

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

out now when they need it the most, we will reap a huge return in our investment.

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

(Mr. ALEXANDER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

AMERICA'S TRADE DEFICIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, the Commerce Department has just reported the latest economic news and the trade deficit figures, and the story is not good. America's trade deficit in March surged sharply, reaching the second highest monthly deficit in history. This means thousands more lost jobs. This chart illustrates the increasing number of jobs we are losing every year due to the imbalance of our trade accounts.

In March, exports exceeded imports by over \$43.5 billion, just that month, and the main culprit was oil. To feed our addiction to oil, American consumers paid out in March \$9.1 billion alone for imported petroleum. Do people really understand what is happening? We are transferring wealth out of the United States and into foreign hands. For every dollar of imported petroleum, we are giving Saudi Arabia, 7½ cents; Mexico, 6½ cents; Canada, 6½ cents; Venezuela, 6½ cents; and Nigeria, 2½ cents for every single gallon of gasoline we use. In a year, this results in billions of our dollars being transferred in income to dictatorships. Over a decade we are talking about trillions of dollars of wealth transferred abroad.

As my colleagues can see, much of this money is going to prop up corrupt oil regimes, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Nigeria, Colombia. Just imagine if America achieved energy independence here at home instead of sending \$9.1 billion more out of America in March. We would be investing \$9.1 billion in the economic future of our own communities, every single month, in new jobs, new fuels, new energy technologies right here at home.

Again, in this Congress I am the sponsor of the Bioenergy Independence Act, which currently has 16 cosponsors representing 10 different States. Despite all the events of recent months, the Bush administration has no policy for weaning America from its dangerous and growing dependence on foreign oil. Quite the opposite. The Bush-Cheney administration is of the oil companies, by the oil companies and for the oil companies. The oil companies have eliminated the middleman and put their own people in the Department of the Interior, in the Department of Energy, and, indeed, in the

Vice President's residence and the White House.

The Biofuels Energy Independence Act of 2003 would authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to make and guarantee loans for biofuel production, distribution, development and storage. The goal of my legislation is energy independence for America. Energy independence is essential for our economic future and our national security.

I do not want to depend on unstable foreign sources of energy. We should use our own domestic sources. The power is growing in the fields of Iowa, Illinois, Ohio, coast to coast, and farmers need income from the market, not from the government.

I do not want to support dictatorships, and I know the American people do not either. No longer will we depend on corrupt foreign powers such as the House of Saud or the Obasanjo administration in Nigeria or Chavez in Venezuela. Instead, we will empower our own local communities and revitalize our agriculture economy, which is on life support now in the form of government subsidies.

At the same time, we will build a stronger economy. From coast to coast, we will create American jobs and American businesses for American companies, used by American consumers, and we will lower this job-killing trade deficit which gets worse every month and the job deficit it is creating coast to coast.

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After the trade numbers came out yesterday, the chief economist at Wells Fargo said this: "I don't know how long we can maintain this type of red ink year after year decade after decade without causing substantial damage to the dollar and our economy." Many of us in the House have been talking for years about the dangers of this growing trade deficit.

We are quickly approaching the moment in history when foreign interests own half the outstanding debt of our country, and we now pay them over \$400 billion a year in interest: the leading country, China, followed by Japan, followed by Saudi Arabia. \$400 billion a year in interest to them every year is as much as we spend on the Department of Defense. It is huge. Imagine if we could help give that money to the State of California, which is in bankruptcy, the State of Ohio, all the States in our Union that are so short on funds.

Achieving energy independence by relying on homegrown sources of energy will help America avoid the danger that an ever-increasing trade deficit poses to America's economy and our future.

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

(Mr. DAVIS of Alabama addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

TEXAS LEGISLATURE

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, in the last 2 days, many Americans have been intrigued by the story of 51 Texas legislators breaking a quorum in the Texas legislature by traveling to Ardmore, Oklahoma. Many may wonder why those legislators, whom I consider profiles in courage, would take such an extraordinarily drastic step. People such as Representative Pete Laney, who several years ago, when President Bush first learned that he would be the President-elect to the United States, was the Speaker of the Texas House, the Democrat that then President-elect Bush asked to introduce him to the Nation. He was a bipartisan Speaker, a great Speaker of the House. Mr. Laney, along with 50 others, are in Ardmore, Oklahoma.

I think the issue, to a large degree, revolves around the principle of congressional redistricting. For those that do not understand that process, once every decade, after a census is taken, each State must go back through its legislature and redraw congressional district lines so we have equal populations in districts across the country. In 2001, the Texas legislature failed to do so. So as is the case, the Federal courts step in and draw those districts.

Let me mention the facts. Fact number one: prior to this year, no legislature in the last 50 years in America has redistricted more than once in a decade unless ordered to do so by the Federal courts.

Fact number two: the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the Texas congressional districts, drawn just 2 years ago, are, in fact, constitutional. The fact is those districts are fair. The Republican ticket in Texas in this last election carried 20 of those 32 congressional districts. No one can argue that is not being fair to Texas Republicans.

Fact number three: Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott, a Republican, recently gave a report to the legislature saying it is not legally necessary to do congressional redistricting for the second time in 2 years because the law simply does not require it.

Fact number four: Why are we even dealing with this push for congressional redistricting for the second time in 2 years in Texas? Well, our majority leader in the United States House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY), said it very succinctly. He said, "I am majority leader and I want more seats." Forget the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court said the present seats are constitutional. Forget the fact that no legislature in 50 years has redistricted twice without a court order to