

When we look at the job growth figures, we see that 21,000 jobs were created last month. The true story, however, is that none of these jobs were in the private sector. Furthermore, the country needs to add about 125,000 jobs a month just to keep up with population growth. If we count the net 2.3 million jobs that have been lost to this country since this administration took office and add the 4.7 million jobs that are needed to be created since then to support our population growth, we have a 7 million job gap in the labor market.

The measly job growth we have seen in recent months will not even begin to put a dent in that job gap; and, to make matters worse, the rolls of our long-term unemployed workers are growing. Technically, workers who have been out of work for more than 6 months are defined as long-term unemployed. Six months also happens to be the maximum length of regular unemployment benefits. Therefore, most economists consider the number of long-term unemployed workers as indicative of the need for temporary unemployment benefits.

If my Republican colleagues need further proof of our need for a temporary extension of unemployment benefits, I would encourage them to look at the number of long-term unemployed workers in this country. In each of the past 3 months, almost 1.9 million unemployed workers have been counted as long-term unemployed. America's long-term unemployed represent 23 percent of the country's total unemployed workers, at least those who are counted.

Moreover, the level of long-term unemployment is three times what it was when the recession began. Job growth in this country is, without question, weaker than any other post-World War II recovery period. As each week of this jobless recovery goes by, 80,000 more workers exhaust their unemployment benefits and have nowhere to turn.

A recent Congressional Budget Office study shows that, without these benefits, unemployed Americans double their chances of entering poverty and lacking health insurance. Mr. Speaker, the need for an extension of unemployment benefits has never been greater. In the absence of true job creation, it is imperative that these benefits be extended.

Again, when we see outsourcing, offshoring happening in the high-tech community, and we see the continual hemorrhaging of blue collar jobs being lost, our American worker's income security and their health depend on that extension.

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

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

CHILDREN'S EXPRESS LANE TO HEALTH COVERAGE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Ms. CARSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. CARSON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to invite my colleagues to cosponsor bipartisan legislation authored by Senator RICHARD LUGAR in the United States Senate and myself in the House of Representatives known over here as H.R. 4031. The measure will help States in their efforts to enroll income-eligible children in the States Children's Health Insurance Program, commonly referred to as SCHIP.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, despite gains in recent years, nearly 9 million children in the United States remain uninsured. Of those, nearly 7 million children are eligible for public health insurance coverage. H.R. 4031, the Children's Express Lane to Health Coverage Act, builds on the successful legislation of the 106th Congress that provides States with the option of using the National School Lunch Program, the Women's, Infants, and Children Program to identify uninsured children eligible for benefits under the SCHIP and Medicare program. Many States have used this cost-saving option successfully to promote the well-being of income-eligible children.

While existing law does allow children to be income-eligible for WIC based on their enrollment in the Medicare program, it does not give the States adequate flexibility to make an income determination for eligibility for the Medicaid and SCHIP program based on the uninsured child's enrollment in WIC or another public program.

The Children's Express Lane to Health Coverage Act will give States the option of establishing that their Medicaid or SCHIP financial eligibility rules are satisfied when a family presents proof that their child is already enrolled in another program with comparable income levels. Current Federal law does not provide the flexibility that is necessary for this.

If we are to give our children, Mr. Speaker, a jump-start with quality health care and quality health insurance, I would encourage strongly that my colleagues consider becoming cosponsors of H.R. 4031, which is affectionately known as the Children's Express Lane to Health Coverage Act. It is vital, it is important, it is for our Nation's children.

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

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

FREE/FAIR TRADE AND UNEMPLOYMENT

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

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I hail from the Great State of Ohio, where we have lost 300,000 jobs since George Bush has been President, 2,000 a week, 260 a day. In Youngstown, the biggest city in my district, we have an unemployment rate of 16 percent. In the city of Warren, the second largest city in my district, we have an unemployment rate of 14 percent. This President's economic policies are clearly not working in the industrial Midwest.

Now, the gentleman from Texas who was up a few moments before me was talking about all of the benefits of free trade, and he said that it increased wages in this country, he said it increased the standard of living in this country, and he said that it lowered prices for consumers in this country. I do not think we can challenge the fact that free trade has clearly lowered prices or kept prices from getting out of control and from skyrocketing. I do not know if they clearly show the level of savings. I think the savings by off-shore cheap labor has been a boom for the corporations but not necessarily a boom all the way across the board for consumers.

But what I want to talk about tonight is just a few issues that I think the American people are beginning to recognize and understand.

First, on the issue of unemployment benefits.

We have human beings, we have workers who work throughout the United States of America who are running out of unemployment benefits, who are going to have nothing left, and we want to talk about the intellectual battles of free trade while United States citizens are going to fall through the cracks.

This administration's priorities have been tax cuts, tax cuts, tax cuts to the top 1 percent. They are a one-trick pony, this administration is and this Congress is. A one-trick pony. Tax cuts are the answers for any social ill that we have here, and it is not working.

Second, the debate between free trade and fair trade, I think, has been obscured. You are either for free trade, or you are against it, and you are for putting up protections and not agreeing to any trade whatsoever. When I talk about fair trade, I think we need to look at the issue on the whole, and we need to say to each other what the benefits of trading are and what are the downsides of free trade are.

The downsides are obvious. We are displacing workers. We have unemployment rates going through the roof. We are losing good-paying jobs for menial-wage jobs, and we are competing with a labor force that is getting paid nickels an hour, no health care benefits, no environmental relations, no OSHA, and we are asking American workers to

compete with that. We cannot even get international labor organization standards put into our free trade agreements which just say no child labor, no slave labor in these other countries. We cannot even get those into the agreements we sign.

We are not asking for everything. We are asking for basic human rights in the trade agreements that we sign.

When a lot of us talk about fair trade in this country, at least, at the minimum, have a social safety net that addresses unemployment benefits, that addresses health care insurance for people. How much anxiety would be relieved if you did lose your job if you knew you were going to have health care provided for you and your family.

Every time free trade agreements have come before this House and before this country, the commitment was always made that we had to invest in education. Meanwhile, in Ohio, the No Child Left Behind provisions are underfunded by \$1.5 billion, with a "B", a year. That is \$1.5 billion. So if we want to grab the last 25 percent of the kids and pull them across the finish line, which is what No Child Left Behind is supposed to do, and we are going to have all these Federal mandates, the Federal government must make a decision. Are we going to give tax cuts to the top 1 percent or are we going to invest that money in the No Child Left Behind so that every single child in this country will have an opportunity to compete on an already uneven playing field in the global economy?

Investments in research and development through the Veterans Administration are being cut. The facts are that we have told our kids that they must make investments in themselves and in their education through going to college, and yet we see the Pell Grant not keeping up with inflation and we see children not having the opportunity to live and work in a country where there is a reasonable wage and an opportunity for upward mobility.

We are trying to argue comparative advantage, a doctrine that was established in the early 1800s. We need to change our policy. I never thought that we would be asking for Newt Gingrich to come back and bring some reasonableness to this Congress.

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

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

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

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

GASOLINE PRICE HIKES

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

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, gasoline prices have hit an all-time high. The national average for gasoline is now \$1.77 per gallon, up 25 cents from the beginning of the year; and President Bush is doing nothing to alleviate the strain that this is taking on the American people, on American businesses and on the American economy.

Mr. Speaker, high gas prices impact all of us, consumers and businesses alike. High fuel costs translate into a loss in profits margins for the manufacturing and transportation sectors that force prices for products and services higher, hitting American consumers twice. Not only do Americans need to dole out more cash to fill their gas tanks with the little disposable income they have left, they are forced to pay higher prices for goods and services.

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For instance, Continental Airlines sought to impose a fuel surcharge for their services. And the real impact of all this is a slowdown in the economy with the potential for even more job loss. In fact, an estimate by Merrill Lynch shows that every penny increase in gasoline prices at the pump is equal to \$1 billion in lost consumer spending. That is nearly \$25 billion in lost spending since the beginning of the year.

Furthermore, Merrill Lynch estimates that while Federal tax refunds would total \$55 billion from February to May this year, a 30 percent increase from last year, and theoretically give the economy a nudge, higher pump prices will wipe out as much as half of the positive economic impact that these Federal refunds might have had.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out, too, that this is happening on the watch of an administration that said they would make energy policy a priority in the United States. Yet more than 3 years after President Bush first stepped in the White House, we have no national energy policy, and we have no national energy policy because the bill that the White House presented to Congress was filled with an extraordinary collection of energy industry giveaways, crafted by the members of Vice President CHENEY's secret energy task force, instead of meaningful policies that would increase fuel efficiency and the use of renewable and alternative energy sources.

Mr. Speaker, there are two things that President Bush must do immediately. First, he must hold off placing more oil in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve until prices come down. The SPR, or the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, is a power tool that the President can and should use in times of need, and right now consumers need relief. If President Bush reduced the amount of oil placed in the petroleum

reserve, we would have more on the market driving prices down for Americans now. The SPR can then be replenished when oil prices are lower.

Second, Mr. Speaker, President Bush needs to get on the phone with OPEC and demand increased oil production. Recent news indicates that OPEC has hinted at plans to lower production by 1 million barrels per day after April 1; and the administration's response to this from Secretary Abraham is that the U.S., and I quote, "will not beg OPEC for oil." That is a different tune than the one that candidate Bush sang during the 2000 election. Four years ago on the campaign trail, President Bush, in a swipe at President Clinton, said, "What I think the President ought to do is he ought to get on the phone with the OPEC cartel and say, we expect you to open your spigots and the President of the United States must jawbone OPEC members to lower the price." Mr. President, put your action where your mouth is and insist that OPEC increase production now to alleviate the strain these high gasoline prices are having on the American people and the American economy.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot afford to lose more jobs because of the President's inability to address this problem. He needs to address it now, and I think we should continue to take issue with it and bring it up on the floor until he does.

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

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

RESIGNATION AS MEMBER OF COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following resignation as a member of the Committee on Agriculture:

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, March 30, 2004.

Hon. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Effective March 30, 2004, I hereby resign from the Committee on Agriculture.

Sincerely,

KEN LUCAS,
Member of Congress.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the resignation is accepted. There was no objection.

PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. BAIRD) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address a matter that we would all