it could have an adverse effect if we are forced to decide if it is even ''worth'' employing someone who is willing to work because the risk is too great on our end.

ACA is going to put a major strain on our industry. Omaha is home to many staffing firms including several large nationally focused firms. Is there anything more we can be doing to amend or exempt recruiting/staffing agencies from the standard requirements of ACA?

Thank you for your consideration and any suggestions,

BRAD JONES,
Vice President of Operations,
Cornerstone Staffing Inc.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PITTENGER). All time for debate has expired.

Pursuant to House Resolution 717, the previous question is ordered on the bill, as amended.

The question is on the engrossment and third reading of the bill.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed and read a third time, and was read the third time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 1(c) of rule XIX, further consideration of H.R. 3522 is postponed.

□ 1700

HOUR OF MEETING ON TOMORROW

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that when the House adjourns today, it adjourn to meet at 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

THE PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. POCAN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Speaker, I am here on behalf of the Progressive Caucus. And I will be joined by some other members of the Progressive Caucus to talk about issues that are important to this country and issues that are important to have a debate about in public.

This is our first week back. After 5 weeks of being in our home districts, we have a lot to get done in this Congress. And so far this week, we have not exactly risen to the occasion. We have important things to do regarding the continuing resolution. We have important things to do regarding situations overseas. We have important legislation that this Congress simply has not gotten done. And, instead, another week has gone by without addressing some of the most important issues of the day.

One of those issues that, I think, is front and center in people's minds is what is going on overseas, what is going on with ISIL in Iraq, perhaps in Syria, and what does that mean for the American people.

And I am here today asking many of the questions that I get from people in the district. The President is going to address the Nation this evening, and he is going to give us his vision for where he thinks this country should go. And I am asking the President to please come to Congress before military action is taken against ISIL because it is so important that we are a part of this debate. We are the closest to the people in this country, and Congress needs to be involved. And I have some questions that I would like to see Members of Congress debate and the President help us address as we decide this extremely important issue.

I want to give props to Rachel Maddow who, last night, I thought did an excellent job on her program in looking at some of the questions that we should be debating in this body to make sure that we are doing the right thing by getting involved and that we have got the thought ahead of time going into it, unlike I think what we have done previously when we have gone into Iraq, as a country.

So these are some of the questions that we would like to have answered and we would like to have assistance with. One, why should the President seek congressional authorization and debate for military action against ISIL? Well, for one, it is in the Constitution. The Constitution, article I, section 8: ''The Congress shall have power to declare war, grant letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water; to raise and support armies, but no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than 2 years.''

Directly in our United States Constitution is the power that this body, Congress, has to be involved if we are going to get involved in what would essentially be seen as war. And I think the debate that we have to have is, what are we looking at as we look at the situation in Iraq and perhaps in Syria.

John Nichols from The Nation magazine wrote: ''It is a healthy respect for the complex geopolitics of the region, combined with a regard for the wisdom of the system of checks and balances and the principles of advice and consent outlined in the US Constitution'' that we have a say. Those are the words of John Nichols.

This Congress, in July, before we left to go back to our districts, voted 370–40 for H. Con. Res. 105. We don't get many 370–40 votes in this House. It was a bipartisan resolution. It had overwhelming support and said: ''The President shall not deploy or maintain United States Armed Forces in a sustained combat role in Iraq without specific statutory authorization.''

That is the resolution that was passed overwhelmingly in a bipartisan way by this body just weeks ago. We are facing these questions today. And the President is going to present to the Nation this evening exactly what he would like to see us do and hopefully will let the Congress have a say in it because, clearly, the situation has escalated. It needs a debate.

The beheadings have certainly caught the attention of the country, but we want to make sure that attention is on our behalf, not the attention of someone who did that to try to provoke a reaction, and that we don't fall into the hands of doing the reaction that some people would hope that we would do to engage in a region that could be very complex.

And after this country has had so many unfortunate failures in Iraq—twice in my adult lifetime we have gone into this region, with very limited success, and we have gone into Afghanistan—we owe it to the American people, to our veterans, our servicemen and -women and their families, those who have gone in and put their lives at risk following 9/11, to have this rigorous debate in this very body before us.

This is a complex situation. But given the failures that we have had previously in going into Iraq—whether it be the lack of debate, the lack of buy-in from other nations and other partners specifically in the region and, quite honestly, the faulty intelligence that we had or that were told at the time—it has put us in a bad situation in the past in this region.

In fact, one of the reasons we have to have this debate is there are a number of Members who are right now writing authorizations for us to go in. In fact, there is one from the gentleman from Virginia, Representative FRANK WOLF, that would essentially be an Authorization for Use of Military Force that could authorize force virtually anywhere, with no expiration date and no specific targets.

And I can tell you, when I talk to people across Wisconsin, when I talk to my colleagues in this room and they talk to their constituents, I think people want better answers than that. I know a year ago, when we had the debate about whether or not we would get involved in Syria, within 2 weeks in my district, I received 2,200 responses, 97 percent to 3 percent who were leery of us getting involved in Syria. And while the situation is different from a year ago and is even a situation different from a month ago, I think the public still has questions, certainly questions that we need to debate in this body. So we need to have that debate in Congress.

What do we want from the President in a new authorization? Well, I think there are three things that should be in that. One is that Congress has a say. Again, we have the ability to have a vote. We are elected and accountable to our districts, and these decisions are not just made behind closed doors without the advice and consent of Congress. We will have a stronger effort if we have that public debate. So that is one. Two, that we have a narrow scope. We simply can't bomb our way into success.

And let me just go over a little bit of the timeline just in the very few months since ISIL has been out there.

Let me just talk a little bit about that timeline. Back on June 16 of this year, the administration announced it was sending 275 military personnel to protect the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Three days later, they announced that 300 military advisers would collaborate and train Iraqi forces—3 days later. On June 30, the administration announced the deployment of 200 more troops to Iraq. On August 7, the President authorized airstrikes in Iraq. On the 12th of August, the administration announced 130 additional U.S. military personnel to assess the scope of the humanitarian mission. On the 26th of August, the President authorized surveillance flights over Syria. On September 2, the administration announced the deployment of 350 additional military personnel to Iraq, bringing our total to 1,100 U.S. troops now deployed in Iraq. And in the last month alone, there have been 153 airstrikes in Iraq. Just in the little bit of time that has passed, that is what we have seen happen. And I think we need to be very specific in the limited scope of what that is going to be so we don't have mission creep leading us into perhaps more involvement than we thought was going to happen in the beginning.

And third, I think—and others that I talk to think—it is important that we go in with a coalition, that we are not doing this either alone or largely alone and that we are doing this with partners from the region. Right now, there are 10 other countries that I know of that are involved in saying that they will commit to help work with us. But we need to build a moderate Sunni support and buy-in from some of the Arab States specifically to help us in this region because right now, this is a regional situation, and we need to have partners within that region to make sure that we can accomplish any goals.

There are many questions that we continue to have, and I think there are many about what that strike would look like, what exactly does it mean to have that involvement.

I just mentioned who are some of the allies that we are going to have. But what are some of our short-term goals? What do we expect to accomplish when we decide that we are going in? What would we carry out in military action? It is one thing to say that we are not going to have boots on the ground, but clearly, we are having pilots in the sky.

Right now, we are using U.S. attack aircraft, fighter aircraft, and drone aircraft to do attacks within that region. So you already have a presence that—I don't like the term ''boots on the ground,'' because these are people with families, sons and daughters, nephews and nieces, brothers and sisters that we have who are overseas, and we need to know exactly what that means.

There has been potentially a request to aid some of the moderate Syrian rebels that may come out of the conversations. And, once again, I think there are questions that this body has to have a debate on. Steven Sotloff, the journalist, who was the second person that was beheaded, that we have followed very closely, as an American citizen, his family recently said that it was moderate Syrian rebels who essentially sold access to ISIL to get Steve Sotloff. And who is it that we are going to provide assistance to? And what does that assistance mean? And who are the people that we can potentially be doing that for?

What is our long-term commitment to military action? Now, if we would have asked this question years ago when we first looked at Iraq and Afghanistan, I don't think anyone would have expected to hear a 13-year commitment to Afghanistan. More than 2,000 Americans have been killed in Afghanistan and more than 4,000 in Iraq. The cost has been estimated to be 4 to $6 trillion in that region just since that last action was called years ago. And, as I mentioned, there have been 153 airstrikes just in the last month. How many more airstrikes will it take to say that that is enough? So we need to have more meat put onto this to have an idea of what that involvement is if we are going to be authorizing something.

And finally, the question I would ask is: How do we define mission accomplished? What is the end goal that we are going to have? And where does that end happen? I certainly hope the end goal is not flying in military gear on an aircraft carrier with a banner behind it that says ''Mission Accomplished.'' Because we all know, there was no mission accomplished at that time. We need to have clear and definite goals of what it means to defeat ISIL and to make sure that that region can have some stability after the instability of so long that it has had.

So, in conclusion, the President has a constitutional obligation, I feel, to work with Congress before engaging in extended military operations. The public is still very war-weary. And while right now, polls may say people think we should get involved in Iraq and Syria with limited airstrikes, we have to have that much longer debate.

Clearly, the public beheadings of two American citizens has raised the ire of the American people and I think many in Congress. It is a different situation than it was a year ago. It is a different situation than it was a month ago. But at the same time, we have got to be sure that we are not falling into doing something that could be counterproductive because, clearly, ISIL did that to provoke a reaction, and I think that needs to be a part of the debate we have.

After being entangled in a global conflict for 13 years, we owe it to the American people and to the servicemen and -women and their families and the veterans who have already made tremendous sacrifices and the support of our country that we have a transparent and thorough debate on any action that would happen with ISIL in Syria or Iraq.

So those are my hopes. Those are my questions. I am looking forward to hearing the President tonight, and I am hoping that this body will be able to have that full debate so we know everything that we can possibly have for information prior to continuing and perhaps enhancing any actions there.

□ 1715

Now, I am very proud to be joined by other members of the Progressive Caucus. We have one of the most senior Members of this body, who has become a mentor and a friend to me, and I would like to yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL).

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, let me thank you sincerely.

It looks like it is going to be pretty lonesome in this House. I have been looking since I have returned from the recess to see how a nation that is about to embark on another intrusion, military intrusion, what concerns we would have to have and to explain when we go home and tell our constituents that we have done this because of you, that your Nation's security was threatened.

Now, I agree with the gentleman that when we see these atrocities committed something should be done, but by us? Haven't we suffered enough? Haven't we sacrificed enough?

So few Members of Congress have to attend the funerals of those dedicated men and women. Less than 1 percent are making this sacrifice. There is no financial sacrifice being made, no tax put on the war, and people think that people are volunteering to put themselves in danger. Well, the families don't always feel the same way about it. And I have been involved in being a part of getting citizenship for people who have come to this country and enlisted and fought and died for this country, and I give the family a little flag.

Now, it wasn't too long ago that America was under the impression that enough is enough. We have lost. We have sacrificed enough. We have got to get Iraq on its feet, help stabilize the government, and then we will get on and deal with Syria.

Now, in the old days, when I was in the Army, we knew who the enemy was. They had uniforms. They had flags. But as I understand, the fluid situation that came to our intelligence during the recent recess, it seems as though ISIS is worse than al Qaeda and all the other evil terrorists that we have been involved with and that now some of them have acquired weapons that we have given to some of the Arab cults that were our friends, but somehow the weapons have been taken and are in the hands of people that I am not certain which ones are our friends.

Now, I know the President has said no boots on the ground. I don't know what that really means, that we don't expect to lose any American lives. I don't know whether that means that only drones will be used and that we can rest assured that no American in

uniform is going to be fighting anybody in that part of the world.

But since the threat to our national security appears to be so uncertain, and since the President believes he already has the power constitutionally to enter into this stage of engagement with this threat to our national security, and since I know that, polls notwithstanding, very few Americans are going to have a problem going to sleep tonight thinking about ISIS, it would seem to me that one of the ways that we could discuss and debate this is a part of what I was saying when I introduced the draft bill.

I don't want to see our young people having to serve in the military. I think it is good to have some type of public national service, but I don't think people should be trained to kill. But I know one thing. If the security of this great Nation is at risk, it shouldn't be less than 1 percent of America that has to be placed in harm's way.

So, even though most of the lives we lost started off with not troops going in initially, but consultants, advisors, and those that are going to instruct our friends to defend themselves, but ultimately the number gets larger and larger and larger. So I am going to submit some kind of way that one criteria that Members can use when going back home when their voters ask, ''Well, what was it that impressed you so much after all our country has suffered in getting involved, all the trillions of dollars, the 6,000 lives, what did they say that caused you to believe that our Nation was threatened?'' you might say that we had attached to that a draft bill, and we said that if it appeared as though our Nation was going to embark on a military excursion in another country, every American must be registered between certain ages, men and women, if they are able, to say our security has been threatened, and we should be proud as Americans to say that that is the reason why we have done that.

I bet you one thing. If that is what we were talking about this recess, neither party would be anxious not to have a vote on this, and we wouldn't be getting out of here tomorrow or the next day or the day after if we have to explain why someone's son, husband, or brother or sister may have to be involved in Selective Service because we felt in our hearts that our Nation's security was threatened.

So I, like you, want to hear what the President has to say. When Republicans come to the floor and say they are going to join with Democrats to support the President, that is something I haven't heard of in years. So I do hope that the President is able to bring us together with a better understanding as to we as Members of Congress and Representatives of the Nation's citizens and noncitizens, that we can come together, not as Republicans and Democrats, but as Members of the House of Representatives where the people govern. And all of us would feel better in knowing it is not an easy choice, but we are convinced that it was the best choice.

So thank you so much for taking the time out, and I only hope that 435 of our Members would be doing the same thing so I can leave more secure in knowing that I have done the right thing. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

Mr. POCAN. Representative RANGEL, you have been an outspoken advocate for equality within the draft, making sure that everyone understands that there is an expense when we go into war. As someone who has had several nephews personally get involved and plenty of constituents, those decisions are something that are mighty, and this body has to have that as part of that debate, and that is why we should have that debate. Thank you so much for your time and your efforts.

One of the other issues that is extremely important that this body get done before we leave is addressing income inequality and addressing how we can best help those who need help the most, those who are aspiring to be in the middle class and helping the middle class. One of the very best ways and one of the priorities of the Democrats in this House is to give America a raise, to raise the minimum wage, through a bill that we have, to $10.10, to make sure that people have more money in their pockets. When that money is in their pockets, they will spend it in the community, and that will lift the economy and help create more jobs. It is exactly what we need right now.

For too long, we have not raised the minimum wage. If the minimum wage were the same and kept up with inflation from 1967, it would be well over $10.60 an hour. And we are not. We are at a much lower rate, and we need to have that.

One of my colleagues from California has been an outspoken advocate for raising the minimum wage, and I would love to, on behalf of the Progressive Caucus, yield to my colleague from the great State of California, Mr. ALAN LOWENTHAL.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Mr. Speaker, I am concerned about working families, and I will be talking about the minimum wage.

I just want to preface that it was an honor to listen to Congressman RANGEL really talk about what is probably the most important issue before us in terms of how we as a deliberative body deal with issues of war and peace and where our Nation is going. I, too, hope that we have, as this goes on, a really thoughtful discussion as you have laid out for us tonight. And I hope that we follow up with what the President says later on tonight and that, when we reconvene, we do talk about this in a very, very thoughtful, thoughtful way.

But I am also concerned about how working families and individuals are struggling to make a living on our current minimum wage of $7.25. That is why I think Congressman POCAN and my colleagues and I are discussing this issue. It is a key component of raising this minimum wage, of closing the opportunity gap and building an economy that works for our working families.

We spend a lot of time in this body talking about building the economy. We spend time discussing tax breaks for large corporations. But really what we should be about is: How do we rebuild the middle class? How do we give people an opportunity to join the middle class? Raising the minimum wage is a critical component.

By raising it from $7.25 to $10.10 an hour, we would lift 900,000 Americans out of poverty. Do we raise it into wealth? No. We just take the first step. And this is a minimum step. It would raise it for 28 million people, including more than—in my home State, 2.7 million Californians live below the poverty level, working Californians, we are talking about, live below.

Who are they? Seventy percent of them are women. The average age is not as it is often told to us, young people, 18 to 25. We are talking about the average age of a person on minimum wage is 35 years of age. That is a significant year.

I think I meant to say 1.3 million Californians in my State. It is going to raise it for 2.7 million, and of those, almost a million and a half are women who would be impacted by an increase.

This is a bill we are talking about that is a bill that was put forth by Senator TOM HARKIN and Congressman GEORGE MILLER, and it is going to go have a tremendous impact upon job growth. Sometimes we hear, well, if you raise the minimum wage, we are going to lose jobs. But if we really get through the scare tactics, we will listen to what people who are experts and who have studied the issue have said, that a recent analysis by the Economic Policy Institute has calculated that a higher minimum wage within 3 years creates 85,000 new jobs and it has a boost of almost $22 billion into the economy.

So, when we raise the minimum wage, we are talking about protecting families, protecting individuals. We as a Congress have, I think, a responsibility to support those families who are the foundation of our workforce. And now is not time to turn our backs on the people who are raising the next generation. We are talking about working families. We need to help the men, women, and children who provide the foundation for our economy and our country, who are raising the next generation.

If we cannot provide an adequate wage for Americans who are living in poverty and working, why are we here? What is our role? Our role, I think, is to listen to those working Americans who are desperately trying to make ends meet, who work two and three jobs, and say: We hear you; it makes economic sense for the Nation; we will support you. And we should not leave this Congress until we take the first

step, and that is to raise the minimum wage to at least $10.10 an hour.

□ 1730

It is a minimum raise of the minimum wage.

So with that, I thank you for providing me this opportunity to speak.

Mr. POCAN. If I could just ask you, gentlemen, one question—and I will go to Mr. RANGEL again for a comment.

Let me ask you a question. The leadership in this House, the Republican leadership, has refused to schedule a bill to raise the minimum wage, and we have one other device to do that called the discharge petition.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Yes.

Mr. POCAN. I would like to ask the gentleman if you signed the discharge petition so that we can force a vote in this House to raise the minimum wage in the remaining weeks we have before we finish the session for the year.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Absolutely would I sign a discharge petition, one of the most important things that we can do.

Mr. POCAN. And we have done that.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. All we are asking for is a right to vote.

I still remember when the President came, in his State of the Union speech, and it was really just after—in my first year here in the Congress and he was talking about the horrible episode that happened at Sandy Hook and said, ''Give the people the vote. Just give us a vote.''

That is all we are asking our Republican colleagues. Let us vote on raising the minimum wage. That is all. That is the democratic way and ''democratic'' with a small D. That is the American way. Give the people a vote.

Mr. POCAN. Again, thank you, Mr. LOWENTHAL.

Because that is the problem—we have been told the Speaker won't schedule the vote, but there are other ways. Every single Member of this body can sign a discharge petition, and if we get a majority of us, 218 of us, to sign that, it will come to this body. So there are no excuses not to get this done.

I would like to yield to my good friend from New York, Mr. CHARLIE RANGEL.

Mr. RANGEL. We were talking about war and peace. To me, we are still talking about a moral issue.

Here in this great Nation, the richest in the world, we are asking people to work 40 hours, many without sick leave, many without vacations or vacation pay, and—at the end of the day—end up in poverty. There is something terribly wrong with that picture.

It seems to me that it goes beyond just doing the right and the moral thing. Even churches and synagogues and mosques should recognize that their membership is going down because you can't pay the rent, buy the food, and still give your money to the religious institutions.

Beyond that, what are they going to do with the money? I will tell you: they are going to be able to get nutritional diets for their kids. They will be able to buy clothes for their kids. They can aspire that their kids get a better education and be able to get higher jobs and have higher ambitions.

They can make America more productive because they have more self-esteem because being poor is not the worst thing in the world, if you feel that you can come out of that poverty and you have an opportunity to do it.

There is something worse going on in this country today. I was privileged years ago to sponsor a bill that we all know is the earned income tax credit, and the earned income tax credit says this shouldn't happen. If you have got a family and, after you follow the Federal formula, you are still poor, why, we will give you a check. You won't owe taxes; we will give you a refundable check.

Guess what? Some of the people that are hiring these people at very low wages also hire accountants that advise the potential applicant how to become eligible for the earned income tax credit. So they give a little bit, the government gives a little bit, and the people still end up poor.

It just seems to me this is not a Democratic issue; it is not a Republican issue. It is an issue of: What does America stand for? Where is the equity involved if we are not going to allow our country to be pumped up by the middle class people who made this country great?

We are not a country of rich and poor folks. It is the middle class that have demands, that want to go to the local store, so that they can sell and hire people and have communities that feel proud about themselves.

I know one thing: with the rents that are going up in communities all over this country and people who used to consider themselves middle class, you miss one or two payments of your rent—and Judge Judy doesn't want to ask you what were the circumstances.

If you didn't pay your rent, you are going to get evicted. If you don't have resources, if you have no place to go, you can go from a plateau that you thought was middle class into a homeless shelter.

Getting out of that situation and seeking employment is almost impossible. How much does it cost? Hundreds of billions of dollars in social costs because you wouldn't give Americans an opportunity to earn a living wage.

So it is lonely down here with you guys, but I do hope before we leave that we can have not just Democrats, but all of the Members be able to go back home and say, ''I was late getting this started, but we do have the issues, and we are going to make you proud.''

Thank you so much for taking the time to allow us to express what we know most people believe, but politically, they can't support.

Mr. POCAN. Again, thank you, Mr. RANGEL.

One of the things I look at—it is pretty simple math to someone like me, coming from America's heartland, when productivity is going up and wages are flat, the money is going somewhere.

In 1988, the average CEO made 40 times the lowest-paid employee. Now, it is 354 times the lowest-paid employee. Now, if you put extra money in the pockets through raising the minimum wage of someone who is in the middle class or aspiring to be in the middle class, it is going to go back into the economy. If they can afford a long weekend vacation to the Wisconsin Dells in my area, that helps boost the economy, helps create jobs—but you know what? That CEO can't take 354 vacations to make up for it.

Clearly, when the money goes into the pockets of those who need it the most, it is going to go instantly into the economy, help create jobs, and help do everything that we need to, to stimulate the economy to the point that we can be as great as we possibly can be.

To me, it is a no-brainer. I think to many of the constituents I talk to it is a no-brainer.

You are very articulate in talking about the troubles that people go through in trying to just get by. It is another thing this body simply has to take up before we leave.

If we don't take this up before November, quite honestly, those who didn't try to take it up shouldn't come back because we need people who will take it up because it is the will of the people. Democrats, Independents, and even Republicans are looking at this as an issue that is important and has to happen.

Again, thank you so much for all your work on this for so many years. ALAN LOWENTHAL and I are freshman here. We are the newbies. We are taking up the fight, but you have been doing it for so many years and been a mentor to so many of us. Again, thank you, Mr. RANGEL, and thank you, Mr. LOWENTHAL.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Thank you very, very much.

Mr. POCAN. Mr. LOWENTHAL went through all the numbers for the State of California. It has the same effect in my State of Wisconsin. When you look at it, if you raise that minimum wage to $10.10, as the bill from Senator HARKIN does and the one that Representative GEORGE MILLER from California has introduced in this body, not only is it 28 million people in this country that will get a raise, but it is half a million people just in my home State of Wisconsin, a half million people.

One of the things that I have heard sometimes when you talk to people, they say, ''If you raise the minimum wage, all you are doing is giving extra pocket money to teenagers who are living with their parents.''

Well, that is one of the great myths that is out there because here is the reality: the average age of a minimum wage worker is 35 years old. When you look at the exact breakout of who it is, 90 percent are over 20 years old, and

more than half of them are older than 25 years old.

You are not talking about a teenager living at home. You are talking about people who are living independently in the community, trying to get by on $7.35 an hour or close to $15,000 a year, in a job that often has no benefits—health benefits, pension, et cetera.

Fifty-five percent of the people on minimum wage are working full time. Forty-four percent have some type of college education, an associate degree or bachelor's degree or other higher education. That is the reality of the minimum wage worker in this country. It is not the myth of a teenager living at home, looking for some pocket money.

These are hardworking people trying to get by, often on two or three jobs, without the benefits. Without that ability, if they miss their rent, they get evicted, and then they are homeless. As Mr. RANGEL said, these are some of the same people that then show up on our health plans that States provide for being low-income.

So you know who then is subsidizing their salaries? We all are. Every single individual who is a taxpayer pays into those programs. While that employer may not offer a wage that they can live on, we all subsidize it, so that they can actually get something as basic as health care.

So there is a real need to pass the Fair Minimum Wage Act that is proposed. We have tried and tried in this body to get a vote on it. We have signed a discharge petition. Virtually every Democrat in the House of Representatives has signed that.

We need those Republicans, especially those Republicans who are on record supporting a minimum wage, to also sign that, so we can get a vote before we leave in a few weeks, before the November elections, before the end of the year—because I think a question that I would want to ask my Representative when I see them in the community in the coming weeks before the election is: What have they done to help make the middle class stronger? What have they done to help people who are aspiring to be in the minimum class? What have we got done in Congress?

There was a Congress in 1948 that was called the do-nothing Congress because they got so little done. The first year of that session, they passed 350 bills. Last year, this body passed 88.

Here we are sitting another week back in Congress, and we haven't raised the minimum wage, we haven't passed equal pay for equal work so that women make just as much as men do, and we haven't done anything about the affordability of higher education, allowing students to refinance their loans.

These are simple issues that aren't partisan issues. They are not Democratic/Republican. They are not liberal/conservative. They are about whether or not you are fighting for the middle class and those who aspire to be in the middle class or whether you are here trying to help out the special interests and the lobbyists who represent the special interests. It is really that simple.

So we need to pass a raise for the American people. That means you pass an increase in the minimum wage. As other Members have said, it will lift so many people out of poverty and give a raise to so many people to help stimulate the economy.

So the Progressive Caucus is fighting each and every single day while we are here for a variety of issues: raising the minimum wage, trying to stop wage theft in this country, trying to extend unemployment insurance so that everyone who is out of work can still get some benefits while they are looking for work so that they can get that job. We all know the best social program is a job, and we want to make sure that everyone can get that job.

We need to continue to do the things that Congress needs to get done and we have not gotten done. So the minimum wage is one issue that we wanted to talk about today.

As we have the President speaking to us this evening, we want to make sure that this body has a very full and rich debate. As we passed in a bipartisan way, 370–40, we need to have a real debate and have real questions answered before we get involved, so that we never again have what happened the last time we got involved in Iraq because we are back again. There was no ''mission accomplished.'' A banner and a fly-in in military gear is not a successful end to an involvement.

We need to make sure whatever we do this time is thoughtful, done with consultation of Congress, with narrow scope, and with a partnership with other nations specifically in the region to make sure that we are doing this not alone or not largely alone.

With that, Mr. Speaker, the Progressive Caucus appreciates this time this evening, and I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1745

ISSUES FACING THE NATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate my colleagues across the aisle talking about the economy and pushing for a raise in minimum wage because that is what a party does after their party has totally devastated the economy. It is what you do after your party's President, with help from the majority in the Senate led by HARRY REID, are able to just wreak havoc with an economy that should be doing really well.

This economy is ready to take off. ObamaCare, as we have said for over 4 years, is going to harm the economy. It is going to knock people out of work. It is going to put people from full time to part time. Republicans have been explaining this ever since not one of us voted for that bill. We also explained there were $716 billion in cuts to Medicare.

A lot of seniors that vote Democrat voted for this President, voted for a Democratic majority in the Senate. They have now been shocked this year as they are not getting the health care they once did. Why? Because of ObamaCare—seniors are getting mistreated.

When we want to talk about the economy, the most staggering numbers I can imagine have come out in the last year, and the President has even acknowledged it was true. He complains we are not doing enough for the middle class.

Well, we agree with that. We certainly agree with that. We need to help those that are not making enough money. Then quit knocking them out of their jobs, Mr. President, HARRY REID. We have got over 360 bills down at the Senate. Passage of just 10 of them would help this economy, but they won't bring them up.

So the devastating, most incredible numbers are these: since Barack Obama has been President of the United States, for the first time in our Nation's history—it has never ever happened before in any President's tenure, whether it was 4 years or 8 years or shortened by tragedy, no President before Barack Obama has ever presided over an economy in the United States in which 95 percent of all the income in the United States went to the top 1 percent, never ever.

Only under the leadership of President Barack Obama, of all the Presidents, only this President has brought us to the place where 95 percent of all of the income in America goes to the top 1 percent.

People wonder why there is so much money that flooded into the Obama campaign in 2008. Not as much flooded into his campaign in 2012 because there was some people losing money. The economy wasn't doing as well as expected.

Is there anything more devastating than a President acknowledging the fact that 95 percent of all income has gone to the top 1 percent? Then he gives speeches and talks to people like he can't understand how the Republicans could allow this big growth between the poor and the rich. Well, we need the President to tell us how he has done it, but the trouble is we know how he has done it.

He talks about fat cats and then makes sure that they are the ones that get rewarded. He talks about going after Big Oil and proposes a bill that would do nothing to hurt Big Oil, but would absolutely have devastated independent oil producers who actually drill and produce around 95 percent or so of the United States' oil and gas wells.