

Islam has a long history of conquest. Indeed, Christendom's Crusades need to be understood within the context of Islam's assaults on the Byzantine Empire and the continued threats to Europe.

Mr. Speaker, if only Muslims are allowed to express historical outrage and only Christians are required to apologize for past wrongs, there will be no chance of a deep historical and cultural dialogue. More importantly, experience demonstrates that while we may learn from history, we must put past offenses behind us if we are ever to hope to live in peace. Conflicting sects and ethnic groups from Northern Ireland to South Africa recognize that demanding Draconian justice for intergenerational grievances leads only to prolonged conflict and have chosen instead to concentrate on building a better future for their children. The Christian and Islamic worlds can and must do the same.

Third and finally, this particular controversy underscores the importance of the pope's call for a dialogue based on faith and reason. Even religions as different in their conceptions of God as Christianity and Islam must find ways to engage politically, culturally and, over time, theologically. My home State, Mr. Speaker, was founded by William Penn, a refugee of an oppressed political minority who created an environment where sects could live together and exchange views and have mutual respect and even admiration. Voltaire wrote at the time that Pennsylvania had the freest air on earth. Pope Benedict's commitment to this kind of genuine dialogue is clear.

Despite the fact that Pope Benedict never intended any offense, the pontiff has repeatedly expressed regret at the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of his remarks on Islam. He has expressed deep respect for the faith of Muslims.

Speaking at the September 21 general audience in St. Peter's Square in front of more than 40,000 people, the pope noted from his recent trip to Bavaria and told his audience, "This quotation, unfortunately, has lent itself to misunderstanding."

I think we can take him at his word. I think in my view we can let this matter die, and we should use it as a starting point for a genuine dialogue between the Christian West and those of us in the West who want to see a liberal society and also Islam.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to comment on this recent turn of events.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend from Pennsylvania for joining us this evening and for those wonderful, wonderful words of wisdom.

We have just a very few short moments left. In closing, let me just thank my good friend also from Pennsylvania Congresswoman HART who truly organized this activity this evening. I think this has been a re-

markable discussion. It has been a lofty discussion. It truly has been a privilege to come to the floor, and the privilege of service is indeed the privilege of leadership.

I guess if I were to summarize I would say that what we call our colleagues to this evening is, in fact, not just our colleagues, but all Members of the civilized world, is to an appreciation that faith and reason go hand-in-hand and that dialogue is what is absolutely necessary if we are to solve the remarkable challenges that we have as a diverse world.

Mr. Speaker, we live in a glorious and a wonderful Nation. It is a Nation of religious liberty. It is a Nation that continues to be a beacon of hope and a vessel of liberty truly to the world. The opportunity that we have here is remarkable in order to initiate that new dialogue, and it is a privilege to come to the floor Mr. Speaker.

If I may, I want to call on you and I ask all of our colleagues and all of the individuals watching in this time, in this very, very challenging time of an election season here in the United States, that the comments that you have heard before we began our discussion 59 minutes ago and the comments you are about to hear are most likely one of division, of disinformation and of misinformation. I challenge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to raise the level of rhetoric, raise the level of discussion and debate in this body so that we may indeed join together and solve the remarkable challenges that we have as a Nation.

### 30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FITZPATRICK of Pennsylvania). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, it is again a pleasure to be on the floor this evening with the 30-Something Working Group, and my colleague Mr. MEEK my will be joining me in a few short minutes.

But I say to my good friend from Georgia who has just issued a call to raise the tone of the dialogue, I think the Official Truth Squad would do well to engage in a little truth and acknowledge that it is they who have engaged in the vicious rhetoric that has gone back and forth for the last dozen or so years that they have controlled this chamber, and that the direction that they have moved this country in has given us neither faith nor reason to believe that this country will be able to be put on the right track unless we making some significant changes, not the least of which is in our economy.

Security, Democrats believe that security is incredibly important, not just our national security and our homeland security, but economic security, and no matter what this district is I travel to, no matter what district you

represent, the people in this country are yearning for a commitment from this Congress to move this country in the right direction on economic security. That does not appear to be the commitment of the leadership of this institution. One has only to look at the commentary across the country to know that it is not just my opinion, but this is the opinion of many, many people both who have expertise in economics as well as the rank-and-file individuals who are struggling to make ends meet on a daily basis.

I want to just walk through some of the commentary that we have seen recently and compare the rosy picture that has been painted by this administration and by this Republican leadership, compared to what the reality on the ground every day for working families is.

Let us look at the economy according to essentially do-nothing Washington Republicans, and the way we are characterizing them is simply because we have spent the least amount of time at work during this 109th Congress than in history. We have worked the least number of days, produced the smallest amounts of legislation, and yet the administration and the Republican leadership continues to toot a horn that does not deserve to be tooted.

Let us look at what President Bush said just the other day. Just 2-days ago he said, I would say look at what the recent economy has done. It is strong. We have created a lot of jobs.

You also have majority leader JOHN BOEHNER say on September 1 that the American economy is strong; it continues to provide more economic opportunity and higher wage jobs to working families across the country.

What I would say to the President and to my colleague Mr. BOEHNER is that I am not sure what country they are living in or who they are speaking to, but they seem to believe that if you say something enough times and repeat it often enough that eventually it will sink in and someone will believe it.

□ 2300

But if you ask about the economy according to America's working families, let's see what one young woman talked about from her point of view. Denine Gordon, who is 32 years old and is a waitress who makes the minimum wage, news about her latest trouble. Her van has been in the shop for a week because she and her husband can't afford to fix it. "This is the least I have ever made in my entire life," the Republican and mother of three said. "The gas prices went up, and the tips went down." She said that in the newspaper as reported by AP just 2 days ago.

Debbie Brewer, a 50-year-old woman and a deli owner, rattled off her biggest complaints about the economy as she counted change while closing her register for the night. "We will never see 99 cents again," the Republican said, of

gas prices. "Everything is jumping, your gas, your food, and everything, but your wages don't go up."

And what both of these young women are speaking about is the fact that in 9 years we have not had an increase in the minimum wage. We still have not provided just a minimal increase to those who make the least amount of money in the country, who certainly can't afford to uphold the costs that their families have on a minimum-wage salary. We have a Republican Congress here that has repeatedly refused to raise the minimum wage, and no opportunity in the next 1½ weeks, it appears, that we are going to be able to do that. We have legislation that is being amended, we have the Labor and Health and Human Services appropriations bill that has an amendment sitting on it that the Republican leadership refuses to bring to the floor because it was successfully adopted in the appropriations subcommittee. As a result, that bill was stalled, never to see the light of day because, God forbid, it would give the Members an opportunity to have a straight up-or-down vote on the minimum wage. Their fear is that it actually would pass. And that is just incredibly, incredibly sad.

Let's take a look at some more reality about the economy. This is the real economic change under this President. While the minimum wage has not increased since 1997, let's look at what has increased. You look at this chart over here, all the way on the left you see zero percent increase in the minimum wage. But let's take a look at the price of whole milk. That has increased 24 percent. Let's take a look at the price of a loaf of bread. That has increased 25 percent. How about the price of a 4-year public college education? That has increased 77 percent.

Let's peruse how much health insurance has gone up. And, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that health insurance in particular is an item that people in my district and districts all across the country, I am sure yours as well, people are totally frustrated, don't know what to do, are tearing their hair out because of the ever-increasing upwards of 15 percent increases in health care costs.

It doesn't matter whether I sit next to a mom with young kids or a small business owner or a CEO of a large corporation. I just talked to a CEO of a large corporation today. The cost of health care is their number one concern.

We have 46 million people in this country that don't have access to health insurance, and that number is constantly going up, not down. And the reason it is going up is because more and more employers have less and less of an ability to provide access to health insurance for their employees, so they are just dropping the coverage and leaving their employees on their own to figure out how they are going to get that coverage.

What it means when someone doesn't have health insurance coverage, Mr. Speaker, is that when their child is sick, when they are sick, they can't afford to go to the doctor.

And I can tell you a little story about how, when I first ran for the State legislature in Florida, which was back in 1992, I was walking door to door. And I knocked on a door, I knocked on 25,000 doors in my first election. And as I was walking door to door, it took a young woman who was home at the time a particularly long time to get to the door before she could answer it. And she called to me from inside of the apartment and said, "Just a minute, just a minute. I will be right there."

So I waited patiently. And when she finally got to the door and opened it, you couldn't help but notice that her foot was incredibly, incredibly swollen. And of course, I couldn't help but ask her what happened, what was wrong, because she was obviously in agonizing pain. And she literally said to me, and this has been an issue all the way this number of years. That was 14 years ago. She literally said to me that she now had an infection on her foot, but that she didn't have health insurance, so she now was about to actually, as I have knocked on her door, she was about to go down to the emergency room at the local hospital because she was no longer able to wait.

And she didn't have health insurance, so she couldn't take care of it and go to the doctor for just a chance for him to look at her foot when there was only something minor wrong with it; she had to wait until it was bad enough for her to take herself to the emergency room so that she could get it taken care of.

And that is the story for millions of people across the country, Mr. Speaker. And the problem with 14 years has not gotten better, it has gotten worse, a 97 percent increase in the cost of health insurance.

How about gas prices? Amazingly, people have been rejoicing or at least breathing some sighs of relief that there has been a drop in the cost of gas lately. What is sad is that there has been a drop from upwards of \$3 to somewhere between \$2.75 and \$2.95. You know, when we are at the point in this country where people are excited about gas prices that are lower than \$3, but are still higher than \$2.50, there is something seriously wrong. Our expectations are out of whack, because America can certainly do better. We can certainly move this country in a new direction.

And I guess that the whole issue of gas prices boils down to, the way I summarized it, what happens, I think, in this country is that it must be on the other side of the aisle that the Republican leadership here isn't filling their own gas tank, or maybe they haven't filled their own gas tank in so long that they don't remember what the cost of a gallon of gas is. They are

not standing there at the pump watching it tick dime after dime. It used to be pennies. When I was a child, when you would pump gas and when my parents were pumping gas, you would watch the pennies tick off. Now you watch the dimes tick off.

And pretty soon, if we don't get a handle on making sure that we don't totally rely on foreign oil or oil in general as a resource, we are going to probably see quarters rattle off on that end column on the gas tank as opposed to dimes or as opposed to pennies like it used to when I was a child.

That is the only explanation I can find to the callous disregard on the part of the leadership here for getting a real handle on how to address gas prices so that we don't have joy and so that we are not forced to delight in a 20-cent drop that brings us to about \$2.70 or \$2.50. It is just our priorities seem to be backwards.

What we need to do and what Democrats will do in our new direction for America if we are given an opportunity after November 7 is we would make a real investment in exploring alternative energy. We would make an investment in the Midwest instead of the Middle East. We would make an investment in ensuring that we can expand the use of ethanol; that we can truly, like Brazil did.

Brazil, Mr. Speaker, is now a country that has broken their addiction to foreign oil. They actually are self-sufficient. They grew their way out of the problem. They have crops that give them the ability to produce enough ethanol, and now they have American automobile manufacturers building cars for them that are sold and marketed in Brazil so that they can again be energy self-sufficient and not reliant upon OPEC and the Middle East.

And what we have is our Energizing America Plan. We have a plan to have farmers fuel America's energy independence, and we have an action plan to do that so that we can be truly energy-independent within 10 years. It is not rhetoric, it is a plan.

It is not rhetoric like what we heard here with the President's State of the Union where he talked about wanting to end America's addiction to foreign oil. Well, where is the beef, Mr. Speaker? Where is the backup behind the words? Because I haven't seen it, and I have only been here 2 years now and completing my freshman term in Congress, but I have only seen energy legislation that is written for the oil companies, that gives them the ability to not pay subsidies, that gives away the store, that gives them the ability to drill all they want without paying royalties to the government. And, the last time I checked, the oil industry is the most profitable industry on the planet.

Literally, in the fourth quarter of last year, I believe it was ExxonMobil that made more money, more profit than any company in history. And let's just take a look at the oil companies'

record profits. Yet we are passing legislation that gives them even more money.

In 2002, you have the oil industry making \$34 billion. In 2003, they made \$59 billion. In 2004, they made \$84 billion; in 2005, \$113 billion. Yet, we pass legislation here in this House that actually gave them more. Didn't make them pay the royalties and the subsidies that they would normally owe to the Federal Government. Why? Because there is no commitment on the part of this Republican Congress to actually end our addiction to foreign oil, because that would end the direction that this profit margin is going. It would make sure that there was some balance. It would make sure that we invest, like our plan would, in America, in the Midwest, and in my home State where we have sugar farmers who could benefit from producing sugar that could be made into ethanol. I have a company in my district that has the ability to do that, and if we will only give them the opportunity to help move this country in the right direction.

Let's take a look at what is happening with the individuals who work for the oil industry. This is Lee Raymond. Why is he smiling in this picture? Because he got a \$398 million retirement package and a \$2 million tax break. Really. When we are talking about who gets tax cuts that have been passed out of this Chamber again and again and again since you and I have been here, Mr. Speaker, this is the person and the type of person that those tax cuts are designed to help. We passed tax breaks and subsidy giveaways for the oil industry, and we refuse to raise the minimum wage for people like waitresses and our workers who are only trying to make ends meet. It is just abominable.

What we would do as Democrats is we would move this country in a new direction. We would make a real commitment to economic security. We would focus on the domestic needs of this Nation. We would make sure that we cut the student loan rate in half. It is at its highest rate ever. We would make sure that we make a real commitment to expanding access to health care, to the 46 million Americans that don't have it. We would pass a real prescription drug benefit for senior citizens, and not a prescription drug benefit that was written to benefit the pharmaceutical industry.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit, and we are getting close to September 22, which is the date in which many, many senior citizens, and they are already dropping through it as we speak, that many, many senior citizens are going to fall into what is called the doughnut hole, the point at which the Medicare prescription drug benefit that was passed in 2003, before you and I came to this Chamber, the senior citizens that we represent will fall into this doughnut hole. And this is how it is going to happen.

There is a gap in coverage in the prescription drug benefit designed in this bill that makes it so that when a senior citizen participating in a drug plan reaches \$2,250 in prescription drug expenses, and now I am not talking about out-of-pocket expenses, the way you get into the doughnut hole is they take the actual cost of the drug, not what the insurance plan pays for it, but the actual cost of the drug, plus the copay, and they add that up together. When it gets to \$2,250, you fall into the doughnut hole.

But it is a bait and switch. You don't get out of the doughnut hole when you reach \$5,100 in those kinds of costs. You can't climb out of the doughnut hole until you reach \$5,100 in out-of-pocket expenses. So what that means is that many, many senior citizens will never climb out of the doughnut hole.

How is that going to help senior citizens reduce their drug costs and not to have to choose between medicine and meals?

□ 2315

The reason it was designed that way was so the pharmaceutical industry wouldn't have to be on the hook for losing a ton of money. The Republicans could essentially say they passed a prescription drug benefit that really does not help a lot of people.

Another problem with the prescription drug benefit is that it actually is prohibited in the law from allowing the government to negotiate for lower prices with the pharmaceutical industry. There is a specific prohibition against that.

That is outrageous. It seems like common sense that we should be able to negotiate the best possible deal for our seniors. But we can't do it, it is not allowed, even though the Veterans Administration is able to do it and is able to get better prices than the Federal Government can for our senior citizens.

That is why people are importing their drugs from Canada. It is shocking but true that they actually have American-manufactured drugs in Canada available for less money than they are available for here, even though they are developed and manufactured in America.

I was in New York over the weekend, and while I was there I heard a radio ad that shocked me. It was a bald-faced radio ad that marketed directly to seniors, that encouraged them to contact this Canadian company and buy their drugs directly from Canada.

That is what we have come to. We have to have our own citizens get their prescription drugs from outside this country because we are not taking proper care of them.

Democrats would do better. We would move this country in a new direction. We would close the doughnut hole by changing the law and allowing for the negotiation of lower prices. That savings would fill the doughnut hole so there would not be a gap in coverage.

Those are the kinds of things we would do. We would make sure that we

put Americans and their economic security first and not the wealthiest few, not the CEOs of oil companies, not the oil industry itself. And we put action behind our words.

The gentleman from Georgia concluded his hour by saying we need to tone down the rhetoric. Well, if we could tone down the agenda and focus the agenda on the needs of the American people, then the rhetoric would not need to be so sharp.

Forgive me, but I happen to consider myself a direct and straightforward person. I am going to call it like I see it. The way I see it and have seen it since I have been here, Mr. MEEK, is that we are for working families; we are for making sure that we move this country in a new direction; that we expand access to health care; that we increase the minimum wage; that we cut the student loan rate in half so we can expand access to higher education; that we reduce the deficit; restore pay-as-you-go spending so we don't spend more than we take in; so we reduce the foreign debt, as you so eloquently talk about night after night; so we make sure that we reorder America's priorities so that we focus on homeland security. Only 5 percent of the containers that come into our Nation's ports are checked, and virtually no packages or cargo that is put in the belly of passenger planes are checked.

These are the things that we would do in our new direction for America. It is time. We have 48 days. Americans have 48 days to send a signal that they want us to move in a new direction. I am looking forward to November 8 when we can wake up and implement all of the things that we talk about night after night after night.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, I think it is important that we take this in a very serious manner. Even though it is Eastern Standard Time, it is approximately 11:20 p.m., and we have worked a full legislative day tomorrow. And we are here to give voice to those that are counting on not only Members of Congress, but Members of Congress that have the will and desire to move us in a new direction.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that for those Members who want to join this side of the aisle in making sure that veterans, those who have allowed us to salute one flag, to be able to get the kind of health care that they deserve from this government, to allow those small businesses that want to provide affordable health care for their workers, all of the way up to the Fords and the GMs of the world who would like to provide health care, because we haven't addressed those issues here in this Congress. The corporate community and also the business community are suffering because of it, as well as the workers. Forty million Americans are trying to figure out how they are going to provide health care to not only children but for individuals who punch in and punch out every day.

These are issues that we are willing to address and that we have had here as it relates to legislation in this Congress. I think it is important that we focus on bringing balance to this process, not just coming to the floor, having discussions. I can see if we were just here talking about what the majority is not doing. We are not only identifying what they are not doing, but at the same time we are saying on HouseDemocrats.gov that we have plans for security. We have plans for making sure that we invest in the Midwest versus the Middle East. We have plans as it relates to a real strategy for the war in Iraq versus just a slogan that says stay the course.

We have a plan to make sure that we educate our children, an innovation agenda that has been out for a very long time. It is nothing new, nothing that we revealed in days before the election, some under 50 days before the next election.

The American people, and I am not talking about just the Democratic American people, I am saying Independents, the Reform Party, all have an opportunity to make a decision on behalf of the future of our country.

The gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and the 30-something Working Group, as you know we were here earlier with Mr. DELAHUNT and Mr. RYAN, and for those others of the 30-something Working Group that were not able to make it to the floor, making sure that college is affordable for the next generation, making sure that we are not worrying about competing with the school down the street but competing with a school on another continent, we want to make sure that we do everything that we are supposed to do here in this Congress in giving every American a level playing field, if not an advantage over other countries, and making sure that they have what they need.

We have fought the obvious battle here in making sure that our troops have body armor, making sure that those families that had to buy body armor for their loved ones, husbands, wives, uncles, daughters, making sure that we fought for those issues.

I would give credit to some Members on the other side of the aisle who did stand up against the majority. But unfortunately, we have overwhelming support for a rubber-stamp majority, those individuals who are willing to follow the Republican leadership and not standing up on behalf of the American people.

I think it is important that we give voice to those individuals. I am glad Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ talked about the minimum wage and she focused on domestic issues. We have a war in Iraq, but we have a huge challenge here in the United States of America. We have a huge challenge. We have blue and red States that are suing the Federal Government for lack of funding on Leave No Child Behind, which was a bipartisan piece of legislation that we felt

we could move forth in a bipartisan way, not only in this Chamber but also in the Senate.

But it takes a majority to bring about true bipartisanship. We have shown that we have been able to do it. We have shown on this side of the aisle that we can balance the budget and secure the future of not only Social Security but also secure the future of our country, not having other countries having their hand in the pocket of the American taxpayer.

Earlier Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ talked about the whole issue of border security. It was an hour that the majority had, not the last hour, the hour before that, talking about how we are securing America and we are strong, this, that, and the other, and coming to the floor and sharing words without third-party validators. Who are the third-party validators? Our third-party validators are the American people who are saying that they are concerned about what is happening in this country because we don't have the kind of balance that our democracy calls for.

Who is going to hold in check an administration that is willing to do anything to make sure that, you know, let's say the poll numbers, or to use 9/11, something that is not dealing with honoring those families and those first responders, but to talk about a false agenda as far as securing America. We can do a better job.

Have the majority done some things? Yes, they have done some things. I am a level-minded person, and there are some things that have been done. But have we secured America in the way we should? As it relates to our agenda and securing America, we have put that up front. Not just as it relates to uniforms and badges, but also from a fiscal standpoint, we are saying we don't want America's back broken because of the record-gaining debt of this administration and the Republican Congress.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, I am going to tell you right now, this poster here is very interesting because this poster is the longest-living poster that we have in the 30-Something Working Group arsenal of posters, to be able to break this down so everybody can understand.

We don't want to confuse Members or the American people by using big words and acronyms and just kind of talking inside a Washington game. We want to make sure that people understand. We want to make sure that people understand that here as it relates to our efforts on the Democratic side of the aisle, that it is not about the Democratic National Committee. That it is not about, because I am a Democrat, I am right. It is not about okay, I am going to speak to only the Democratic Members of the House, because that is not what this democracy is set up to do.

This democracy, Article I, section 1, of the U.S. Constitution, says as a legislative body, we have oversight and investigative powers. We are supposed to hold this government accountable.

The House is the only body you have to be elected to. The Senate, you can be appointed as a Senator. If a Senator was to say I have to retire, health reasons or whatever the case may be, or somebody is picked for Vice President, a Governor in that given State can appoint an American citizen to carry out that Senator's term. That has happened. That has happened in this Congress.

When we look at the House of Representatives, we are the true body of the democracy. We have to be elected. If any Member of the House has to leave, they have to hold a special election to fill a seat. Let me say, it takes the House and the executive branch to do what has happened. \$1.05 trillion has been borrowed in 4 years between 2001–2005. President Bush, he is our Commander in Chief and he is our President, period, dot, but he cannot do it by himself. The Republican Congress allowed him to do it in raising the debt ceiling. We had those letters out here, and we still have those letters from the Secretary of the Treasury saying we have to raise the debt ceiling.

What does that mean? That means we haven't been responsible, the Republican majority, in administering the dollars that the American people have given in trust to this Congress and this House to do on their behalf. Spending is out of control, borrowing is out of control. Borrowing is out of control. \$1.05 trillion. In 224 years, and here I am in the 109th Congress, a second generation Member of the House, okay, and this has never happened in the history of the Republic. This is not something that happened maybe 20 years ago, even 100 years ago. In 224 years, 42 Presidents have not been able to accomplish what the Bush administration and the rubber-stamp Republican Congress has been able to accomplish in allowing foreign nations to buy our debt, to have their hands in the pockets of the American people, and counting.

This chart, as far as I am concerned, when we get back here after November, we are probably going to have some new numbers. That \$1.05 trillion is higher. This chart is falling apart, goodness gracious, because this chart has been the wake-up call.

We decided to come up with this chart to paint the picture, regardless of what the Members on the other side who come to the floor say about fiscal responsibility. The Government Accountability Office released a report that there are agencies that are coming to the Hill that can't explain where millions of dollars have gone.

□ 2330

And we are supposed to have oversight. We have the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that says if anyone in the Pentagon says anything else about redeployment of troops or a different strategy than what I believe, "I believe," or that the administration has embraced, then they are fired. Ms.

WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, not even a hearing, not even a Member from the Republican side outraged to the point where they are going to their party leaders saying we have got to call the Secretary of Defense in and find out what he is talking about, because this thing is supposed to be, using your own words, Mr. Speaker, using their words, saying if we hear from the military commanders on the ground what they need, we are going to give it to them.

So when you have this lack of oversight, no matter what your party affiliation is, no matter what your motivation may be to vote or not vote in November, you have to have issue with individuals that are saying, "Either it's my way or the highway." That is okay if you had a household somewhere and you are the big paycheck guy or gal or whatever the case may be and you are paying the bill. But when you are paying the bills with U.S. taxpayer dollars, we have to bring issue to that. And because of that relationship that this Republican majority has with the executive branch of this government, of our government, I must add, it is problematic when you have folks that are not willing to ask the question.

When we walk through these doors into this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, and the lights are up in this Chamber, and it says the board is open, what we call the voting board is open, and we take our voting card out, and we come in here to vote, we are voting on behalf of 600- or 700,000 Americans that have elected us to come here to represent them, not what the special interests say that we should do here in this House. There are some very obvious issues that should be resolved, that need to be resolved, but will not be resolved as long as we have a rubber-stamp Congress in place.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, I sleep well knowing that we spend every moment that we can here on this floor until the clock runs out by the rules of this House to allow us to come here and give voice to those Americans that deserve better. We are saying that we are willing to put this country in a new direction, not just saying it in fiction. It is on the Internet. It is on [housedemocrats.gov](http://housedemocrats.gov). We have press conferences. We file amendments in committee. And the only reason why those amendments and that legislation does not have breath in the lungs of the legislation that we file, the reason why it doesn't have a heartbeat, is the fact that we are in the minority.

Now, the only way that can change, Mr. Speaker, is that we need a majority of this House to bring accountability back to this government to make sure that we have balance, to make sure we have fiscal responsibility, to make sure that we stand up on behalf of children who can't even vote, and to make sure that we give voice and to make sure that we give direction and to make sure that we have the backs of our men and women that have sand in their teeth right now in

the war in Iraq, and to make sure that those individuals that are in Afghanistan that are standing on behalf of the hope and the prayer and hopefully the willing desire of this Congress, to make sure that we have their back, to make sure that we have a true coalition, to make sure that other countries can look at this country and know when that whatever the President's says, it does not necessarily mean that that is the final word.

Yes, we support our President. But at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we have to be able to allow this Congress and this legislative branch to function in a way that it is supposed to function. And right now that is not the case because individuals are willing to rubber-stamp exactly to the word, to the comma, to the period to what the President calls for. And it is on domestic policy, and it is also on foreign policy. And I think it is important, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, that we carry out our duty.

No other President in recent times, Mr. Speaker, I must add, has been able to celebrate the kind of rubber stamp that the Bush administration has received. That is not good for America. That is not good for any party affiliation anyone may have, and that is not good for the future of our country. And that is the reason why we are here in that light.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you so much, Mr. MEEK. And I have to tell you that I know I am less senior than you are. I came here a term behind you, and I am just completing my second year in the Congress. And what I have been shocked by is the lack of oversight. I sit on the Judiciary Committee and Financial Services. And in the Judiciary Committee in particular, which is supposed to be the place where we are protecting our civil liberties and protecting the Constitution of the United States of America, even in the Judiciary Committee in this House, we have ceded our authority, our authority for oversight, and holding the administration's feet to the fire to the executive branch. The Republican leadership here has thrown up their hands and said, you do whatever you want. It is okay.

Honestly, sometimes I ask myself, other than our taking the floor each night and individually trying to do what we can and as a caucus collectively trying to do what we can to hold the administration's feet to the fire, I wonder why these people who are running this institution bother showing up to work, because what are they doing? We have worked less. We have been in session fewer days than even the "Do-Nothing Congress" of the 1940s.

We aren't passing significant legislation. Two weeks ago we literally, the only piece of, quote, unquote, major legislation we passed out was a bill that would prohibit the slaughter of horses. And yet we still have Americans who are twisting in the wind, who are struggling to make ends meet, who are toiling at a minimum wage rate

where they can't possibly pay all the bills, and the Republicans just continue to paint a rosy picture.

And what you always say, and I quoted you earlier, is maybe if they just think if they say it enough times that people will believe it, or it will magically come true. Let us just look at what they said and what the reality is.

Essentially we know that Americans are not fooled by this rosy picture that is being painted. Let us look at the recent polling. A respected poll, NBC-Wall Street Journal poll, 52 percent of those polled disapproved of the President's handling of the economy. That was not a long time ago. That was on September 15, a few days ago. A Bloomberg-L.A. Times poll showed 60 percent of self-described Independents said the economy was doing badly, 60 percent. That was on September 5. And really what we are dealing with here is Americans are facing a different reality than the Republicans' statistical spin.

Let us look at the situation with the minimum wage. It is now at its lowest level in 50 years adjusted for inflation. Real household has declined nearly \$1,300 under this present administration. The cost of family health insurance has skyrocketed 71 percent since the President took office. And the cost of tuition and fees at 4-year public institutions, 4-year universities, has exploded by 57 percent. We are talking people who are caving in under money pressures. We have an economic squeeze that really in 48 days I believe, we believe, is going to affect how people make their voting decisions.

Look at hourly wages. They are down 2 percent since 2003. Up 20 percent from just a year earlier are gas prices. Consumer confidence is down by 7 percent in just the past month.

When the economy is rosy, Mr. MEEK, and I am no economist, but usually the consumer confidence index is not in this direction when the economy is doing well.

What is up 97 percent since this President took office, mortgage debt. You and I know we live in now what is one of the most expensive communities in the country. Who knew that South Florida would end up being as costly as it is? But our school districts actually just realized that they lost and had an unexpected drop in the number of schoolchildren in each of our school districts, and they are baffled as to how that happened, except the only thing they can attribute it to is that the cost of housing has exploded to such a degree that people have just moved because they can't afford to live in our community anymore.

And that is the case with communities all across America. Only where are they going to go? Every place is expensive. The average cost of a house in our communities now is over \$300,000. Yet we continue to pass tax cuts for the wealthiest few off this floor and out of this Congress and send those

things to the President. At least we have the Senate as a backstop.

One of the other things I wanted to touch on, we have been talking about our 2006 agenda, our new direction for America; and we have covered our commitment to real security at home; our commitment to better jobs, specifically not sending jobs overseas; increasing the minimum wage; cutting the student loan rate; really making a commitment to energy independence and affordable access to health care.

One of the things that we talked about in the 30-Something Working Group a lot last year was the privatization scheme that President Bush proposed for Social Security. And what Leader PELOSI has emphasized so often with us is don't let the American people forget that this is not off the agenda or off the table for this Republican leadership or this President. They are absolutely still committed to privatizing Social Security, and if we take control of this Congress, we will ensure that that will not happen. President Bush literally has said he hopes to revise his plan to overhaul the U.S. Social Security retirement program if his party keeps control of the Congress in the November midterm elections.

And you talked about third-party validators. That is whom we rely upon for our information that we disseminate on this floor each night. That was the Wall Street Journal just on September 9, just 10 days ago.

The bottom line is that the threat of privatizing Social Security is not over, and we need to make sure that we have a party and a caucus and Members who are committed to preserving Social Security.

Just look at the quote of Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson. He said, "Social Security was created in 1935. Today people are living longer than that they did in 1935. Yet Social Security's basic structure has barely changed. Just 3.3 workers are paying into the system to support each beneficiary while 16 workers did so in 1950. The President put forward a plan last year to strengthen and modernize Social Security. The longer we wait to fix this problem, the more limited will be the options available to us, the greater cost, and the more severe the economic impact on our Nation."

And all of the people in the administration, there is quote after quote after quote that describes their underlying intent to privatize Social Security, pull the rug out from under our senior citizens from the most successful program in American history that is the floor through which we will not allow our senior citizens to fall. And we have just got to make sure that 48 days from now we are able to make sure that our senior citizens can be protected not just in their retirement security, but in terms of their health care security, in terms of making sure that they have a prescription drug benefit that truly protects them, that truly gives them

affordable access to prescription drugs, that is consistent, that does not have a doughnut hole that they fall through, and that allows the Federal Government to negotiate for lower prices. Those are the things that are reflected in our agenda.

And you can see by the Republicans' agenda here that they have been committed to nothing remotely close to that. They have been committed, since I have been here, to increasing tax breaks for the wealthiest few. They have been committed to giving subsidies to the oil industry. I mean, sometimes I feel like they are committed to reducing access to health care because they have done absolutely nothing to move that ball down the field. It has just been a real shock to me. And the fact that they have allowed the aftermath of Katrina to continue by contracts going out the door unchecked, millions and millions of dollars not accounted for, no-bid contracts awarded to companies that are essentially the friends of Republicans.

We have got former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, certainly no friend of the Democratic agenda, who has commented that "they are seen by the country," they being the Republicans, his party members, "they are seen by the country as being in charge of a government that can't function." And that is because they are giving away the store. They are letting things happen completely unchecked, ceded the oversight authority of the Congress to the executive branch and, on top of that, in the war in Iraq, also allowed for contracts to be let without a bid with absolutely no oversight of how those funds are spent; one contract where \$9 million went out the door, and no one knew what it was spent on.

It is just shocking. These are facts. These are not things that we are making up, and it is not hyperbole or exaggeration. I just don't understand how they look at themselves in the mirror every morning when they wake up. My parents raised me that you have got to make decisions that are going to make you comfortable and that are going to allow you to look yourself in the mirror when you wake up in the morning and put your head down on the pillow and rest comfortably at night. And I honestly don't understand how any of the Members on that side of the aisle can do that when they take out that rubber stamp that you bring to the floor each night that we are and they just stamp it. They just repeatedly pound it over and over for the agenda of this President, which is clearly out of step with the average American.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, I can tell you that as you start to go down the line of the facts and not fiction of what has happened and what has not happened here in this House, you can't help but think that we only have tomorrow that we will be in session, and we have next week that we will be in session.

□ 2345

There are a number of conference reports out there, bills that have passed both House and Senate that are in limbo that a conference committee has not even been appointed by the leadership of the House on a bipartisan, in a bipartisan way or partisan way to even deal with those issues.

We have an immigration bill that the American people would like to see some action on. No action whatsoever. And I can sit here with great confidence to say that it will not happen. A lot of things have, you know, a lot of talk on the majority side about an immigration bill. A lot of talk about protecting our borders and bringing legislation to the floor, if it even made it through a committee, and I will take out my Sharpie here of a double-lined fence to protect our border and bringing it to the floor for a vote.

And you take out the legislation and you start to do something, what my teachers used to say, reading is fundamental, and you do not see here where the money has been appropriated to even build a double-line fence that we are coming to the floor and being asked to vote on. It is not a joke.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. There is no money?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. No money. Yes, we are going to build this fence. It is going to be for 200, or if someone sat in the back room somewhere off the chamber and said, do not make it 200, make it a 300-mile fence, let's build a fence all of the way, let's put one in the middle of the Gulf, and we are going to run a fence underwater, folks have to put on masks and SCUBA equipment, put it underwater, yeah, that is the ticket. But no money to be able to pay for the fence.

Better yet, I think that folks find some sort of gratification or, I guess to prove a point, to say we are tough on security. But we are not going to put our money where our mouths are.

The same thing, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to Leave No Child Behind. The same thing as it relates to what, Mr. Speaker, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ talked about as it relates to the minimum wage.

The 30-Something Working Group night after night pounds the Republican majority as it relates to the imbalance of accountability on behalf of the American people that are making minimum wage. We have a proposal on this side of the aisle to raise the minimum wage to \$7.25, that will take other workers who are not on the minimum wage, that are making \$10, \$15 or \$20 an hour, their wages will go up.

Meanwhile, CEOs are getting everything that they want, making triple-time of the worker who is going in there and working every day. Need it be someone that is retired, that is trying to make ends meet, they are going in, they are punching in and punching out every day, 15 minutes in the morning, 15 minutes in the afternoon and 30 minutes for lunch if they get that.

The CEOs are getting what they want, and guess what? The Members of Congress are getting what they want. These numbers that you see up here are not minimum wage or even salaried workers in the United States of America. The minimum wage worker has not received an increase since 1997. Look at it. Zeros across the board for the American people. But look at Members of Congress. Now, here is the difference between the minority, those of us that are the Democrats and the majority, those that are in the majority, that has the power and the influence and the committee chairpersons that are able to move legislation, and the speakership and the majority leader, and the Senate, and the White House.

What has happened? They all got raises. And the difference between us and them is that we said we will not participate in another pay raise for Members of Congress until the American people receive a pay raise. And that is a fact. And that is a promise. And the other promise that we have made on this side of the aisle is in the majority, within the first 100 hours that the American people will receive an increase in the minimum wage. And that is a fact. That is not fiction. That is fact. That is on the RECORD. That is in legislation that was filed in the 109th Congress that cannot see the light of day because the majority does not want it to happen.

Now, here is the other issue as it comes down to accountability. There is a big differences from that side of the aisle and this side of the aisle. We have said we are willing to move forth in a bipartisan way and tackle the major issues that are facing this country today and tomorrow. The Republican majority has already shown that they do not have the will nor the desire to follow through on anything that I am talking about at the levels that we are talking about.

We are talking about moving this country in a new direction to make sure that every American can participate, whether they are driving a pickup truck or a flex vehicle here in the United States, making sure that Democrats, Republicans, independents, members of the American people in general, those who cannot even vote will have the opportunity.

We have a proposal on reversing the cost increases that the Republican majority has put on the backs of the American worker and the American family and in educating the next generation of leaders that are here to make sure that they have enough money to attend college, that makes sure that there is no devolution of taxes. And what do I mean?

In the 30-Something Working Group, we do not believe in big slogans and Washington inside talk. We believe in making sure that the American people understand. Devolution of taxes is saying we cut their taxes here, and that we do not put it on the backs of the States, because by their constitution,

by State constitutions, they have to balance.

Here in Washington, they just put it on the credit card or they ask a foreign country to pay for the mismanagement of this Republican majority.

So there is a big choice here. The big choice is that do we want to continue to go in the wrong direction, from a fiscal standpoint and a respect standpoint as it relates to our veterans and their services, also as it relates to health care, or do we want to go in a new direction in making sure that we deal with our fiscal issues?

Because on this side of the aisle, we balance the budget. Not one Republican on this side can say that they had anything to do with balancing the budget.

We are almost going to run out of time. But I am just going to say go to [www.housedemocrats.gov](http://www.housedemocrats.gov), or [www.house.gov/dems](http://www.house.gov/dems). The Members can go on and see the report on making sure that we keep Social Security as a public program versus privatization. A member actually came to the floor after we finished last week and said that no one in my party ever said anything about privatization of social security.

I kind of wanted to ask the gentleman to yield, Mr. Speaker, because I wanted to bring a statement out that the President said less than 10 hours earlier saying that if they get the majority and he is able to get the next Congress, as he has it now, to rubber stamp, you are going to pursue the privatization of Social Security once again.

So we want to make sure the American people know about it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, we have all of the charts and particularly the quotes about Social Security, and what the administration has said about their desire to privatize Social Security and the direction they would take Social Security on our website, our 30-Something website, [www.housedemocrats.gov/30something](http://www.housedemocrats.gov/30something).

We also have our New Direction for America pamphlet on that as well. We encourage the Members and anyone else who would like to learn a little bit more about the direction we would take the country to go on to that website.

Mr. Speaker, we thank Leader PELOSI for the opportunity to talk to the Members tonight. Mr. MEEK, thank you for joining me once again and for your leadership in the 30 Something Working Group.

#### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. WOLF (at the request of Mr. BOEHNER) for today until noon on account of attending a funeral.

#### SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legis-

lative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. MCDERMOTT) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Ms. PELOSI, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. DEFAZIO, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. PALLONE, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mrs. MCCARTHY, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. MCDERMOTT, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. EMANUEL, for 5 minutes, today.  
Ms. WOOLSEY, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. SKELTON, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. SHERMAN, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. CUMMINGS, for 5 minutes, today.  
Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California, for 5 minutes, today.  
Ms. ESHOO, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. HONDA, for 5 minutes, today.  
Ms. KAPTUR, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. PAYNE, for 5 minutes, today.  
Ms. KILPATRICK of Michigan, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. WATT, for 5 minutes, today.  
Ms. LEE, for 5 minutes, today.  
Ms. WATERS, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. RUSH, for 5 minutes, today.  
Mr. AL GREEN of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. JEFFERSON, for 5 minutes, today.  
(The following Members (at the request of Mr. POE) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Ms. FOXX, for 5 minutes, September 21.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. HULSHOF, for 5 minutes, today and September 21.

Mr. TIAHRT, for 5 minutes, today.

#### EXTENSION OF REMARKS

By unanimous consent, permission to revise and extend remarks was granted to:

Mr. KUCINICH and to include extraneous material, notwithstanding the fact that it exceeds two pages of the RECORD and is estimated by the Public Printer to cost \$2,599.

#### ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

Mrs. Haas, Clerk of the House, reported and found truly enrolled a bill of the House of the following title, which was thereupon signed by the Speaker:

H.R. 5684. An act to implement the United States-Oman Free Trade Agreement.

#### ADJOURNMENT

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 55 minutes p.m.), the House adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, September 21, 2006, at 10 a.m.