Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. Speaker, tonight the Speaker of the House is the special host of a dinner to benefit National Empowerment Television, a radical right-wing TV station devoted solely to espouse reactionary views over the airways 24 hours a day. It is appalling that there is a TV station designed not to be objective, but to brainwash, and to boot it is tax deductible.

Just as appalling is the price tag for the dinner, $50,000 a plate.

What do you they serve at a $50,000-a-plate dinner? First is access, a chance to rub elbows with the Speaker; second, and just as outrageous, a huge taxpayer subsidy. That is right. Unlike meals most working Americans eat, this one comes with a special $19,800 tax break. About a dozen people are attending the dinner, for a total tax break of $237,600, enough money for 21,000 meals-on-wheels for the elderly.

□ 1120

By the way, if you are working for the minimum wage, it will take you 5 years, 45 weeks, 4 days, 2 hours and 33 minutes to pay for this one dinner. I guess that dinner will be served in the year 2000 on December 22. The fundraiser is wrong. The price tag is way out of line. The TV station is bizarre and the taxpayer subsidy is a disgrace.

MINIMUM WAGE

(Mr. BAKER of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BAKER of California. Mr. Speaker, in his State of the Union Address, President Clinton made the point that a Member of Congress earns more in a month that a minimum-wage worker earns in a year. Well, perhaps a more interesting statistic is the Federal Government spends more in less than 4 days than all the 3.5 million minimum-wage earners make in a full year. Yet in his new budget, the President proposes that we spend $50 billion more next year than this year, $50 billion we do not have.

While the President has taken some small, positive steps, it is clear he is not up to making the tough decisions on the budget. So we in Congress, yesterday, voted to give the President a new tool, the line-item veto. We would like to have the President as a partner, but we are prepared to go it alone in balancing the budget.

We are going to improve the lot of minimum-wage earners and middle-income Americans and the best way to do it is to get the Federal budget under control and grow the economy.

Our Contract With America will do precisely that by lowering taxes, reducing Federal regulation and Government spending and increasing incentives for work and investment. The results will be a balanced budget by the year 2002, the sooner, the better.

SPECIAL INTERESTS

(Mrs. SCHROEDER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. SCHROEDER. Mr. Speaker, to anyone who is wondering why Public Citizen, Common Cause, and almost every other good Government group I know and many others are calling for outside counsel to investigate the growing array of special interest connections that are alleged to be gathering at the Speaker's doorstep, watch tonight. Because tonight lifestyles of the rich and famous come to Washington.

Yes, for $50,000 you can get a dinner. Well, the steak better be good. Yes, you can get a dinner, but you can also get access. And that dinner can be publicly subsidized because you as a taxpayer are going to pay $19,800 for that dinner. So if you are outraged by that dinner, think about it. Especially on the very same day the Speaker is quoted in the Washington Post as saying public high school is nothing but publicly subsidized dating.

Please, what is wrong? Let us get on with an outside counsel and get this cleared up.

THE CRIME BILL

(Mr. WHITE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. WHITE. Mr. Speaker, I have looked forward to this moment for a long time. These are my first remarks on the floor of the House.

I have waited for this moment for an important reason. The crime bill that we are about to consider this week is one of the most important things that this Congress will do in the entire 2 years we are here.

I have said many times that the crime bill that passed last year was not an example of everything that is wrong with Congress. It was directed at an important national problem, but it did not solve that problem. It spread social spending out in every congressional district, a little bit of pork for every Congressman. It was the worst tradition of politics as usual.

This year we are going to be different. This year's bill focuses on what the Federal Government can do to solve the crime problem, including building more prisons, changing some of our procedural rules, and sending the responsibility back to the local governments to decide what to do.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be here. I am proud of this Congress. And I look forward to dealing with this crime bill over the next week.

THE MINIMUM WAGE

(Mrs. CLAYTON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, the distance between low- and high-income families is growing. We must act now to close that gap. If we do not act, the cost of basic necessities—housing, food, and clothing—may be unaffordable for these families. Those costs are rising. Earnings for low-income families are falling. An increase in the minimum wage, as proposed by the President, will help to close the gap. With no minimum wage increase, those with little money end up with less money.

An increase in the minimum wage will not provide plenty, but it can raise working families out of poverty. In 1993, high-income families averaged $104,616 in earnings. Low-income families averaged $12,964. Between 1980 and 1992, income for the top 20 percent in America increased by 16 percent while income for the bottom 20 percent decreased by 7 percent. An increase in the minimum wage will help low-income families, but it will not hurt high-income families. The growing income gap hurts the economy. The best welfare reform is minimum wage reform. Low-income workers are helped. The economy is helped. No one is hurt. If we want to help people, we should help them and not hurt them.

PUT TEETH BACK IN THE CRIME BILL

(Mr. HOKE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HOKE. Mr. Speaker, when the Democrats passed their soft-on-crime bill last year, we were assured that it would be tough on criminals and attack crime's root causes. But once the American people learned what it was—dance classes and midnight basketball, what they called hugs for thugs—they issued a very different verdict at the polls. They said the Democrat crime bill was guilty of being pollyannaish, that it coddled criminals instead of incarcerating them, and they said, ''We want our streets back. We want the criminal justice system to act as a deterrent. We believe that you have got to catch, convict, and confine. That is what criminal justice is all about.''

When we take up the crime bill today, we are going to put some real teeth back into it and give our police and prosecutors the tools that they need to do their job effectively. We are going to stop frivolous appeals. We are going to end the practice of letting criminals off on technicalities and build more prisons to keep them off the streets.

Our Constitution demands that we ensure domestic tranquility, a duty that we have been failing at recently. That changes, starting today.

SUPPORT OUR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION LAWS

(Mr. STOKES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1

minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STOKES. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my strong support for the affirmative action laws of the United States. Within the last two decades, affirmative action has been the primary tool that has allowed minority and women workers to break through the many barriers of employment discrimination.

Despite the steps our Nation has taken to move forward in the area of affirmative action, we are now faced with a new onslaught on civil rights, as evidenced by the recent statements of a Republican Senate leader. In a Washington Post article published yesterday, this Republican Senate leader is quoted as asserting that affirmative action has caused some Americans to ''Have to pay'' for discrimination practiced ''before they were born.'' A congressional leader who opposes affirmative action should realize that jobs do not belong specifically to one race of people. Black Americans born in this country, also have a contract with America. That contract, by virtue of birth, is rooted in both the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

The truth of affirmative action programs is that they do not grant preferential treatment to selected Americans, but provide for a means of equal opportunity employment for all members of our society.

BIPARTISAN COOPERATION HELPS IN KEEPING PROMISES TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

(Ms. PRYCE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. PRYCE. Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago in an historic and symbolic gesture the esteemed minority leader from Missouri passed the gavel onto the first Republican Speaker in 40 years announcing: ''Let the great debate begin.''

But a great debate there was not. For it seemed that when the Republicans wanted to change the way Congress works, the Democrats wanted to change the subject. When Republicans wanted to make Government leaner and less intrusive, Democrats seemed intent to use scare tactics and delaying maneuvers.

But Mr. Speaker, this past week or two were different and for the third time in about the same period, the American people won. Casting politics aside and placing the American people first, we together have now passed a balanced budget amendment, unfunded mandate reform, and a line-item veto.

Mr. Speaker, we are now on a roll. There is a renewed spirit of reform and fiscal restraint in this great body of the people. I look forward to even more bipartisan cooperation in our goal to keep our promises to the American people.

□ 1130

URGING CONGRESS TO PASS THE MODEST INCREASE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE

(Mr. ENGEL asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, our Republican friends support a tax cut for wealthy Americans earning more than $200,000 a year, but they will not support a raise in the minimum wage for people who want to work and not collect welfare.

If we truly want to move people off public assistance, we must make work more attractive than welfare. We ought not be deceived by those who say the minimum wage is only being paid to teenagers from well-off families. Two-thirds of minimum wage workers are adults over the age of 21, many of whom bring home at least half their family's income.

Let us look at the choices faced by a single mother living at the poverty level. If she goes on welfare, she can get comprehensive health care and a monthly check from the government. If she goes to work at a minimum wage job, she earns only $8,500 a year, and her family loses her health coverage. She must find a way to care for her children while she is at work. That is not much of a choice. Mark my words, Mr. Speaker, tossing people off welfare will not make these dilemmas magically disappear.

The minimum wage is an important piece of the effort to raise the living standards for all Americans. We started on the right path last year when we voted to expand the earned income tax credit. Let us raise the minimum wage.

COMPENSATION FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME SHOULD BE A BIPARTISAN CONCERN

(Mr. LATOURETTE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LATOURETTE. Mr. Speaker, today this House will begin debate on the Victim's Restitution Act of 1995.

While there may be honest points of disagreement in subsequent consideration of habeas corpus reform, restrictions on the exclusionary rule and the death penalty, there should be no difficulty in recognizing the absolute need within our justice system to compensate victims of crime for the horrors visited upon them by those who cannot abide by society's rules.

In my tenure as a county prosecutor, the most commonly heard complaint by victims of crime was that their voices and their rights were the only absent parties from the criminal justice equation.

The people are represented by the D.A.; the defendant had his high-priced or taxpayer-supported mouthpiece—but the victim, like the cheese in the children's rhyme ''The Farmer in the Dell''—stands alone.

And although financial recompense cannot replace the loss of personal security one suffers at the hands of the criminal, it is wholly appropriate that the wrongdoers pay in many ways for their inability to conform their behavior to socially acceptable standards.

It has become commonplace for the pendulum to swing back and forth between protection of society and protection of defendants' due process guarantees. Today it is time it swings toward victim's rights—and after today, the victims of crime will no longer stand alone.

CALLING FOR OUTSIDE COUNSEL TO HELP THE ETHICS COMMITTEE

(Mr. WARD asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WARD. Mr. Speaker, on May 26, 1988, a Member of this House said: ''I believe that honesty and accountability lie at the heart of self-government and freedom. Without integrity, our free institutions cannot survive.'' I could not agree more.

Mr. Speaker, on that same day, that same Member said: ''Recently the weight of evidence has grown so large that Common Cause has called for an investigation.'' That Member was NEWT GINGRICH. While Speaker GINGRICH and I may not agree on much in the 104th Congress, I certainly agree with what he said then.

I join Common Cause in calling for an outside ethics adviser to help the Ethics Committee.

As Speaker GINGRICH said in 1988: ''I think there is a different standard for being Speaker.'' I agree.

As the Speaker himself said, we need an outside counsel.

THE EXCLUSIONARY RULE REFORM ACT WILL HELP REDUCE CRIME

(Mr. JONES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. JONES. We have all heard stories about suspected criminals that have had their cases dropped due to illegal searches. I, like all Americans, believe strongly in the fourth amendment which bans unreasonable search and seizures. However, the number of dismissed cases is on the increase.

We have police officers risking their lives each and every day to put these criminals behind bars only to later have the criminals released on a technicality.

Under current law, judges must ignore evidence which was gathered illegally based on present interpretation, even when police thought they were acting legally. This must stop. We cannot allow criminals to control us.