

Congressman Bernie Sanders (I-VT) delivered the following remarks on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on November 06, 2003.

Mr. Speaker, tonight I want to focus on some very important issues which impact the middle class of our country, and I do that as the only Independent in the U.S. House of Representatives. And as an Independent, the views that I am going to express are somewhat different than the views of many of my colleagues.

The first point that I want to make is in a sense an obvious point to most people in this country, especially perhaps the 50 or 60 percent of the American people who have given up on the political process and no longer vote, and that is that in Washington, D.C., in the White House and in the United States Congress, money, big money plays an enormous role. There is a reason, and I am going to get into this in greater length in a moment, why we are hemorrhaging decent-paying manufacturing jobs and those jobs are going to China where workers there are paid 50 cents an hour and why corporate America is laying off millions of American workers to take jobs abroad. And one of the reasons that we have a disastrous trade policy is the huge amounts of money that come into Congress, that go into the White House, which have opened up access so that these corporations can go a long way toward destroying decent-paying jobs in America. Money talks. There is a reason why in the United States of America our people pay by far the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs.

I border in Vermont, the State that I represent, Canada, the Canadian Nation. And in Canada people pay in some cases one-fifth, one-third, one-half of the prices that people in the United States pay for the same exact medicine made by the same company. There is a reason for the fact that in the United States we are the only country in the industrialized world that does not in one form or another regulate the drug industry and prevent them from charging Americans any prices they want, and that reason is big money.

The pharmaceutical industry contributes huge amounts of money to Members of Congress. They have lobbyists running all over this place. Several years ago when the President of the United States had a major fund raiser, there was the pharmaceutical industry up there on the dais with him. There is a reason why the United States today is the only Nation in the industrialized world which does not have a national health care program guaranteeing health care to all people, and that reason is money coming into Washington, D.C. from the insurance companies and other people who profit off of a health care system which is disintegrating before our eyes. There is a reason why pollution all over

America is rampant, and that has to do with the money that utilities and other large corporations contribute to political parties and to the White House.

Front page, New York Times today: "Lawyers at EPA Say it will Drop Pollution Cases," and the article goes on to point out, of course, that "Representatives of the utility industry have been among President Bush's biggest campaign donors, and a change in the enforcement policies has been a top priority of the industry's lobbyists." In other words, they have now been given permission to pollute because they are major campaign contributors.

There is a reason why this Congress and this President have passed legislation which provides enormous tax breaks for the wealthiest people in our country, hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks that will go to millionaires and billionaires, while at the same time we have the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world for our children, where we have working people living in their cars because they cannot afford the housing that is available to them. That has everything to do with the money that the wealthy and large corporations contribute into the political process.

Mr. Speaker, the corporate media, which, of course, is owned by big money interests, does not talk about what is happening in our country too much in terms of what is going on in the lives of ordinary people, but in my view, in many respects the United States is rapidly becoming three separate nations. On one hand we have an increasingly wealthy elite composed of a small number of people with unbelievable wealth and power. That is one group. Small numbers but incredible wealth, incredible power. And then we have the vast majority of the people who are in the middle class, and the middle class in our country today is, as most Americans know, shrinking. The average American today is working longer hours for lower wages than he or she used to. People are going bankrupt at frightening numbers. It is extremely rare when we can see one breadwinner in the family earning enough money to pay the bills in almost every instance in the middle class. Now, two people are needed to work, and sometimes these folks are working unbelievable hours and are becoming stressed out. That is the middle class, shrinking, people working longer hours for lower wages, wondering how they are going to be able to send their kids to college. And at the bottom, at the bottom of the ladder, we have a growing number of Americans who are living in abject poverty, people who are barely able to keep their heads above water, people who are in many instances working for \$5.15 an hour, the minimum wage, and those people, after 40 hours of work, 50 hours of work, are falling further behind. They cannot afford to get their cars fixed to get the work. They cannot afford child care for their children, and that is what is happening to our low-income people, and poverty in America, as we all know, is increasing.

What we very rarely hear discussed in the House of Representatives, in the corporate media, is the growing gap between the rich and the poor and the fact that in our country we have the most unequal distribution of wealth and

income. The fact that there have been rich and poor is not new. That has always gone on. But the disparities in wealth and income that currently exist in our country today have not been seen since the 1920's. In other words, instead of becoming a more egalitarian country, a country in which the middle class is growing, where fewer people are living in poverty, what we are seeing is more and more inequality in terms of the distribution of wealth and income.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the wealthiest 1 percent of the population owns more wealth than the bottom 95 percent. That is right. The richest 1 percent owns more wealth than the bottom 95 percent. Some people may think that is okay. Let me be frank. I do not think that that is right, that that is moral, that that is what this country should be about. The CEOs of our largest corporations today earn more than 500 times what their employees are making, 500 times. While workers are being squeezed, being forced to pay more for health insurance, while their pensions are being cut back, the CEOs of large corporations in many instances make out like bandits. And I am not just talking here about the crooks, the dishonest people, the illegal people who ran companies like Enron and WorldCom and Arthur Andersen and those companies. I am not talking about them. I am talking about the highly-respected CEOs like the retired head of General Electric, Jack Welch, who, when he retired in 2000, received \$123 million in compensation and \$10 million a year in pension benefits for the rest of his life, and he did that after throwing tens and tens of thousands of American workers out on the streets as he moved his plants abroad to China, Mexico, and other countries. Good job, Jack. He is sure worth \$123 million now that he has laid off tens of thousands of American workers. I am talking about people like Lou Gerstner of IBM, who, from 1997 to 2002, received \$366 million in compensation while slashing the pensions of his employees and the health care benefits of IBM retirees. Right on, Lou. \$366 million for him; cuts in pensions and health care benefits for his retirees. A great American. I am talking about C.A. Heimbold Jr., Bristol-Myers Squibb, who received almost \$75 million in 2001 while helping to make it impossible for many seniors in this country to purchase prescription drugs because they are priced so high.

Today the Nation's 13,000 wealthiest families who constitute 1/100 of 1 percent of the population receive almost as much income as the bottom 20 million families in the United States. That to my mind is not what America is supposed to be.

New data from the Congressional Budget Office shows that the gap between the rich and the poor in terms of income more than doubled from 1979 to 2000. In other words, we are moving in exactly the wrong direction. The gap is such that the wealthiest 1 percent had more money to spend after taxes than the bottom 40 percent. The richest 2.8 million Americans had \$950 billion after taxes, while the poorest 110 million had less, 14.4 percent.

Mr. Speaker, it is increasingly common to see in my State of Vermont, and all over this Nation, working people working not at one job, not at two jobs in order to pay the bills, but in more instance than we can imagine, working three jobs, working incredible hours, not 40 hours but 50 hours, 60 hours. Is this what the new global economy is all about, seeing men and women all over America working one, two, three jobs with minimal benefits?

When I was growing up, the expectation of being in the middle class, and I know this is a very radical concept that some young people might find difficult to understand, but the concept then before computers, before the explosion of technology, concept of being in the middle class in those days was that one person in a family could work 40 hours a week and earn enough money to pay the bills and take care of his or her family. Imagine what a radical idea that was, one person. The reality now is that we find very few families in the middle class where one person works 40 hours and earns enough money to pay the bills.

In terms of what is happening to the middle-class, we have lost over 3 million jobs in the last 3 years, and, with 9 million workers unemployed, unemployment is over 6 percent. That is a serious problem. But in truth, the unemployment situation is far worse than that, because official unemployment statistics do not include those workers who are no longer actively searching for work. So if you are in a high unemployment area, if there are no jobs and you are not actively working, you are not included. Those figures do not include workers who are working part-time because they cannot find full-time work. Those figures do not include Ph.D.s who are driving cabs and skilled workers who are doing unskilled labor because there are no jobs around that fit their skills. But, nonetheless, we have 9 million people who are unemployed.

Importantly, of the 3 million jobs that we have lost over the last 3 years, 2.7 million were in the manufacturing sector. This is an issue that I want to spend a moment on, because what is happening in our manufacturing sector today is a disaster for this country and bodes very, very poorly for the future of our Nation.

The bottom line is, and Congress must finally recognize this, our trade policies are failing. NAFTA has failed. Our membership in the WTO has failed. Perhaps, above all, permanent normal trade relations with China, PNTR, has failed.

The time is now, and, in fact, it is long overdue, for the United States Congress to stand up to corporate America, to stand up to the President of the United States, to stand up to editorial writers all over America, all of whom have told us, year after year, how great unfettered free trade would be. Well, the evidence is in. They were wrong. They were horrendously wrong.

They told us that unfettered free trade would create new jobs. Instead, we have lost jobs.

They told us that unfettered free trade would improve the standard of living of the middle-class. Instead, real wages have gone down.

Let us be very clear: The decline of manufacturing is one of the reasons why our middle-class is shrinking and why wages for middle-class workers have declined. When we talk about the loss of 3 million jobs in the last 3 years, we should appreciate that 90 percent of those jobs were lost in manufacturing, and, with the loss of manufacturing jobs, we have seen a decline in real inflation-accounted-for wages over the last 30 years.

Today, American workers in the private sector are earning 8 percent less than they were in 1973; 8 percent less. Now, just think about that for a moment. In the last 30 years there has been a revolution in technology. We all know that. We all know what computers have done, what e-mail has done, what faxes have done, what cell phones and satellite communications have done. We know what robotics in factories have done. In other words, we are a much more productive Nation than we were 30 years ago. Almost every worker is producing more.

Given that reality, that we have new tools that make us more productive, why is it that the average worker in the private sector today is earning 8 percent less than he or she was earning in 1973? This is a major issue that we have got to put up there on the radar screen, and an issue that needs to be discussed all over our country.

Let us be honest about it: Manufacturing in this country today is in a state of collapse. In the last 3 years, we have lost 2.7 million manufacturing jobs, which comprise 16 percent of the total; 16 percent of manufacturing jobs have been lost in the last 3 years.

In my own small State of Vermont, the third smallest State in the country, we have lost some 8,700 manufacturing jobs between January 2001 and August 2003.

And here is the tragedy: When we talk about the loss of manufacturing jobs, we are talking about the loss of decent-paying jobs, often with decent benefits.

In Vermont, for example, on average, someone working in manufacturing makes over \$42,000 a year. That is a decent income. When that employee loses his or her job, when that job goes to China, in almost every instance the new job that is acquired by that worker pays less and provides lower benefits.

Mr. Speaker, in 2002, the United States had a \$435 billion trade deficit; a \$435 billion trade deficit. This year, the trade deficit with China alone, one country, China, is expected to be \$120 billion, and that number is projected to go up and up and up in future years.

In recent years we have seen the trade deficit rise from \$11.5 billion in 1990 to \$49 billion in 1997 to \$120 billion this year. And here is what is scary; the National Association of Manufacturers estimates that if present trends continue, our trade deficit with China will go up to \$330 billion in 5 years.

Now, our disastrous trade policy is not only costing us millions of decent-paying jobs, it is squeezing wages. It is lowering the wages for the average person. Many employers are making it very clear that if workers do not take cuts in their health care coverage or do not take cuts in wages, that they will move operations to China, to Mexico, or elsewhere.

One of the areas where people are most severely hurt is among the young entry level workers, people without a college education.

Mr. Speaker, for entry level workers without a college level education, the real wages, that is, inflation-accounted-for wages, that they receive have dropped by over 28 percent from 1979 to 1997, which are the latest figures that I have seen. The drop for women during that period was only 18 percent.

How did that happen? Why did that happen? Well, the answer is fairly obvious. Twenty-five years ago, 30 years ago, if you graduated high school you had, as often as not, the opportunity to go to work in manufacturing. You did not get rich, but you were able to make a living, you were able to have decent health care and other benefits.

But with the decline of manufacturing, what job opportunities are now open to young workers who do not have a college degree? Well, everybody knows what is open. They can go to work at McDonald's for the minimum wage, or a little bit more than that, or they can go to work at Wal-Mart. But the sad truth is that those jobs do not pay anything close to a living wage.

What I think can best show what is happening in our economy today is that not so many years ago the largest employer in the United States was General Motors, and workers who work at General Motors today and worked at General Motors 20 years ago earned a living wage with decent benefits.

Today, Mr. Speaker, our largest employer is Wal-Mart. And that is what has happened to the American economy. We have gone from a General Motors economy to a Wal-Mart economy, where people earn low wages and miserable benefits. Today, Wal-Mart employees earn \$8.23 per hour, or \$13,800 annually, wages which are below the poverty level.

In other words, the largest employer in America, Wal-Mart, now pays workers wages that are below the poverty level. Many of these workers qualify for Federal food stamp programs, which means that Wal-Mart is being directly subsidized by U.S. taxpayers. They pay inadequate wages, workers cannot

make it, the Federal Government subsidizes Wal-Mart and allows those workers to get food stamps.

Wal-Mart, as you know, has been sued by 27 States for not paying the overtime pay their workers are entitled to, and, recently, on the front pages of our newspapers, Federal agents raided their headquarters and 60 of their stores across the country, arresting 300 illegal workers in 21 States. That is the largest employer in the United States of America.

That is what the transformation of the American economy is all about. We have gone from an economy where workers used to work producing real products, making middle-class wages with good benefits, to a Wal-Mart economy, where our largest employer now pays workers poverty wages with minimal benefits and has a huge turnover.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, in hindsight, it did not take a genius to predict that unfettered free trade with China would be a disaster. Many of us have been saying that right here on this floor for years. With educated, hard-working Chinese workers available at 30, 40, 50 cents an hour, and with corporations having the capability of bringing their Chinese-made products back into this country tariff-free, why would American multinational corporations not shut down? Why would they not shut down their plants in this country and move to China? It does not take a genius to figure out that that is what they would do, and that is what they are doing.

Should anyone be surprised that Motorola eliminated 42,000 American jobs in 2001 while investing \$3.4 billion in China, or that it plans to invest \$10 billion there by 2006?

Who is shocked that General Electric has thrown hundreds of thousands of American workers out on the street in the last 30 years, while investing \$1.5 billion in China? From 1978 to 1995, GE eliminated 269,000 jobs in the United States. Meanwhile, of course, its former CEO, Jack Welch, managed to put together an estimated fortune of some \$900 million for himself.

Boeing has laid off 135,000 American workers. In the last 30 years, General Motors has shrunk their U.S. workforce by 250,000. IBM, another major corporation, has signed deals to train 100,000 software specialists in China over a 3-year period. Honeywell has built 13 factories in China. Ethan Allen Furniture, which does business in my State, has cut jobs at three sawmills and 17 U.S. manufacturing plants. Nobody, nobody, should be surprised at those developments.

China, for American multinational corporations, is a great place to do business, if by "doing business" we mean making products for export back into the United States that companies previously made here. Not only are wages

extremely low in China, 30, 40, 50 cents an hour, but if workers attempt to stand up for their rights and they try to form a union, they get arrested. They go to jail.

That is a great place to do business. In the United States we have environmental standards. Factories, plants cannot throw their garbage into the air and into our waterways. Not in China, which is rapidly becoming one of the most polluted countries in the world.

It is a great place to do business: Low wages, people go to jail when they form unions. If people stand up and protest against their former government, they go to jail. Massive pollution. What a wonderful place to go and support the authoritarian government in China.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read a quote, and I think some of our Members and Americans will really be quite surprised by this quote, but I think it needs to be brought out, and it needs to be discussed, because this is what is going on in America today. This is a quote from Jeffrey Immelt, who is the chairman and CEO of General Electric, obviously one of the largest corporations not only in America, but in the world, and this is what he said at an investor meeting on December 6, 2002, a little less than a year ago. This is the chairman of General Electric: "When I am talking to GE managers, I talk China, China, China, China, China. You need to be there. You need to change the way people talk about it and how they get there. I am a nut on China. Outsourcing from China is going to grow to \$5 billion. We are building a tech center in China. Every discussion today has to center on China. The cost basis is extremely attractive. You can take an 18 cubic foot refrigerator, make it in China, land it in the United States, and land it for less than we can make an 18 cubic foot refrigerator today, ourselves." Jeffrey Immelt, Chairman, CEO of General Electric.

There it is. This is not an American company; this is a company prepared to sell out every American worker and run to China where they can exploit people there and bring that product back into this country tariff-free. And it is not just General Electric. I quoted GE. I could have quoted a dozen other corporations.

Mr. Speaker, the trade problem with China is now so severe that it is not only a question of companies located in the United States moving to China, but it is companies located in Mexico moving to China. Everyone knows that Mexican wages are a fraction of the wages in the United States, but for many American corporations and international corporations, wages in Mexico are too high, which is why hundreds of factories have shut down there and have gone to China, causing major problems for Mexico. Mexico cannot compete with China, and we signed a trade agreement with them which says that American workers are supposed to compete against the desperate people of that country.

Over the years, advocates of unfettered free trade have tried to gloss over the bad news about the decline in factory employment by promising that a new

high-tech economy was in the making. It would be a new economy in which millions of workers, young people, would be able to be sitting in clean offices, working behind their computers, earning \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000 a year. We do not have to worry about those old factory jobs, let them go to China and Mexico, because we have all of these high-tech jobs that are going to pay people really good wages. That is what they told us. Do not worry about blue collar jobs, we have the white collar jobs.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the advocates of free trade are wrong again. We now know that blue collar manufacturing jobs are not the only casualty of unfettered free trade. Estimates are that some 50,000 to 60,000 high-tech, white collar jobs have been lost in this country in the last 2 years, and that many of them have ended up in India. When Americans argue with the phone company about whether their phone bill is right or wrong, they are not going to be talking to somebody in Boston, New York City or Los Angeles; more often than not, they are going to be talking to somebody in India. That is who we are going to be talking to, more and more. And that whole phenomenon of outsourcing information technology jobs is happening more and more.

According to Forester Research, a major consultant on this issue, they say, "Over the next 15 years, 3.3 million U.S. service industry jobs and \$136 billion in wages will move offshore. The information technology industry will lead the initial overseas exodus." That is from Forester Research.

According to Booz Allen Hamilton, companies can lower their costs by as much as 80 percent by shifting tasks such as computer programming, accounting, and procurement to China. That is your job going abroad. Among many other companies moving high-tech jobs abroad is Microsoft, which is spending \$750 million over the next 3 years on research and development and outsourcing in China.

Recently, Intel Corporation Chairman Andy Grove warned that the U.S. could lose the bulk of its information technology jobs to overseas competitors in the next decade, largely to India and China.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, not only has unfettered free trade cost us much of our textile industry, our footwear industry, our steel industry, our tool and die industry, our electronics industry, our furniture industry, as well as many, many other industries, it is now going to cost us, unless we change it, millions of high-tech information technology jobs as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to place into the **RECORD** a recent press release from the University of California at Berkeley. Its headline is, "UC Berkeley Study Assesses Potential Impacts of Second Wave of Outsourcing Jobs From the U.S.," and this is the way it begins: "A ferocious new wave of outsourcing of white collar jobs is sweeping the United States. According to a new study

published by the University of California Berkeley, researchers say the trend could leave as many as 14 million service jobs in the United States vulnerable. Study authors, who are both researchers at the Fisher Center for Real Estate and Urban Economics housed at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business, say that not all of the jobs are likely to be lost, but they note that jobs remaining in the United States could be subject to pressure to lower wages, and that the jobs that leave may slow the Nation's job growth or generate losses in related activities.

What are those jobs? Well, if you are a telephone operator, watch out. If you deal with health records, if you are a payroll clerk, if you are a legal assistant or a paralegal, if you are an accountant, if you are a financial research analyst, if you work behind a computer, there are folks in India, there are folks in China who can do that job for a fraction of the pay that you are being paid, and your boss is interested in taking that job there.

Now, let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker. The United States needs to have a strong and positive relationship with China. I very much respect the Chinese people, and I am not here attacking China. I am here saying that the President of the United States, corporate America, and the United States Congress have sold out the American worker. China is doing fine. We do not have to criticize them. They are doing very, very well. They just sent a man into space. Their economy is exploding. The problem is not China. The problem is that corporate America, and all of their money, have influenced the United States Congress and the President of the United States. And not just this President, but Mr. Clinton, but Bush the first, but Ronald Reagan before him, into a trade policy which is a disaster.

The bottom line is that American workers should not and cannot be asked to compete against desperate people who make 30 cents or 40 cents an hour. That is wrong.

Now, trade in itself is a good thing. I am not anti-trade. But we need a trade policy, and I know how heretical it is to say this, but we actually need a trade policy that works for America and not just large multinational corporations. We need a trade policy that is fair for the American workers. We want to export our products that are manufactured by American workers, not export the jobs that American workers have. When the New York Yankees are engaged in trade, they do not engage in free trade by which they trade their best ball player for a third-string, minor leaguer, they do not do that. The United States has the most lucrative market in the world, and we are giving it away. Let us engage in trade that works for us, that works for the other side; not engage in trade which is decimating American manufacturing and increasingly, high-tech jobs.

Now is not the time to engage in an accelerated race to the bottom. We should be talking about how wages go up, not down; how poverty is eliminated, not increased. And that is why we need to change our trade policies, and that is

why, Mr. Speaker, I have introduced H.R. 3228, which would repeal permanent Normal Trade Relations with China. Let us get it out in the open. Let us not be talking about currency. It is important, but it is not the major issue. The major issue is that our trade agreement with China, permanent normalized trade relations is a disaster. We have to repeal it, and then we can engage in a fair trade agreement with China and with other countries.

I am very happy, Mr. Speaker, to tell my colleagues that since we have introduced that legislation just a few weeks ago, we have garnered 54 cosponsors and it is strongly bipartisan, 14 Republicans are on board that legislation right now, and I appreciate that. We have a tripartisan piece of legislation, and it is something that I know the American people support. If any person in the House of Representatives or elsewhere wants to learn more about that legislation, we have written it up on our Web site which is www.bernie.house.gov. We have a lot of information there about trade and many other important information about what is going on in Congress.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the decline of the middle class, when we talk about unemployment going up, wages going down, the loss of decent-paying jobs, we should also talk about what is happening to the quality of life of so many people in our country. We should recognize that the average American today is working incredibly long hours in order to pay the bills. Today, in fact, the average American employee works, by far, the longest hours of any worker in the industrialized world, and that situation is getting worse.

According to statistics from the International Labor Organization, the average American last year worked 1,978 hours, up from 1,942 hours in 1990. That is an increase of almost 1 week of work. Since 1990, the average

American is now working an additional week a year.

Now, I see those workers in the State of Vermont and I see them all over the country. They are stressed out. They do not have enough vacation time. They are working day and night just to pay the bills. Again, we want to ask ourselves this simple question: What is going on in our country when we have increased productivity, more technology and, yet, more and more workers earning lower real, inflation-accounted for wages, and they are working incredibly long hours? What is going on in our economy?

The bottom line there is that we have got to begin to create an economy that works for the middle class and not just for the very, very rich. We have to create an economy where people are earning more income so they can work fewer hours, so they have more time to spend in leisure and with their kids and with their families.

I have talked, Mr. Speaker, about what is going on with the middle class. I have talked a little bit about the conversion from a manufacturing society, a General Motors society to a service industry economy, a Wall Street economy. But let us look for a moment at those people who are not even in the middle class. They have not made it into the middle class, those people who are living in poverty. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, while the rich become richer, 1.3 million more Americans became poor and entered poverty just in the last year.

We now have 34.8 million people who now live in poverty. In the midst of those people, Mr. Speaker, and what is happening, people we have got to ask about the 11 million Americans who are trying to survive on the pathetic minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour.

And I wonder how it is that in this great institution we can lower taxes for billionaires, but I have not heard one word from the President of the United States about the need to raise the minimum wage above the pathetic level of \$5.15 an hour.

Now, how does somebody survive who makes \$5.15 an hour or \$6 an hour. Does anybody care? Well, I will tell you how some of them do it. After working 40 hours a week, some of these workers, full-time employees, go to sleep, not in their houses, not in their apartments, but in their automobiles because they cannot afford the housing units that are available in their region.

And what, Mr. Speaker, about the 43.6 million Americans who lack any health insurance at all? What happens to those people? That is over 15 percent of our population. And what about the 3 1/2 million people who will experience homelessness this year, 1.3 million of them children? And what about our elderly citizens who cannot afford their prescription drugs, who shrug their shoulders and nod their heads when doctors write out a prescription because they do not have the money to fill those prescriptions? How many of them die? How many of them see a deterioration in their health?

And what about the veterans, the veterans who have put their lives on the line defending this country and then try to get into a VA hospital that they are entitled to get into but they find out that they have to be placed on a waiting list? They were not placed on a waiting list when they were going off to fight, but now to get the health benefits they are entitled to, they are placed on a waiting list.

And just last year the President of the United States, after giving huge tax breaks to the richest 1 percent, threw over 150,000 veterans off of VA health care. Tax breaks for billionaires, inadequate funding for our veterans.

In the last several years we have seen huge increases in health insurance costs. And with the increase of unemployment, we have seen more and more working people lose their health insurance. And what happens to those people?

What happens if you have no health insurance and you have an automobile accident and you end up in the hospital? Well, I tell you what happens. You go bankrupt. And the largest single cause of bankruptcy, personal bankruptcy in this country are for people who cannot pay the medical costs that have been generated because of an accident or an illness.

Mr. Speaker, our health care system today is a disgrace and is in a state of disintegration. More and more people are uninsured and more and more people are underinsured, that is, they have to pay higher and higher copayments, higher and higher deductibles, higher and higher premiums. There are millions of Americans today who have insurance, but who hesitate to go to the doctor when they should be going because they cannot afford the deductible and the copayment. And doctors will tell you that the patients they are seeing today are far sicker than the patients they used to see because people simply cannot afford payments out of their own pocket.

In my mind, the only solution to our health care crisis, the only right thing to do to really address the disintegration of our health care system is to do what every other major industrialized nation on Earth has done, and that is to move toward a national health care system which guarantees health care to every man, woman, and child as a right of citizenship.

The reality of our health care nonsystem is not only that 43 million Americans are uninsured, not only that more and more are underinsured, not only that we pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs; but the reality is that this system is the most wasteful and bureaucratic system in the world. Many people do not know this, but in the United States we spend twice as much as the Canadians, three times as much per person as the United Kingdom spends. And those countries provide health care to all of their people.

And study after study shows that if we moved toward a single-pay national health care system, we can guarantee health care to all of our people, quality health care, freedom of choice for the doctor that you want to go to and not spend one penny more than we are currently spending on our disintegrating nonsystem. And, Mr. Speaker, that is what we have got to do. We can no longer tolerate the disgrace of tens of millions of people being uninsured, people going bankrupt because they get ill, people delaying going to the doctor.

In areas of this country dental care is a disaster. Children have rotting teeth in their mouths because there are no dentists who will treat them or dentists available in the area. We need to finally move toward a national health care system and make health care a right of all people.

Now, Mr. Speaker, those are some of the problems facing our country. Poverty is increasing. Middle class is shrinking. Rich are growing richer. Large corporations and their CEOs, while they hide behind the American flag and they

tell us how much they love America, they are prepared to throw millions of American workers out on the street and move to an authoritarian China because they can make more money there.

Now, I wish I could say, Mr. Speaker, that the Bush administration is in any rational way responding to these problems. But I think it really would be impossible to say that. Instead of addressing the very serious problems facing our veterans, facing our children, facing public education, facing the fact that middle-class families are finding it harder and harder to send their kids to college, instead of addressing the crisis of the high cost of prescription drugs, the proudest achievement of the Bush administration is huge tax breaks, 40 percent of which went to the wealthiest 1 percent.

And in the midst of all of this, in the midst of workers working longer hours for lower wages, the decline of manufacturing, the Bush administration, if one can believe it, is now attacking overtime pay for American workers. Can you imagine that? Attacking overtime pay for American workers and trying to undo laws that have been on the books for decades which say that if you work over 40 hours a week you will get time and a half.

I am very proud that a number of Republicans joined many of us Democrats, Independents, on the floor of this House to say that that is wrong and that in fact we were not going to cut back on the overtime pay that workers earn and deserve.

Now, when we talk about the Bush administration, we should also point out a very strange irony. The President considers himself a conservative. That is fine. But, generally speaking, conservatives have told us over and over again, year after year after year, what a terrible thing it is to grow the deficit and grow the national debt because when you do that they have told us, and they were right, you are simply passing on today's problems to our children and our grandchildren. Over and over again I have heard from these podiums right here how terrible it is to grow the deficit. Well, guess what? We now have the largest deficit this year in modern American history and the largest national debt that we have ever had.

In the midst of that and accelerating that deficit and accelerating that national debt are the huge tax breaks that the President and the Republican leadership have given to the wealthy.

Now some people, many conservatives, they say why would a conservative President grow the deficit and grow the national debt. That is not conservative. Let me suggest my view as to why they are doing that. We can all understand that if the wealthy contribute large amounts of money, you are going to give them a tax break. I think that is obscene, but that is nothing new; that is politics. But there is something more cynical going on here. That is, I believe, by

driving up the national debt and the deficit, what the President is saying is that we will be so deeply in debt that we have got to tear apart many of the important social programs that have protected tens and tens and millions of Americans.

It is my opinion that in many respects this President wants to undue many of the major gains that were won by working people over the last 100 years and bring us back to the 19th century where workers had no guarantees, and when trouble struck them and their families, they were dependent on charity and the largess of the wealthy.

I think that is one of the reasons why this national debt is going up, so the President and future Presidents will be able to say we can no longer afford to maintain Social Security; let us privatize it. We can no longer afford to protect Medicare; let us privatize it. Let us do away with Medicaid. Let us do away with the Veterans Administration. Let us do away with Pell grants. We cannot afford it. I think what this administration is doing, and this is the most right-wing administration in modern history, is essentially trying to remove all of the protections that the elderly, the poor, the sick, and the young have and were won over the last 100 years. That is what I think is going on, and I think that is a very, very dangerous trend.

Mr. Speaker, let me conclude my remarks by mentioning that this weekend I am going to be going to Madison, Wisconsin, to participate in a major media conference where we expect some 1,500 people from all over the country. I want to congratulate some of the organizers of that conference, Bob McChesney, John Nichols and many others for putting it together. The issue that they are going to be talking about and I will be talking about is the danger that faces our country when a handful of huge media conglomerates increasingly own and control what we see, hear, and read.

On June 2, the FCC by a 3-2 vote voted to make a bad situation worse and to allow even fewer large media conglomerates to control more and more media. That certainly will be one of the many issues that that conference will be dealing with.

I believe it is a very frightening day for democracy when so few large corporations control so much of the flow of information in this country. And if we are not able to overturn that FCC decision, and I and many of us are working hard on that, the day could come in the not-too-distant future where in a community like Burlington, Vermont, you can have one company owning the major television station, the major newspaper, and a number of radio stations. That is one of the rules that was undone; the prevention of that was one of the rules that the FCC just eliminated.

Now the good news is that the United States Senate, the other body, voted for a resolution of disapproval against that by a 55-40 vote. Liberals and

conservatives came together, Republicans and Democrats came together and said that is not what media should become in America.

Mr. Speaker, I have a letter which has 205 signatures on it for the Speaker of the House, and it says to the Speaker, let the U.S. House of Representatives have a vote on doing what the other body did. Let us also have the opportunity to vote for a resolution of disapproval regarding the FCC decision. Three million Americans have contacted the FCC, and I think we should listen to those Americans, and I think the Speaker should give us a vote.