

out of that act the Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Does America have to wait for more violence and more bloodshed to pass real gun safety laws? I would hope not.

Frankly, I hope America will come together with people of good will, put the snickering aside, the snide remarks aside, and get the good people of America to join us and encourage us to pass real gun safety legislation.

MINIMUM WAGE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TANCREDO). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. FOLEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, I want to first mention to the gentlewoman from Texas who just spoke, it was in fact a senior member of the Democratic caucus that may have derailed the efforts on gun safety that she claims today on the floor.

I would also like to strongly suggest that we keep talking about the NRA as if they are somehow responsible for the deaths around this country. Last I checked, none of the crimes committed were perpetrated by a member of the NRA. Now, we can have different positions on this issue, but how anyone can think for a minute that that crackhead, where that gun was found and that young innocent life was snuffed out by a gun, would have put a trigger lock on their gun, is beyond me.

Mr. Speaker, that is not what I am here to speak to, however. I do not want to talk about this issue. We do need to debate it in fairness. We will have an opportunity to have this debate, but I want to strongly urge Members once again not to point fingers or accuse groups, whether it is the NRA or Hollywood, for the decline of values in America. Let us talk constructively on trying to make something that will work, that people will obey and abide by. Let us construct a law that will have some teeth for those criminals who are violating the law.

I applaud the President on his efforts to increase funding for ATF, to increase the outreach to find out who is selling guns illegally. There are a lot of things we can do. But let us not sit here and point fingers and say it is the Republicans or it is the Democrats, it is that or that. It is too serious of an issue.

Let me also rise today to talk about an issue that is coming to the floor tomorrow, and that is on minimum wage and the economic growth act that we will be discussing tomorrow.

The President said clearly today that it should be a clean bill and it should not have amendments. But I would urge the President once again to at least tone down the rhetoric and discuss this in a very fair manner.

I can assure all of America that members of the Republican Party have in fact been meeting in good faith to try to structure a bill that will in fact increase the minimum wage. I commend people like the gentleman from New York (Mr. QUINN), the gentleman from New York (Mr. LAZIO), the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS), and others who have been working constructively to find a way to increase incomes for those at minimum wage.

I was involved in a restaurant. I owned a small business. I understand full well the impact of increasing expenses, such as payroll, through minimum wage increases. But at the same time I recognize that with rising gas prices, insurance costs, health care, it is probably timely that we look to seek to raise the level of people who are in fact working at minimum wage.

Let me also suggest to the President that we can in fact come to some kind of agreement here today or tomorrow and discuss this with some clarity. Raising the minimum wage will in fact cost small businesses money. What is the solution? Offset the cost with some benefits that we could structure, that are targeted, that are reasonable, that will be effective to not only assisting the low-income worker on minimum wage but helping the business owner meet the obligation of continuing to provide things for his community, his family.

We could accelerate the increase in the self-employment health insurance deduction to 100 percent. That would help insure more people and provide a good write-off for that business owner. We could increase section 179 expensing. We could raise the business meal deduction. As a restaurant owner, raising meal deductions would in fact incentivize people to come to eat in a restaurant, would increase income, and would allow the employer to increase minimum wage through that effort.

Real estate tax relief is in the bill tomorrow that we can talk about. Tax credits encouraging the move from welfare to work. Getting people off of welfare into the workplace. This is something that would extend work opportunity tax credits. So there are some very, very good things in this bill. Tax relief for America's farmers and ranchers. Death tax relief.

The bill is constructed in such a way that I think, if we can talk logically and fairly, we can find an increase in minimum wage over 3 years, we can provide some relief and incentives for small businesses, and we can go away making a lot of people happy.

Regrettably, though, I hear the word bipartisan used around here a lot. If they would only work in a bipartisan manner, we would solve this issue. But that only assumes that one side agrees 100 percent with the other side's argument. Nowhere can we disagree without being accused of being obstruction-

ists, stalling or doing those types of things. I would suggest to my colleagues that we could in fact work very clearly and quickly on this very, very important issue.

We want to help Americans, but I will also say that 1.2 percent of the American work force is at minimum wage. Those that are on minimum wage are usually just starting their job, or teenagers seeking their first jobs. Yes, I agree, and I said it before, I will vote to increase over 3 years a dollar per hour because I think it is important and it is warranted. But make no mistake about it, those people who are successfully fulfilling their jobs in the workplace are exceeding minimum wage because employers need employees and they will pay in order to retain good qualified workers.

SUNDRY MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sundry messages in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Sherman Williams, one of his secretaries.

LAWSUIT ALLEGES VIOLATION OF EQUAL PAY ACT BY ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor to report to my colleagues something that I am certain is as much of a piece of embarrassment to them as it is to me, and that is that on February 29 a Federal Court declared a class in a lawsuit against the Architect of the Capitol, our agent, that is to say the Congress of the United States, alleging that there has been a violation of the equal pay act; that we have been paying women less for doing the same work as men.

The women I am talking about are the women who clean the offices of Members, who keep this Capitol clean, and who, in fact, are responsible for the maintenance and cleanliness of the place where we work.

This was the first class action under the Congressional Accountability Act, the new act we passed, in order to hold Members and Congress itself accountable in the same way that we hold others. May I say that it should not have been necessary for this case to go this far. I am a former chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and I have to tell my colleagues that when a case that looks like this is filed before the commission today, and for years now, they simply get settled out before they get this far.

This case not only did not get settled out when it was in our own administrative process, in the Office of Contract