

Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize and support those in my district and around the Nation who are joined together in labor unions to promote workers' rights.

In our free market economy and free enterprise system, freedom for workers means the right to choose a representative and have a voice in their wages and their working conditions. Unions provide and organize an effective means for workers to join together to solve problems and participate in discussions regarding their wages, better benefits, safer working conditions, and better opportunities.

Workers should make their voices heard. Today they celebrate such right. I sincerely hope they have a fair hearing; that people in our Nation will, in fact, listen.

Union organizing is supposed to be a right guaranteed by law; however, in many instances employers have directly interfered with worker organizing efforts. The atmosphere of intimidation in many workplaces makes joining a union difficult, if not impossible. This is, of course, unacceptable. It is time for employers, communities, and legislators to support the right of workers to organize.

Unions perform a vital function in the lives of working families. Despite a booming economy, some workers cannot even remember the last time they got a raise. As the unionized share of the work force has declined, income inequity is increasingly dramatic. At a time when U.S. corporations are making record profits and the economy is strong and stable, it seems unreasonable that working people must struggle and too often losing in efforts to make ends meet.

American workers, the most productive workers in the world, deserve to share in the bounty of our economy. The benefits and the path to achieve such justified improvements is through union membership within the labor movement, the same folks who brought us the 40-hour work week and, that is right, and importantly the weekend off.

In fact, union negotiating does not just help those members that belong to that labor union. It helps our society in general and has promoted fair wages, fair taxes, and justice throughout our society. Unions attack all wage gaps, the discrepancy between executive pay and that of workers, income differences for women and for people of color, for the disabled, they fight discrimination and actively promote equal treatment and opportunity for all the workers in our society.

Because better pay and conditions help achieve a more productive work force, union workers earn an average of 33 percent more than nonunion workers and are much more likely to have health and pension benefits, the tools that we need to take care of our family.

Today, the simple justice of joining a union and the self-help and freedom to

gain a fair wage is a big problem. In countless organizing campaigns, a majority of workers have clearly voiced a desire for union representation. However, more often than not they are obstructed by their employer's antiunion campaigns. Antiunion consulting industries are booming. It is a big business, guiding employers to manipulate the law and distort the intent in order to stall the organizing process, harass it, threaten and terminate workers who are trying to organize and achieve an exclusive representative, a union.

Mr. Speaker, all this is done with minimal, if any, penalties. In fact, the process is so cumbersome that it generally takes years before violations are even rectified. I have seen this happen firsthand in my own State of Minnesota this past year. Employees at the Metrodome Sheraton Hotel began an organizing drive with huge worker support. In fact, 80 percent of the workers, 112 workers of the 140 workers, signed cards supporting a union. But they had to have an election.

The Sheraton management in turn began a high-pressure campaign to put an end to the organizing and defeat the vote. They paid an antiunion consultant \$300 an hour to assist them in their task. Management inundated the workplace with antiunion literature; offered pay raises to employees who promised to go along with the company and vote against the union.

Worst of all, the company repeatedly brought small groups of employees into rooms, where the heat was turned up to almost unbearable levels. Workers were lectured for hours about the evils of unions. They got paid for sitting there. They could not speak up or talk back. They could not ask questions. This is in America and this is legal in labor union elections today.

Mr. Speaker, this tactic of course worked. This election was lost by these workers, these hotel restaurant and housemen that worked at the Sheraton Metrodome in Minnesota. Amazingly, this type of antiunion campaign is neither illegal nor uncommon. Eight out of ten private sector employers hire professional consultants when faced with organizing efforts in their business. They do not want workers organized. They do not want workers in a union. They do not want workers to have such rights accorded in law.

Of course, this tactic works. The result is the frustration and intimidation of workers. In the case of the Minneapolis Sheraton, despite overwhelming support at the beginning of the process, the employees voted not to elect an exclusive representative this past May. But this was an election stacked against the workers and their right to have a union.

Mr. Speaker, a strong labor movement helps all Americans. Let us listen today as these voices are raised of working people across this country.

It is our job as elected leaders to ensure that the national and state laws allow our constituents to enjoy the fundamental values of

democracy—freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. That includes, under law and custom, the long honored right to have a voice in their wages and working conditions. When workers are denied that voice, they no longer share in the wealth that they create. The health worker can't afford to be treated at the clinics and hospitals in which they labor. Auto workers can't afford to buy and drive the cars they make.

Congress needs to show support beyond voting positively upon labor issues. We can use our leverage to ensure that the rights and interests of America's labor force are advanced, that working families are accorded dignity and respect. Moreover, we have the obligation to make sure that the employers, policies, and laws that shape this relationship are just and workable.

Workers have the right to fully participate in the political arena. However, today the political voice of labor and working families faces the prospect of being silenced. Frankly, big business has the economic leverage to elect candidates who put the interests of corporations first. Corporations outspend labor unions 17 to one in lobbying efforts and other types of political involvement. We have to support labor organizations, so that they have a fair chance to support the candidates who will amplify the voices, views and concerns of the worker and working families.

Unfortunately, in Washington, DC, too much time and energy is focused on controversy, personalities, and political rhetoric. The everyday struggles of working families are often glossed over and shifted to the back burner. Or worse yet, under the guise of reform turned inside out, further limiting and stripping the worker of the limited rights they today hold. It is time to do the right thing, by respecting laborers and their rights, and truly listen to their concerns. On this day, the day for workers to make their voice heard, I speak for Minnesota working families, and working families across the nation, to recognize and support the right to organize. I encourage all of my colleagues to consider the successes and heartaches of those who are trying to join together in this crescendo to make their voices heard.

#### VETERANS TOBACCO TRUST FUND ACT OF 1998

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, this morning I want to talk about a very important issue that affects all of our veterans. There has been a great deal of discussion about veterans and tobacco-related illnesses. My purpose this morning is to acquaint Members with legislation I plan to introduce this week.

Mr. Speaker, the measure I intend to introduce is entitled the Veterans Tobacco Trust Fund Act of 1998. What this would do is guarantee that a portion of any funds that are received from a national tobacco settlement law, if it occurs, be dedicated to health care for veterans. Very simple.

Many might argue that not one veteran was coerced into smoking. My response to that assertion is that many

young men were exposed to tobacco for the first time when they entered the military service. Free cigarettes were provided to them and thus a habit was started during that time of service.

We must ensure that any man or woman who became addicted and consequently developed health problems due to the consumption of tobacco must be given the health care they were promised when they enlisted to serve this country.

My bill would establish a trust fund to be known as the Veterans Tobacco Trust Fund, providing that if a tobacco settlement is enacted, then \$3 billion would be credited to the trust fund. The funds would be made available to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish medical care and to conduct medical research, rehabilitation research, and health systems research related to tobacco addiction.

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I also want to clear up an issue which has caused a great deal of consternation among the veterans and here on the House floor. I am referring, of course, to the recent vote we had on H.R. 2400, the Transportation Equity Act.

First, let us be clear on how this evolved. This was proposed by the Clinton administration in the fiscal year 1999 budget, VA budget, in which the President requested that VA disability benefits for tobacco-related illnesses be repealed. I opposed the President's proposal and its inclusion in H.R. 2400, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st century. I voted for the Obey amendment that sent H.R. 2400 back to conference and to instruct the conferees to remove the language reducing service-connected disability compensation to veterans for smoking-related illnesses. Unfortunately this motion was defeated.

I also joined the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP), chairman of our Committee on Veterans' Affairs, in sending a letter to the Speaker and to the minority leader, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT), voicing strong opposition to any provision that would offset veterans' benefits to pay for other programs.

Regrettably, we were not successful in our effort to prevent the administration's proposal to repeal VA disability compensation benefits for tobacco-related disabilities from being passed in part of H.R. 2400. However, we did prevail in providing benefit increases for veterans going to college on the GI bill, severely disabled veterans needing modifications for automobiles or their homes, and widows of veterans who died from service-connected disability.

As chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, I am committed to finding the funds to compensate the VA for the cost of providing health care for them, including smoking-related illnesses. That is why I developed the Veterans Tobacco Trust Fund Bill, so that funding will be made available should a na-

tional tobacco settlement be enacted into law.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in my efforts to help our Nation's veterans and sponsor my bill.

#### ADOPT A RELIGIOUS PRISONER IN VIETNAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) is recognized during morning hour debates for 3 minutes.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my colleagues to participate in the Adopt a Religious Prisoner in Vietnam Campaign, sponsored by the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church of Southern California. Religious believers around the world often suffer abuses, including beatings, tortures, extended incarceration and, yes, even death at the hands of their government, unless their leaders intervene.

As Members of Congress, it is our responsibility to highlight the ongoing repression against religion in Vietnam and the plight of many clergy members and lay leaders who are being detained because of their faith. Reports show that the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church continues to be suppressed. All religious activities and ceremonies are prohibited. Assembly of more than three persons is forbidden, and all assets and properties are being confiscated.

Religious expression is a fundamental right of all people, both here and abroad, and I believe that we should do all we can to affirm this principle. For too long, imprisoned people of faith have been forgotten. With Members of Congress adopting prisoners, we can successfully advocate for religious prisoners suffering persecution at the hands of the Vietnamese government. I adopted Mr. Tran Huu Duyen and Mr. Nam Liem to raise awareness among U.S. decision-makers and the public about religious repercussion in communist Vietnam. What crimes did these men commit to suffer such hard prison sentences?

Mr. Liem is a 58 year old Buddhist priest who practices religion at a small family temple in Vietnam, and since 1975 he has been arrested and detained by the communist authorities over 50 times for having refused to abandon his religious practice. To date, he has not been released from prison.

After the Communist takeover, Mr. Huu was arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the people's government, for participating in a political party that was affiliated with the church. Mr. Huu is last known to be in a labor camp in Xuan Loc and, despite his 78 years of age, he is still forced to do hard labor 8 hours a day.

By adopting these prisoners, Members of Congress can generate constant pressure on the Vietnamese authorities to release these religious leaders from detention and to truly respect freedom of religion.

#### SPENDING BY GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRATS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DUNCAN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, the Washington Times reported last week that Carol Browner, head of the EPA, had led a junket to Paris at a cost of \$60,000 to the American taxpayers. Of course, surely this was done to go to some very vital environmental meetings.

Well, no. This trip was made so she and some of her friends could go to the World Cup soccer games, a \$60,000 vacation at the expense of the taxpayers for Carol Browner, our environmental administrator. Five-thousand-dollar first class round trip airfares, \$300-a-night hotel rooms and then, of course, as is so often the case with this administration, they cannot take these fancy trips without big campaign contributors.

One guest on this trip was Hassan Nemazee, an Iranian American. Hassan Nemazee has contributed at least \$125,000 to the Democratic National Committee in recent years and no telling how much to individual Democratic candidates or other committees. Democratic fund-raisers have now sold nights in the Lincoln bedroom, Commerce Department trips, even nuclear technology in return for campaign contributions. You have to wonder how much they will try to make out of the upcoming or the next Olympic games in Australia.

On another and even more wasteful topic, a GAO report released last month said the cost of the space station has now gone up to \$96 billion, over five times the original cost estimates. Today the publication Congress Daily says, "Recent reports from the GAO and the Cost Assessments and Validation Task Force on the space station have left even its biggest supporters acknowledging that problems with costs and Russian participation need to be addressed."

Also Congress Daily reports in the article today that the space station will likely be 2 years behind schedule, with each one month of delay costing \$100 million. Congress Daily reports today that the space station will likely be 2 years behind schedule, with each month of delay costing \$100 million for a program that is already over five times its original cost estimate.

Each day, every day here in Washington we hear about horrible examples of waste, fraud and abuse.

A few months ago it was reported that there was \$23 billion, \$23 billion with a "B," in waste and fraud in the Medicare program, \$23 billion. The entire State of Tennessee, our entire government in Tennessee does not spend that much in a year and a half for education and everything else that the State does. It does not spend as much