Republicans. So if you don't have any checks and balances, we will have zero balance in the bank account.

Mr. SPRATT. As a matter of fact, our Republican colleagues control the House. They have a majority in the Senate, and, of course, they control the White House. So they cannot escape responsibility for these fiscal results.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to join you all this evening.

Rubber Stamp Republicans: There is a very good reason why 77 percent of the American public does not believe that the United States Congress represents their interests. Instead of debating a fair minimum wage bill, tomorrow we will be debating the Repeal of the Estate Tax for millionaires!

Instead of dealing with high gas prices, Republicans want to talk about gay marriage. Instead of providing the services that the veterans need when they return from Iraq, the Republicans want to talk about flag burning.

Just last week, seven House Republicans joined Democrats in supporting an increase in the minimum wage, but yesterday, when the measure came up in the CJS appropriations bill, they suddenly changed their minds, joining the rest of the Republicans in ignoring the needs of seven million hard working minimum wage workers.

So while ignoring the needs of hardworking low-income workers, House Republicans once again will vote to reward those who least need help!

Just as they rewarded Halliburton, they continue to award big oil companies huge tax breaks at the expense of hard working Americans paying over $3 per gallon!

The White House is collecting our phone records and tapping our phones, yet has no interest in investigating the abuse and fraud by Halliburton in Iraq.

It is high time our country needs a change in direction! We need new energy policies, Iraq policy, higher education policy, health care policy, transportation, national security, and the list goes on and on and on! And this needs to be done in a fiscally sound way, not in a way that puts our children into more debt than they're piled in already.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you so much, Mr. SPRATT and Ms. BROWN. We are so glad to have you here with the 30-Something Working Group.

Mr. SPRATT. Does that mean I get to join the 30–Something Working Group?

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. We will adopt you as a member.

And we would like to remind the Members, Mr. Speaker, that all of the charts and documents that we have talked about tonight are on our Web site, housedemocrats.gov/30something.

THE STRENGTH OF THE AMERICAN ECONOMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHL of New York). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the responsibility and the privilege to speak to you in this House and to represent my constituents here.

I came over here to raise the issue on a number of bits of subject matter. And as I sat and listened, of course, the subject changed a little bit as I listened to the group here on the other side. And I think that it is important to edify Americans as to the difference between Republicans and Democrats. And I am just really grateful that when I was born and I was reared in a family, I began to build a certain attitude about life. And as that attitude unfolded, I was taught from the beginning to fend for yourself. You are going to have to get out there and make something out of yourself in this lifetime because nobody is going to do it for you. Your ship will never come in. Take control of your life. So at an early age, I realized that when I was born, my glass was half full and it was my job to get out of bed, go to work every day, and go ahead and fill that glass up.

I was not raised with an attitude and neither did I gather an attitude that my glass was half empty. I was always grateful that I was born here in America. And when I would ask my parents, what is the best country in the world to come from? They would always answer, The United States of America is the best country in the world. Eat your cold mashed potatoes. There are people starving in China.

That is kind of the composite of the upbringing that I had. But grateful for this Nation, and I would always ask why, what is the difference? And probe into these other countries. And, of course, the people starving in China part was what we talked about then. But country after country in the aftermath of World War II, we were the only surviving industrial nation, and this Nation that had preserved freedom for the world, for the entire globe, and had we not done that, we would not be standing here today speaking in English, for example, Mr. Speaker, but speaking in a free way with free ideas and having this free exchange.

I stand at the same spot on which Tom DeLay gave his last speech here in this Congress. And he made a point that I think is an important one. And that is that, yes, there is partisanship and, yes, we have sharp disagreements. We have those disagreements because we have a Constitution that protects our right to do so. But he made a point that was, you show me a Nation that does not have partisanship and I will show you a tyranny. So when we disagree, we need to be grateful that we can disagree, and we should base that on fundamental philosophical differences and highlight those.

But there is a difference in human nature. Part of human nature is like me that sees our glass half full. Part of human nature is like the people on the other side of the aisle that see their glass and the glass of their constituents as half empty. And that is all right if you look at it from that perspective. But then you have to take it to the next level. And the next level is those that see their glass half full set about going to work to fill it, and we pull each other up the ladder because we know that as we all go out and work and produce and market and save and invest that that helps everyone, that this economy grows. This is not a zero sum game. It is not a goose that has so many golden eggs in it where we can just simply slaughter the goose and harvest the eggs. It is an economy that needs to have inputs. It needs to have capital investment, both intellectual capital and real dollars in a real way. We need to have entrepreneurs. We need to keep generating new ideas. This organism of our economy, has a lot of components in it, and it needs to be working and churning. And when we go in there and we tap into this organism of our economy and we start to take from it and not put into it, then it slows down the growth of our economy and it grows slowly.

But this was an economy that when Ronald Reagan was sworn in outside this building in 1980, the Dow Jones was below 1,000. I do not remember the exact number, but I know it was below 1,000. Today it is at 11,000. That is a good measure of what has happened with our economy, and that should be something that should tell, Mr. Speaker, the American people that when your glass is half full and you go to work to fill that glass up the rest of the way and you help your brethren up the ladder along the way that the sum total of the size of the pie, which is divided up amongst now 300 million Americans, gets greater and greater and greater, and that means when the pie is bigger, the size of the pieces can be bigger for each individual that is involved. This is not a matter of taking from the rich and giving to the poor. This is a matter which the argument that I am hearing really slows down this economy and that when you tax someone for the labor they do, you punish them for that labor.

Ronald Reagan also said what you tax, you get less of.

□ 1830

So we have a first lien on all productivity in America. The Federal Government has the first lien on all productivity in America. So we tax production. We tax earnings, savings and investment. We tax Social Security, we tax your pension, we tax your capital gains, your income tax, your corporate income tax, your partnership income tax. Also we tax your earnings on investments and your Alternative Minimum Tax. All those things are taxed.

Well, when there is a tax applied to anything, it is a disincentive to