off. I have seen jean factories in Elkins and Phillippi, a shoe plant in Marlinton, trade glassworks in Huntington, and a shirt factory in Morgan- 

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS, Madam President, at the close of business Friday, July 20, 2001, the Federal debt stood at $5,723,280,631,657.09, five trillion, seven hundred twenty-three billion, two hundred eighty million, six hundred thirty-one thousand, six hundred fifty-seven dollars and nine cents.

One year ago, July 20, 2000, the Federal debt stood at $5,665,503,000,000, five trillion, six hundred sixty-five billion, five hundred thirty-one million.

Twenty-five years ago, July 20, 1976, the Federal debt stood at $619,038,000,000, six hundred nineteen billion, thirty-eight million, which reflects a debt increase of more than $3 trillion, or 50 percent, since 1976.

The minimum wage was once viewed by Democrats and Republicans alike as an instrument of economic justice—an effort to "end starvation wages," as President Franklin D. Roosevelt himself put it. Now, though, it is seen by much of official Washington as an economic impediment, an undue burden on a marketplace better left unfettered. Where the onus was once on the business owner to pay "a decent wage," it is now more on the worker to demonstrate that he or she deserves one.

This sea change began when Ronald Reagan swept into office. From 1980 through 1982, the minimum wage was allowed to fall below 45% of the average hourly wage in the U.S. in only four separate years. Since 1982, the minimum wage has never reached 45%, and it currently stands at 36%, of that benchmark. Even using a conservative measure of inflation, the minimum wage through 1997 and 1998 was worth more than $5.50 an hour—and frequently more than $6—in today's dollars. After 1980, its value plummeted, sinking to less than $4.20 a day by President Bush II's end. Two subsequent increases have nudged it back up to its present $5.15.

While the robust job market of the '90s thinned the ranks of minimum-wage workers—only about 1% of hourly employees earn exactly $5.15 an hour now, down from more...