And I am just suggesting tonight that there might be a solution between the Republicans and the Democrats that could come about on Social Security, too, where we focus on trying to increase the net worth of every American by letting them keep a little bit of that payroll tax, making up the difference from the surplus, as part of a tax cut, or focused on a payroll tax cut.

This, I think, gets around a lot of the debate that we have seen on where do you put that tax cut, and how the numbers exactly would work out neither the gentlewoman nor I have that data right now, because there are lots of variables that the Congressional Budget Office and others would have to look at in terms of projections for economic growth, and exactly what the dollars would be coming into the Social Security trust fund or not be there if you had that 2 percent reduction.

I am just saying that I think that Republicans and Democrats on both sides of the aisle that have some shared goals, and the number one shared goal I think is Social Security solvency; number 2, maintaining the safety net for those elderly women; number 3, helping every American become richer. I would like to see every American become a lot more wealthy; and number 4, making sure that the younger people who are coming up, the two out of which we will be supporting every one retiree in about 25 years, that we somehow or another figure this out so that we do not leave them with an overwhelming payroll tax to be supporting the gentlewoman from Connecticut and me when we are in our retirement.

I very much appreciate the gentlewoman from Connecticut for just entering into a brief colloquy with me on this. And I would be happy to yield again to the gentlewoman if she has any further remarks.

Ms. DELAURO. Well, I am pleased as well that the gentleman asked to be able to do this, because I think that there is room for discussion of the issues. Again, it is worrisome that we are, again, in two proposals that have been made in the last several days, which have captured the national attention that I think it is well worth pointing out, and again, in my view, I think one is terribly risky in this sense, as I started out my commentary, is that to somehow turn on its head the notion of this guaranteed annual income, which has been so important to people in their lives. It was not meant to be just that, the only income, but for some people, about a third of the beneficiaries of Social Security, that is the only income that they have, and to somehow tamper with that seems to be moving away from that guarantee that people have believed in.

Then the notion of the savings accounts deals with increasing individual risk, which I think, again, threatens the system. Now, are there alternate proposals that we might consider to get where we want to go in order to make sure that there is that guarantee that does not put people at risk, in which case then you can try to look at how, in fact, we can as the gentleman pointed out increase people's financial wherewithal; certainly, we ought to take a look at that.

I will tell the gentleman that in all of this, in terms of its effect on women and older women in our society, and if we do not go down this road in a very careful way about the unique situation that women find themselves in, then we are going to compound their vulnerability and increase their rate of poverty, and that is not where we want to go and what I see at the moment, in terms of a public policy direction, which has been espoused by Governor Bush, is that that, in fact, is where it leads. And I am not suggesting that is where you are and that there is not room for conversation and debate and discussion on this issue in a way that the gentleman has proposed, and there may be other ways, but it scares me.

Mr. GANSKE. I agree with the gentlewoman that we need to be very careful. And I think it will be, I hope that our parties' respective presidential candidates have a chance to be as civil to each other during a presidential debate on this important issue as we have been.

I also want to thank the gentlewoman for working so vigorously on the children's clothing issue as it relates to whether clothing can catch on fire. She has worked very diligently on trying to make sure that we have safe standards for children's clothing, and I look forward to joining the gentlewoman on this.

I would just close with this, and that is, that I think it is going to be important to talk in a reasoned fashion about where does Social Security go, with the baby boomers coming down the line, I think it is also true, though, that we will need to seek solutions and not just be reactionary and say that no change is the only way to go.

Ms. DELAURO. There has to be change.

Mr. GANSKE. I know the gentlewoman is not proposing that.

Ms. DELAURO. I thank the gentleman from Iowa, and I thank the gentleman, if I just might for one second, and I do not want to take any more of the gentleman's time, is for the gentleman's diligence, your commitment to the health of people in our country and in our society, both in your own profession as a doctor in which the gentleman has really made his own personal commitment, but the role that the gentleman has played in trying to bring us to some understanding and conclusion about patients and the decisions, medical decisions that affect their lives and your hard work on the patients' bill of rights. And I thank the gentleman.

□ 2130

Mr. GANSKE. I thank the gentlewoman from Connecticut.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to save my comments on HMOs for another night, because I am going to yield the balance of my time to my colleague from Colorado, who has important things to say, as he usually does, and so I will yield to the gentleman from Colorado.

SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WALDEN of Oregon). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS) is recognized for 30 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. MCINNIS. Point of order, Mr. Speaker. The gentleman, I think, yielded me the balance of his time, which I think would give me an additional 7 minutes. So I would request 37 minutes for the special order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's guidelines, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. GANSKE) is not allowed to yield to the gentleman, so the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS) for 30 minutes.

Mr. MCINNIS. I thank the Speaker for the clarification.

Good evening, colleagues. I have been listening to the discussions. I think we had a healthy discussion, where the gentleman from Iowa and the gentlewoman from Connecticut were having a discussion. But previous to that I was not quite as inspired as some might have been in regards to her attack on the policies of the Governor of the State of Texas, the Republican candidate for the Presidency, in regards to Social Security.

Now, my purpose here this evening with my colleagues is not to talk to them necessarily about partisan politics. That is not the purpose of this podium. My purpose this evening is to talk about an issue that is important and, by the way, not just important for women, it is very important for women but it is very important for young people, regardless of their sex, regardless of their ethnic background.

I tell my colleagues, we are not going to accomplish a solution for Social Security by using fear tactics. Standing up and implying that the women of this country, apart from any other segment of this country, are endangered by Social Security ignores problems that go across the sexes. These are fear tactics that are being launched against senior citizens.

The reality of it is that every one of us in these chambers, every one of us in these chambers knows that today every senior citizen, or every beneficiary of Social Security benefits who is picking up the check today will have the check next month, will have the check next year, and will have the check as long as they are entitled to that benefit. There is not, under anybody's, under anybody's study of Social Security, there is not one beneficiary today who is receiving Social Security funds, whose funds are endangered during the period of time that they are to receive those funds.

It is nothing but pure and simple fear tactics to come out here and somehow try to defend the status quo of a system that is not running well and by doing that implying that people who are on the system today are somehow going to be cut off. Imagine being a senior citizen and hearing from a person in these great halls of Congress the implication that either because they are a woman or because they are a senior citizen that somehow their benefits are somehow going to be canceled because a Republican, the Governor of the State of Texas, has come up with something that changes the status quo.

The recommendation to change the status quo comes because of one reason: Everybody in these chambers, everybody in our country admits that Social Security needs to be improved. How interesting that during the conversation of the gentlewoman from Connecticut she speaks consistently of privatization. Maybe she should speak, maybe we should all speak of personalization. Maybe we ought to look at this Social Security System and, number one, admit that it is not working right and quit being stuck on the status quo.

And by the way, this argument that, well, we are reducing the national debt. How nice, after 40 years of Democrat leadership, 40 years of Democratic leadership which drove that debt to record highs, which gave us that annual deficit. All of a sudden they have turned a new leaf: Oh, let us reduce the national debt.

Let me tell my colleagues that in my opinion what we need to do is to not look at the fear factor of Social Security. Forget the fear factor of Social Security. Play fair on this. Look at the business factor of Social Security. Let us get down with our pencils and get down there with our pads of paper and figure out how we can improve the system.

I want to give my colleagues a suggestion, a suggestion that everybody in this Chamber, every Federal employee gets to enjoy, and then I want my colleagues to ask after I bring this system out, I want my colleagues to ask why only Federal employees? Why only Congressmen and Congresswomen? Why do they get this benefit and the rest of America does not? Why are we a special class, as Federal employees? We get to choose personalization. The gentleman from Connecticut who spoke up here previously gets to choose personalization. All of us have that option as Federal employees. As Congressmen we have that option to personalize our account. Why can we not look at Social Security and compare it to the system we have?

By the way, the system we have works very well. It is not broken. My guess would be that every one of my colleagues on this floor who is eligible for what we call Thrift Savings is in it. We are in the program. And my bet is that every one of our employees are in that program. Now, it is an option to go into that program. It is also my bet that most Federal employees are in that program. Why are they in that program? Because it works. They had a choice. It works and they get some choice in the program. They get to personalize it.

That is what George W. Bush is talking about. Frankly, I compliment him. We need somebody to stand up. Social Security in an election year is one hot potato to deal with. It is tough. And here we had somebody who had the courage to stand up and put out a plan that I think is pretty bold, a plan that I think has a lot of inspiration and initiative to it.

So let me tell my colleagues a little about the kind of plan that we have here on the floor, our Federal Thrift Savings Plan. It is really broken down into two parts. As a Federal employee, and let me speak more specifically, as a United States Congressman, we get every month a certain amount of money taken out of our pay that is put in for retirement. We have no choice where that money is invested. We have no choice how that money is invested. We cannot put our hands on that money. That is the safety net. But the second option we have is what is called Thrift Savings, and that is the kind of direction that is being proposed to look at for Social Security.

Now, what does the Thrift Savings do? A Federal employee, or a Congressman, let us take myself for an example, I, SCOTT MCINNIS, have the option every month of taking a certain percentage of my salary and putting it into the Thrift Savings program. Now, once it goes into the program, my personalization really begins. At that point I get to make a choice. No one else chooses for me. My employees do not choose for me. The bureaucracy does not choose for me. I get to have a personalized account.

And I have three basic options. I can take a high-risk speculative stock investment, and in the last several years that has made an enormous return, sometimes 24 to 48 percent. I do not have the exact figure, but it is a tremendous return. I can go into a little bit lower risk with the second option, which are bonds; or I can go into a guaranteed fund, which has a low interest.

Remember, interest is based on risk. The higher the risk, the higher the rate. The lower the risk, the lower the rate. So I can go into the most conservative of the three options, and it is guaranteed, but it does not return a lot of interest.

Now, when we take a look at what we have, and what has been suggested here, I am frankly surprised that the Vice President, under his policies, although 6 months ago he was in favor of something like this, in the last week and a half, frankly because of the politics, that his policy is stick with the status quo.

My good friend, the doctor here, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. GANSKE), and I compliment him, as being a doctor, I admire him for that background.

Mr. GANSKE. And if the gentleman, when he gets a chance, would yield for just a minute.

Mr. MCINNIS. I will in just a moment, but let me go over a few statistics that the gentleman brought up.

The gentleman before me talked about what are some of the difficulties that we face with Social Security today. What are causing some of the problems? It is pretty simple. It is demographics. In 1935, when our Social Security System was put into place, we had 42 workers for every retired person over 65. Today, as the gentleman highlighted earlier, we have three workers for every retired person.

Now, as a compliment to the health care system of this country, when Social Security was first put into place, a man could expect to live to be 61 years old, a woman could expect to be 65. But because of health care and taking better care of ourselves and so on and so forth, that has gone up tremendously. So now people are living longer. The result of this has been that throughout this period of time we have had people who have refused to make those kind of adjustments. We had elected officials who continued to defend the status quo and shove it on to the next administration.

Well, I think it is time we take a stand and say we are not going to stand for the status quo. This Social Security System owes something to the women, absolutely, but we owe it to the women and we owe it to every citizen in the United States to stand up now while the system still has a positive cash flow and make commitments to move off the status quo and improve our system. And the beauty of it is we do not have to invent something brand new. This is a trail that has been traveled. The snow has been plowed. We have this system, the Thrift Savings system currently used by every Federal employee, or at least given as an option for every Federal employee, and that system works.

In just one minute I will yield to the gentleman from Iowa, but let me ask my colleagues, and I wish I had the time to go around individually to every Member and ask them, since they get the Thrift Savings option, what is so wrong with us at least having good discussion about the people who are on Social Security or the people who will be on Social Security, our young people or now the generation behind me who is in the working place, what is wrong with asking that generation if perhaps they would not like to personalize their account? Tough answer.

I would be happy to yield to the gentleman.

Mr. GANSKE. I appreciate the gentleman's comments, and I agree with him totally that Governor Bush, to his credit, has had the courage to talk about the future retirement of the baby boomers. This is, I think, going to be a significant debate, and it should be.

In the past, any politician that would touch Social Security, it has always

been called the third rail of politics, Governor Bush deserves an awful lot of credit for the courage to talk about what are the options.

As we know from the Social Security Advisory Commission, the options are, with all the baby boomers coming down the road, we either, for those baby boomers, and we are not talking about current beneficiaries. The gentleman made that point clearly, but I want to emphasize it. We are not talking about current beneficiaries, we are talking about when the baby boomers retire.

But for the baby boomers, with our huge numbers coming down the road, the Social Security Advisory Commission has said that our options are one of three: We are either going to have to reduce benefits by 25 percent for the baby boomers, not for current beneficiaries; we are going to have to increase payroll taxes for those workers at that time, these are our children that we are talking about; or we somehow or other work to help every American in retirement be wealthier, to have some type of increased return on investment.

□ 2145

Now, that Social Security advisory commission was made up of people representing labor unions, accountants, businesses, leaders from all across the spectrum. They had three separate proposals for how you would increase the return, and they vary in some details. But all of them agreed, all three of the solutions agreed that the first two solutions were not so great, and that was to either reduce benefits or to increase taxes. And so I commend the gentleman for giving an analogy, because our thrift, the Congressional Thrift Savings Plan is equivalent to a 401(k) in the private community. And it is something that we can elect to do. And if you are wise and you are looking at your future pension requirements, you will take some of your current salary and put it into that 401(k), just like people in businesses, corporations, employees do.

But the analogy is very apt in terms of the choices that we have, because that is one of the ways in which you could set up these personal accounts in Social Security, and, that is, that, number one, the government does not own those accounts, individuals do, and that is important because you do not want the government to own half or three-fourths of the stock market. Then the government can control investment. I do not think that the government necessarily makes wise decisions in investments.

So that is important. But there are mechanisms whereby through certification of funds that can help keep the administrative costs low. That has been something that people have criticized these accounts about. There are choices that can be offered to individuals. Let us say that you are younger, maybe you want to put that account into a growth fund for a while but then as you grow older you want to be more conservative so you switch it into a bond fund. Those are things that Americans have learned to do. And I think it is correct that over extended periods of time, you gain about twice or three times the return through the market. We are just talking about, though, a small percent and we are still talking about maintaining that safety net that is very important.

Mr. MCINNIS. The gentleman made a very clear point at the very end, and, that is, on the thrift savings, there is an amount of money that goes into our retirement every month we cannot touch. That money is guaranteed. So even if on our personalized account we mess up, we still have a safety net. I would ask every one of my colleagues in here, for example, if the gentleman or I won a million dollars in the lottery and we decided consciously that we wanted to take that $1 million and invest it for our future retirement, how many of us would take that $1 million and turn it over to Social Security and say, ''Hey, why don't you take the million dollars I just won and why don't you invest it because I've got confidence that when I get 65 you're going to have that million dollars and you will have taken good care in the investment of it.'' There is not a person in this country that is going to do it.

That is why when I listened to the previous speaker, let me say with all due respect to my colleague, that you cannot maintain the status quo. The Vice President has been very clear in his position. He wants the status quo. Now, look, things have changed. We have got a new economy out there. Take a look at the State of Florida last week. The State of Florida took 650,000 State employees and said, hey, we are going to let you go into your own, essentially what is a 401(k) program. We are letting you come out. You can come out to a Corporate Life 401(k) system. They get up to eight mutual funds to invest in. Ohio and Kansas are right behind them.

The States realize this. The employees realize this. The women, the children, the workers, they realize this. It is time to take a bold move. When we speak of bold move, as the gentleman stated, we are not talking about taking all of your Social Security money and putting it in, bulk, into this. We are only allowing a transfer of 2 percent. But that is considered bold when you are dealing with the status quo.

Let me mention a couple of other things because my good friend brought them up. The program that the Governor of Texas, Mr. Bush, has proposed had several principles. You hit on a few of them but that is what that Social Security panel said was necessary. Number one, modernization must not change existing benefits for retirees or near retirees. The current retirees are not going to be impacted by this. Their future is secure. And so are the expected retirees.

Mr. GANSKE. If the gentleman will yield, the retirees, for instance, people who are 50 or 55 years or older, because we all recognize that you cannot change the system for them. They would not have sufficient time to build up additional reserves.

Mr. MCINNIS. Reclaiming my time, the window of opportunity is too narrow. That is acknowledged.

It is kind of common sense, the next thing, that the Social Security surplus must be locked away for Social Security only. As you know, when these Democrats, frankly, the leadership, had control of this budget for 40 years, they used the Social Security money for other purposes. It is the Republican bills that changed the status quo and said, wait a minute, let us put Social Security money for the purpose of Social Security. Social Security payroll taxes must not be increased. That is another condition. The government must not invest Social Security funds in the stock market, the very point the gentleman made 3 or 4 minutes ago.

Modernization must preserve the disability and survivor components. Modernization must include individually controlled personalized voluntary, and ''voluntary'' is the key word, personal retirement accounts which will augment, supplement the Social Security safety net.

I wish my colleague were here. I would say what is wrong with any one of those elements. But let me say, if we adopt any one of those single elements, we move off the status quo. You have got to be willing to save Social Security, and to improve that system you have got to put your stubbornness aside, Democrats, and be prepared to accept some of these principles. And what is wrong with any one of them? There is not one of those principles I mentioned that they would disagree with.

Let me say that I am not attempting up here to throw out partisan warfare but I am saying, there is a clear difference, and as my colleague who is a Democrat who spoke earlier, she also said there is a clear difference between the two, and I think it is important for us to distinguish between these two plans. One supports the status quo and the second says we have got to make some type of improvement. The improvement is based on those conditions I mentioned.

Again, just recapping, how many Members in here are not in thrift savings? We all enjoy thrift savings. It is a voluntary program, it is a personalized program. Likewise, how many of us in these chambers would be willing to give Social Security a million dollars of our own money to invest and plan for our retirement?

Mr. GANSKE. I think it is important to note that 6 months or so ago, President Clinton and Vice President GORE talked about a plan to utilize a portion of that payroll tax to go into personal accounts. There were some differences in terms of the mechanics that they

were talking about, but I think it is clear as we look at the demographics coming down the road that the status quo, doing nothing, just is not going to work.

Now, when we look at, let us say taking 2 percent out of that 12.4 percent and moving it into a personal account, that means that there are going to be some decreased dollars going into the Social Security trust fund for that transition. I have a hard time understanding why the Democrats who constantly talk about trying to direct tax cuts to those who need it most do not seize on this. Look, the people that we, Republicans and Democrats, both would agree need that tax cut the most, the working Americans where their payroll tax is the biggest chunk of tax they ever pay, why not give them, as Senator BOB KERREY has said, a payroll tax cut.

Mr. MCINNIS. A Democrat, by the way.

Mr. GANSKE. A Democrat. And then use part of that surplus that we all want to keep coming in, use part of that projected surplus to make up the difference. That is a tax cut. That is a tax cut for the people who need it the most. That is also helping every American who is working and paying payroll taxes become richer. As Senator BOB KERREY says, my goal is to help every American in this country become wealthier. And the way to do that is to set up these personal accounts while at the same time preserving that safety net for those who are currently in the program and for those who are coming into the program in, say, the next 10 or 15 years. And I think that you can do it. If we look at the surplus that is coming along, if we look at the projections that have been done already through CBO on plans that are like this. I just do not buy this, quote, this risky language that we hear all the time.

As the gentleman said earlier, those are scare tactics. We need to have a civil, calm discussion and try to achieve goals that are common to both sides. But I think simply saying that the status quo is the only way is not recognizing what the experts from the Social Security advisory commission are telling us. They are warning us this.

Mr. MCINNIS. One thing we should discuss with our colleagues before they join on with the Vice President and talk about how reckless and how fearful it is, remember, it is a little hypocritical for any Federal employee to talk about the Bush proposal or the committee's proposal as reckless when in fact we enjoy the benefits of the thrift savings program which does exactly what we are posing in a smaller fashion Social Security head towards.

In other words, I am not sure I have heard any complaint from any of our colleagues, and I certainly have not heard any of our colleagues calling our own thrift savings which is exactly what the gentleman is talking about but as the gentleman knows we have it in place, I have not heard any of them say this is a reckless, terrible deal. In fact, my colleagues keep asking, why can I not contribute more? We would all like to put a little more into this. This is a good idea. That is the direction that I think we are headed.

I read the Wall Street Journal, they had an editorial yesterday, and it is called Grabbing the Third Rail. The reason I reference grabbing the third rail is it talks about the hot potato. It talks about the fact it is time somebody who wants to be the leader of this country, the President of this country, step forward and take a leadership role and say, ''Look, we have got a storm out there, we can't sit at home in the harbor. Somebody's got to take their ship out there and get to the other side.''

Now, what is interesting in this particular editorial is they talked about the fact that there has been some criticism, no details, not enough details. They give four or five websites that you can go to on your computer and these websites even have a calculator built in on them, so that you can figure out what would happen to you as an individual person. I will not go through all of them although I intend to next week because I plan on giving another speech in regard to Social Security because as the gentleman and I previously discussed, it is important. But let me give one of them: socialsecurity.org/index.html. That provides a lot of the detailed information that we are talking about this evening.

I can tell the gentleman that when I mention the Vice President's policy, that policy parallels the policy of the Democratic leadership. Fortunately, not all the Democrats are agreeing with the Democratic leadership. We have a number of Democrats, including as my colleague mentioned Senator KERREY who are saying, ''Wait a minute, you can't stick with the status quo.'' Come on, let us get off these fear tactics. Let us talk about business tactics. We have to change the business model, just the same as businesses throughout our country are changing the business model to deal with the Internet. We have got to do it. This system is 65 years old. Although it is in a cash flow right now, positive cash flow, as we both know, on an actuarial basis, this deal is in trouble.

□ 2200

But we got time to save it. The beauty of what we are doing right now, our conversation today is we are not worried about a fund that is going bankrupt tomorrow. For a change, finally, for a change, you have got elected political government officials in this country talking in advance of the crisis about what to do to avert the crisis.

A lot of times the government responds after the crisis occurs. Here at least we have had the foresight for you to look at your children, myself to look at my children, and say hey, we better do some planning for these people.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WALDEN of Oregon). Under the guidance given to the Chair by the majority leader, the Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS) for an additional 7 minutes, which is the remainder of the hour reserved for the leadership.

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. GANSKE).

Mr. GANSKE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

As I mentioned earlier this evening, for the last several years, as I have done my town hall meetings around my district, I have actually taken a computer program, run a laserpoint off it, the program I borrowed from Senator BOB KERREY, who is a Democrat, who talks about the impending age wave and the Social Security Advisory Commission's recommendations. We have had discussions across the 4th Congressional District in Iowa about this.

For 2 years at least I have been arguing that we need a presidential candidate of courage who would bring this up, who would be willing to take a risk, to have a full and public debate on where we go with probably the biggest issue that is facing our country, as well as all of the other developed countries, and that is how do we deal with the pension requirements of the baby-boomers in the next 20 to 30 years?

So we finally get a candidate like this. Governor Bush should be given a huge accolade for being willing to bring this to the forefront of the presidential debate. There is no question about it, they knew fully down in Austin, Texas, that they were taking a risk by bringing this important issue up, because this has been an issue that politicians have been afraid of.

Well, we finally have a presidential candidate who has been willing to take that risk, because this is the biggest issue facing our country in the next 25 to 30 years, and, as the gentleman from Colorado pointed out, you need time, time, to effect changes, to bring up the wealth of the average American, to make sure that the system is solvent. You cannot just take care of it when it is all of a sudden bankrupt, or else you are going to have huge shifts and significant pain, both on the part of the beneficiaries and on the part of the payees at that time.

Now is the time. This is the election to make a determination and have a debate on this issue, that we can then take into the year 2001 and say we have had this debate, and, if Governor Bush would become President, then we will have an opportunity to effect the type of changes that will be very important in order to make sure that the elderly continue to receive their benefits, in order to make sure that the young are not going to be faced with 50 percent payroll tax increases at that time.

This is hugely important, and I am immensely proud of Governor Bush for

having taken this risk, because the easiest thing to have done with his lead in the polls would be to play it safe, to just ride it out, to take into account ''Clinton fatigue'' or whatever else might enter into this election, and to bring honesty to the White House. But, instead, he has taken a bold step on this, and I am really proud that we have a candidate who has brought this to the debate, because I am sure this is going to be a major focus of debate in every presidential debate.

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is absolutely correct. The first step we have to take is, I used to practice law, and when you put on a defense, I did not do any criminal law, but even when you put on any kind of defense, it has to have some credibility. How can you stand up and credibly defend the current system that we have? How can you look at the young workers and how can the vice president and his policies and his policy for Social Security, how can he look at the women of the country or young workers and say I am going to defend the status quo, I am going to defend the current system?

You know what, it does not sell. It is not credible. I urge both sides of the aisle to get together and at least have enough courage to say, because we are beneficiaries of it, we get to use the Thrift Savings Program, that we at least have enough courage to stand out there and say, you know, what is wrong with looking at change? What is wrong with trying to suggest some improvements for the Social Security system? What is wrong with doing like Federal employees, all the Federal employees get to do, and that is personalize their accounts? What is wrong with standing up and figuring out, hey, there is a better way to do it?

We are not saying dump this system. We are saying improve this system. We are certainly not saying, as the gentleman has said, we are not saying threaten anybody currently on the system. Not at all. In fact, I think most people we talk to out there want us to improve the system. They want a system like every one of us sitting in this hall tonight are benefits of, a Thrift Savings Program. We get personalized choices, and yet we have a safety net back there. We have an obligation I think to offer this across the country. Every Federal employee gets it. What is wrong with offering it to other people?

In conclusion, I would first of all thank the gentleman for joining me this evening and look forward to further discussions with him. Number two, I think this is a very good topic for the presidential debates, because I think our next President has got to take a leadership role and put this system on a track that improves it, that puts it on a system that our young people, and even people our age, are not talking or have a fear that Social Security will not be there for them. We want a President that will give those people the comfort that that system will be there for them.

So far, frankly, so far the only candidate that has stepped out there and said ''I think I have got the system different than the status quo'' is Governor George Bush of the State of Texas.

Again, I thank my colleague for his participation this evening.

TOLERANCE OF TORTURE

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

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, if a bill were to come before this Congress asking for the legalization of rape, torture, murder and religious persecution, it would be voted down without question. If our President were to lower the working age to 15 years old and call for 14 hour workdays, 6 days a week, the people of the United States would be outraged.

Why then do so many in this Congress seek to allow trade practices with a country that allows and encourages such atrocities? In the People's Republic of China, these types of events occur every day. This behavior is not punished by the Chinese Communist Party, but it is condoned and encouraged by this Chinese government.

Although the government of the United States obviously has no authority to stop directly this abusive behavior, we do have the ability to check on the human rights practices of the Chinese through our current trade agreement.

The U.S. State Department reports on human rights violations in China, ''Beijing's poor human rights record deteriorated markedly throughout the year, as the government intensified efforts to suppress dissent.'' Even with our investigations into the human rights issue, China has not changed. Even if we do not consider the $70 billion trade deficit or the threat of jobs going overseas to China, we should deny China permanent normal trade relations based on these human rights violations done and allowed by the Chinese government.

Many of the victims of government oppression in China are young children. Two of the main concerns of many U.S. citizens regarding trade with China are child labor and working conditions for all Chinese, especially young women. Chinese are used as cheap labor, often forced to work in awful conditions for abnormally long hours. They are often punished cruelly. Many are tortured brutally, some are raped by their employers.

The Chinese government acknowledges the use of child labor, and while the exact number of child workers is unknown, the number of minors out of school and in the workforce exceeds by far 10 million young people. Companies looking for cheap labor attract apprehensive students with promises of money and success. These children are forced to work in cramped spaces for long hours. Fourteen-year-olds often faint from exhaustion and heat, often working 6 days a week, 16 hours a day.

Not only do the Chinese practice and allow child labor, slave labor is also common in labor camps throughout China. Chinese citizens are kidnapped, they are forced to work, often without wages or food. These workers, often very young, often 40 of them or more, are forced to stay in makeshift houses of less than 20 square meters, with leaking roofs and rat infestation.

If the U.S. allows China to obtain PNTR, then we are accepting the outrageous treatment of laborers in China. Can we in good conscience allow this to happen in this Congress?

One of the founding principles of the United States is freedom from religious persecution. Under communist rule in China, all religious activity must be approved and registered by the government. Religious sects not approved by the government include the Falun Gong and Tibetan Buddhism. The Chinese government has fought hard to restrict both these sects. According to the Students for a Free Tibet Organization, 6,000 Tibetan monasteries and shrines have been destroyed, 600 Tibetan Buddhists are presently in jail for practicing their religion. The Chinese government banned the Falun Gong in July and put tens of thousands of its members in psychiatric hospitals and in prisons for long, long terms. Prisoners are endlessly harassed, beaten and tortured. Often the Chinese government uses hospital and prisons to silence the spiritual leaders of their country.

Not only are the spiritual leaders detained and imprisoned, but so are political party leaders. China continues to harass Taiwan with threats of bombing, simply because they held free elections and are now a Democratic Nation.

The Chinese government attempts to squelch freedom and democracy, the two basic ideals on which our country was founded. Why are we willing to throw away these ideals because of corporate greed by U.S. CEOs? If the U.S. allows China to have permanent normal trade relations, we are condoning China's outrageous denial of human rights. We would not ignore this type of criminal behavior in our own country; we should not ignore these atrocities in China.

We cannot turn our backs on the Chinese people simply because they do not inhabit our shores. We should expect no less from the countries with whom we trade than we do from ourselves. If we want to have a global economy, we should have a global morality. Can we allow the trafficking of women and children in the name of western corporate profit? Can we condone discrimination and abuse against women and minorities for profit?

Mr. Speaker, free trade with China will prove to be very costly for our values, for democracy and for our Nation.