

community, our cities, and our towns all across America, as dedicated hard-working citizens find themselves receiving pink slips, they are laid off. And the big problem is that they are unable to find jobs.

This economic crisis is at its worst. In the district that I represent in rural eastern North Carolina, an area that once thrived on agriculture and textiles, both of which have been hard hit, it appears that as far as the textile industry, there is little or no hope for recovery. More than half a million jobs have been lost nationwide in the last 5 months alone. At this moment there are fewer jobs in the labor market than at any other time since the current recession began.

Since January of 2001, the Nation has lost 2.7 million private sector jobs, and the unemployment rate has risen from 4.5 in 2001 to 6 percent 2 years later. In North Carolina we have lost 130,000 jobs since the Bush administration took office; 80,000 of these jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector; 5,328 textiles/apparel jobs have been lost in the first district alone since 1999; 32,640 textile/apparel jobs have been lost in North Carolina since 1999; 12,669 manufacturing jobs lost in the first district since 2001.

In addition to plant closings all across the State, they are leaving thousands of families in financial peril. In the Halifax County town of Roanoke Rapids, in my district, the closure of the West Point Stevens textile plant, and many of you may remember the plant immortalized as the foundation for workers' rights in the movie "Norma Rae," will put 350 families out of work next month. There will not be one yard of textile production in Halifax County once this West Point Stevens facility closes, abandoning a city on the Roanoke River founded on textiles.

Unless some long-term remedies are found, North Carolinians and, most specifically, workers in northeastern North Carolina, will face a crisis of chronic unemployment with shrinking safety nets to combat this crisis.

The percentage of workers nearly receiving regular unemployment benefits who subsequently exhausted those benefits without finding work was at its highest level ever just a few months ago in February.

The tax plan forced through this House last week included no provision whatsoever for extending unemployment insurance benefits, which are due to expire in just 17 days.

We have got to do something about this problem. It is time that we pass the bill that extended this deadline and provided jobs for our people. I urge us to take this step.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS ARE GREATLY NEEDED

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

Mr. MILLER of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, 4 months ago as a brand-new Member of this House, I stood with two of my Democratic colleagues from North Carolina at the Employment Security Commission office in Raleigh. And together we called on Congress to extend unemployment benefits for an additional 26 weeks. At that time there were more than 37,000 workers who had already exhausted their unemployment benefits in North Carolina and nationally a million workers were without benefits, out of a job, out of money and because of the inaction of this House, out of luck.

Despite my plea and the plea of other Democrats to extend the benefits through a compromise plan that the Senate passed unanimously, the House leadership allowed the benefits to expire and allowed 1 million Americans and their families to go without benefits. And there was never an explanation for why this House could not trouble itself to act quickly, to act in time to give that extension. A few days later this House did act and extended benefits. It was not 26 weeks. It was 13. Again, no explanation for why we could not act in time.

Here we are again. With a deadline quickly approaching, the Republican leadership is again doing nothing to extend those benefits.

On May 31, just a couple of weeks, this House will let unemployment benefits expire again; but this time the impact will be far greater. Now there are 2.1 million workers who will be left without unemployment benefits. Twice as many in January, twice as many mothers and fathers, twice as many breadwinners, twice as many out-of-luck Americans.

The economy has lost more than half a million additional jobs since January. Since the recession began 2 years ago, the economy has lost 2.7 million jobs in the private sector. The persistence of job loss at this 2-year mark in this recession is the worst since the Great Depression. The unemployment rate is now 6 percent, and there are 8.8 million unemployed Americans. But again House Republicans are doing nothing to protect out-of-work Americans and their families.

The Republican leadership has found the time to do plenty for America's richest. The Republicans rammed the President's tax bill through last week. If you listen to the Republicans speak in favor of that bill, you would have thought you flipped from C-SPAN to the History Channel. You would have thought you had gone back in time and you were seeing House debates during the Great Depression or the Works Progress Administration or the Civilian Conservation Corps, because every Republican spoke entirely of creation of jobs. Only in passing and only occasionally were Republicans speaking for the bill mentioned that what the bill did was eliminate dividends, the taxation on individuals of dividend, dividend income.

As the gentleman pointed out just a short while ago, we have heard strained arguments before for how tax cuts solve a wide variety of problems. The Republicans say that tax cuts to the rich are the solution for everything from urban sprawl to tooth decay. Last week it was the creation of jobs and economic stimulus. But the proposed economic stimulus bill, or the bill described last week as an economic stimulus bill, does little, precious little, to stimulate the economy.

They said that we need to cut taxes on the richest Americans so that we can create what economists call the wealth effect; that the richest Americans need to feel so secure in their financial circumstances that they then will not feel inclined to save the money, but they will spend it; and that will stimulate the economy.

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The unemployed may not feel rich, may not feel wealthy from getting an extension of their unemployment benefits, but believe me, they will spend it. I call it the got-to-pay-the-bills effect. They will spend the money. They will spend it on their rent. They will spend it on food. They will spend it on health care costs. They will spend the money. Do not worry.

I do not favor, Mr. Speaker, an indefinite extension of unemployment benefits, but I do not believe, as apparently the majority in this Chamber do believe, that the majority of those who would be helped by the extension of unemployment benefits would prefer not to be working. If my colleagues think the unemployed are not looking for jobs because unemployment benefits allows them a tax-paid holiday, I invite my colleagues to come with me to Rockingham County. I would like to introduce them to unemployed textile workers who do not know when they will again find a job. They do not where to look for a job. I would like to see my colleagues say to their face that we need to light a fire under them so they will look for a job, and then, unless we end their unemployment benefits, they will not look, they will not go and find a job to support themselves and for their families.

I am proud to be here with many of my colleagues today, the first-term members on the Democratic side, calling for an extension of those benefits.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACING OUR NATION'S WORKING FAMILIES

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

Mr. CARDOZA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the economic challenges facing our Nation's working families. The latest unemployment figures make it official: We are now in the longest period of job losses in America since the Great Depression. America

has lost half a million jobs in just the last 3 months. Today 8½ million Americans are out of work, and millions more are working in part-time jobs because they cannot find full-time employment.

Let us look at the facts. Since January 2001, when this administration took office, we have seen a massive shift in policy away from fiscal discipline in favor of a record of deficits. The results of this policy could not be any clearer. We have seen 2.2 million lost jobs and an economy spiralling out of control.

As I talk to the people in my district in California, I find a high level of anxiety because of this economy. In my district, and in the surrounding region, we have the highest unemployment rates in the entire Nation. It is a terrible situation, and it is not an overstatement to say that my constituents are going through an economic depression.

We have thousands of people in central California who are suffering through no fault of their own. The unemployed need our help. That is why we are here today on this floor. These people who are intelligent, hard-working and educated folks are out on the street. They are running out of unemployment benefits, and some of them have already run out.

The fact is the good people in my State and across the Nation need this House's help, and we have only 17 days until we reach May 31, the day the last extension of unemployment benefits will expire.

That is why so many Democratic Members from across all ideological spectrums are upset. We want to make sure that the people's voices from our districts are heard. That is why this House ought to be a place where the people's voices are heard.

What do we say to the long-term unemployed whose checks have already run out, who do not know where they are going to get the money to pay for the rent, who do not know if they will get evicted, who do not know how they will be able to feed their children? Instead of listening to the voices of the unemployed, the administration and the majority in Congress have focused solely on the need for additional tax cuts, completely ignoring the dangers posed by higher deficits.

Twenty-four years ago when I was an intern to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FROST) who spoke earlier on this floor, I sat at my desk and listened for hours as the Republican Party railed against high deficits. In the last 24 years, it seems that they have forgotten those speeches, and now they have forgotten the philosophy in favor of fiscal irresponsibility.

A short-term deficit is certainly understandable given the recession and the need to respond to last year's terrorist attacks, but the tax cut package approved by this House last week would do serious harm to the long-term fiscal health of this Nation. The pro-

posal centers on permanent changes that would further worsen an already poor long-term budget outlook and risks increasing long-term interest rates, which I call the debt tax.

In my district it would do nothing to help the vast majority of working families. In fact, I recently commissioned a study that showed that most families in the central valley of California would see little or no benefits from the Republican proposal to reduce taxes on capital gains or dividends. The report also showed that the full tax cut package handily favored only 1 percent of the taxpayers of the 18th Congressional District of California.

Mr. Speaker, the tax cut bill offers nothing to help the unemployed and those truly struggling in our stagnant economy. It squeezes important programs out of the budget, forcing cuts in Medicaid, in child care assistance, in veterans benefits and more. In short, this bill compromises the long-term solvency of both the Federal budget and the American economy, and it also further strains the California budget, devastated by the weak economy in our State.

Instead of enacting the reckless provisions of this Republican tax bill, I believe our economy would be best served by pursuing a strategy of responsible planning and fiscal discipline that will shrink, rather than grow, our national debt. These guiding principles are good for the economy, the government, and, most importantly, for American families.

We need a stimulus plan that creates jobs and puts people to work now, instead of the majority and the administration's proposal being to trot out more of the same failed economic policies that have failed time and time again.

There is a case for considering a stimulus package, and I strongly support the alternative stimulus package offered by the Democrats. This economic plan offers exactly the kind of stimulus our economy needs. I hope we have the chance to vote for it in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, let us fight for those unemployed folks in my district and throughout America.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE ECONOMY

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

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my concern about the 2.1 million workers who will lose their regular unemployment insurance during the 6 months after May 31 if we fail to do the right thing and act now to extend their benefits.

I believe we should not only extend benefits, but also improve unemployment assistance by increasing the extension of benefits from 13 weeks to 26 weeks. Acting now to extend and im-

prove unemployment benefits will help an estimated 3.9 million workers.

This past December Congress faced a pending expiration of benefits and ran into an unfortunate and completely avoidable situation when the benefits of unemployed workers were allowed to expire for a week. This time we have the opportunity to act now and to do the right thing to help workers who are unemployed.

There are workers on Long Island in the area I represent who desperately want to work, but for whom jobs simply are not available. Everywhere I go in my district I hear from workers who are out of work or who fear that they will soon be out of a job. These are very real concerns to people on Long Island and nationwide.

Our country faces a serious crisis. We have Americans who want to work and who are actively seeking work, but are unable to secure employment and are worried about putting food on their dinner tables. I believe that extending unemployment insurance to these workers will not only provide working families with relief, but will also serve as an immediate and much-needed stimulus to our economy.

New York State has been particularly hard hit by the ongoing economic downturn. During the past month alone New York has lost 10,300 jobs, and since the end of 2001, our State has suffered from a loss of an estimated 301,000 jobs.

Nationwide the unemployment numbers are staggering. Our unemployment rate is at 6 percent, and there are 8.8 million unemployed Americans. Of this number, 1.9 million Americans have been unemployed for more than 27 weeks. In addition to these numbers, there are approximately 4½ million workers who are working part time because they are unable to find full-time employment.

If we want to find real economic stimulus, we should readjust our priorities and provide a helping hand to those who are out of a job rather than provide yet another fiscally irresponsible tax break to this Nation's wealthiest citizens as we just did this past Friday. We should do right by our workers and act to stimulate the economy by putting a little extra money in the pockets of working families.

We should contrast how the tax bill went through this Congress. It raced through this Congress, and yet we are taking our time providing relief and comfort to the millions of unemployed workers. That is not fair, and we need to address that.

The tax cut was presented as an economic stimulus package, and yet studies have shown that for every dollar we invest in extending unemployment benefits, our economy would receive a \$1.73 boost. This boost is real, and the impact would be felt immediately.

I urge my colleagues to take this important step to extend and improve unemployment benefits. American workers provide the engine that drives our economy, and we have the best workforce in the world. By helping workers