

meeting of our Democratic caucus, indicated this afternoon that one of his great disappointments in this session is failing to provide an increase in the minimum wage for the 13 million Americans who need and deserve an increase. The last time we increased it was 1997. We have had unparalleled economic prosperity before and since. We have had record low unemployment. We have had stability in inflation. It is inexcusable that we have not increased the minimum wage for these workers. I am strongly committed to working with our colleagues to address that situation in the new Congress.

I join our Democratic leader in expressing my deep disappointment in the failure of this Congress to increase the minimum wage. A fair increase is long overdue. It is urgently needed to improve the lives of over ten million hard-working, low-wage earners in this country. It is shameful that Congress is holding the increase hostage to tax cuts for the wealthy. It is even more shameful that Congress recently acted to raise its own pay for the third time in four years—yet they have not found time in the past three years to give any pay increase at all to the lowest paid workers.

The long period of inaction comes at a time when the country as a whole is enjoying unprecedented prosperity—the longest period of economic growth in the nation's history and the lowest unemployment rate in three decades. In these strong economic times, Congress should not be acting like Scrooge.

Millions of low income workers have dedicated their lives to building this strong economy. Yet, in many cases they have been forced to labor for increasingly longer and longer hours, with less and less time to spend with their families, and without sharing fairly in the nation's prosperity. Poverty has almost doubled among full-time, year-round workers since the late 1970s—from about 1.5 million then to almost 3 million in 1998—and an unacceptably low minimum wage is part of the problem.

Minimum wage employees working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earn only \$10,700 a year—\$3,400 below the poverty line for a family of three. At that rate, minimum wage workers now fail to earn enough to afford adequate housing in any area of this country. Waitresses, teacher's aides, child care workers, elder care workers and all other employees deserve to be paid fairly for the work they do. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.

By failing to increase the minimum wage, Congress has broken its promise to American workers. We are denying them just compensation for their many contributions to building a strong nation and a strong economy.

We have broken our promise to women, since 60 percent of minimum wage earners are women.

We have broken our promise to people of color, because 16 percent of those who would benefit from a minimum wage increase are African American and 20 percent of those who would be helped are Hispanic.

We have broken our promise to children, because 33 percent of minimum wage earners are parents with children. In America today, 4.3 million children live in poverty, despite living in a family where someone works full-time, year-round.

And we have broken our promise to the American family, because too many parents are required to spend more and more time away from their families to make ends meet. On average, Americans are working 416 more hours in 1999 than they were in 1979.

Each year we fail to act on the minimum wage, families across the country fall farther behind. As the result of not implementing the dollar increase we first proposed three years ago, when the clock strikes midnight on the December 31st, minimum wage workers will have lost over \$3000 because of the inaction by Congress. Today, the real value of the minimum wage is now \$2.90 below what it was in 1968. To have the purchasing power it had in 1968, the minimum wage would have to be at least \$8.05 an hour today, not \$5.15.

We will never give up or give in on this issue, because it is an issue of fundamental fairness. We will be back next year with a new bill to raise the minimum wage. I hope that the new Congress will act as quickly as possible to pass a fair increase that reflects the losses suffered as the result of our shameful inaction this year.

President-Elect Bush has emphasized many of these priorities, and I look forward to working with him. The lesson of the legislation before us today is that when we fail to consider each other's ideas, only gridlock results—but when we work together for the nation's good, the result is the kind of progress that makes us all proud to serve the American people.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ABRAHAM). The Senator from Nevada.

ORDER FOR RECESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, due to the delay in consideration of the final appropriations bill, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until the hour of 4 p.m., following the remarks of Senator TORRICELLI from New Jersey.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ASSISTANCE FOR ALS PATIENTS

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, 3 years ago, during a visit by a constituent, I met a young man from southern New Jersey named Kevin O'Donnell. I have shared his story with the Senate before. But on this day, having met with some success, I share it with you again.

Five years ago, Kevin was 31 years old. He was a young father, a husband of a lovely woman, and in perfect health. He took his daughter skiing one day and upon returning home felt a pain in his leg. It continued over a period of time, bothering him, so he went to visit the doctor. You can only imagine the shock when this perfectly healthy young man—father of this little girl—discovered he had been stricken with ALS, known to most of us as Lou Gehrig's disease.

Since that day, Kevin O'Donnell's wife and daughter have watched the life flow out of his body. Going from a healthy young man, they watched him lose control of his legs and arms, the ability to speak, and even the ability to breathe. Life simply evaporated from Kevin O'Donnell's body.

When he came in to see me those years ago, he had a very simple request—so logical I could not conceive of an argument against it. While he was waiting to die, not only was his life leaving him but the financial security of his family. Nursing care, medical assistance, things to ease the pain, to maintain some dignity in life, to provide relief for his wife and his family, were costing thousands of dollars.

But under the rules of Medicare, he could not begin to receive any assistance for 2 years. The life expectancy for 90 percent of ALS sufferers is only 3 years, 4 years. Most of the people who have ALS do not live beyond the waiting period in Medicare to get help. This never could have been anticipated. It never could have been even imagined by people in Medicare when these regulations were written. And because there is no other disease quite like it, the regulations have never been changed.

A person can have heart disease or cancer, and they may be at great risk, but they can live 2 years. With the right treatment, they can live 5, 10, 20 years; at least the chances are always good. With ALS, the outcome of the disease is nearly certain that the life expectancy is not long and most will not live to ever see their first dollar of Government help.

I brought this cause to many of my colleagues in the Congress. There are 28 Members in the Senate—16 Democrats and 12 Republicans—and over 280