

but when I go home to Long Island, I hear a different story.

My constituents know the state of our economy is nothing to brag about. Prices at the pump are still alarmingly high. Home heating costs are skyrocketing. Corporations have stopped paying into their employees' pension plans. Taxes on student loans have increased. Despite rising health care costs, Medicaid faces deep and painful cuts; and American companies are closing plants and cutting jobs. In fact, almost 3 million manufacturing jobs have been lost since the administration took office.

The American people deserve better than lip service. The American people need an administration in Congress that will put their concerns first. We have seen over the last couple of years certainly the middle income families, which is the great portion of this great country, suffering. It is time that we look at them, help them and do a better job. America can do better.

DON DEGARMO

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

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the outstanding achievements of Don DeGarmo, a senior at Newton High School. Mr. DeGarmo has received the General Spaatz Award. That is the Civil Air Patrol's highest cadet honor. In only 4 years, he has demonstrated excellence in leadership, character, fitness, and aerospace education.

On average only two cadets in 1,000 ever receive this reward; and in over 40 years, only about 1,500 cadets have ever received it. I am confident that Mr. DeGarmo will continue to fulfill the Civil Air Patrol's mission, which is to serve America by performing Homeland Security and humanitarian missions for our communities, States, and Nation.

Upon graduation, Mr. DeGarmo plans to enter the U.S. Air Force and continue his commitment to protecting our values and our freedoms. We owe a great deal of debt to young men such as he who will protect and preserve the United States of America. At his young age, he is already becoming a role model for future generations, and I come here today to commend him for his exceptional career.

CORRUPTION

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

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, as the Republican leadership spends more time in the courthouse than the People's House doing the people's business, defending itself from charges of bribery, tax evasion and money laundering, the President is traveling the country

telling the American people how incredible this economy is.

Yet, survey after survey shows the American people do not agree with him. This despite the fact that the economy grew 4.2 percent last year. It is the best statistical performance since 1999. Why? Well, in part because very little of this growth is impacting them. 5.4 million more Americans live in poverty than they did before President Bush came into office. Six million more Americans are without health insurance, and the average income fell for the fifth year in a row last year.

The administration's stock explanation for this is always the same, "September 11. We are at war."

Well, being at war has not stopped corporate profits from soaring more than 50 percent since 2001. And when you have Members of Congress pleading guilty to having accepted bribes from defense contractors, ongoing investigations into lawmakers' agreeing to perform official acts in return for lavish golf trips, expensive dinners and campaign contributions, it is easy to understand why corporations are doing so well.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to put the needs of families before the special interests of lobbyists.

TAX RELIEF FOR AMERICANS TODAY

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

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, you know, you can choose to be negative. You can choose to be positive. And with this economy and this great Nation there is a lot to be positive about. Everybody is writing about it. Even the good old Washington Post talking about we are going to move to cut taxes another \$94.5 billion. That is one of the things that makes this economy work. It is why we are seeing record economic growth. Over 4 million jobs created. And today this body is going to take action on H.R. 4297, which already extends tax relief for millions of American families.

There is a provision, sales tax deductibility for States. Sales tax deductibility for individuals who, when they go to file their Federal income tax every April, they can deduct the sales tax they pay every year from that Federal income tax filing. This affects over 60 million individuals, hardworking Americans. We are going to give them tax relief today.

I encourage all Members of this body to support H.R. 4297.

POLITICAL CRONIES IGNORE THE LAW TO INCREASE REPUBLICAN POWER IN WASHINGTON

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

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, the Bush administration is scaling new heights in political cronyism. Not long ago, America cringed watching on TV as a presidential buddy could only manage to create a disaster, not respond to one in the Gulf Coast. But now we are finding out that political cronies ignored the voting rights of African Americans and Hispanic Americans in Texas.

The Washington Post uncovered a 73-page report that says that the Texas redistricting plan illegally diluted black and Hispanic voting in two of the State's congressional districts. The report received the unanimous support of eight Justice Department career employees, but the Republican political cronies ignored it.

One Justice Department attorney told the Post it was "highly unusual" for political appointees to overrule the unanimous findings such as this. But this is business as usual for the President's political appointees. Just ask the people of Louisiana, Mississippi, and now Texas.

It is time for the Republican cronies to go and let the people's votes count.

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

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

Mr. SODREL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to the critics of our Iraqi policy. No one questions their right to criticize our commitment to the Iraqi people or the rate of progress being made. It is not their right I question but rather their responsibility. For every liberty there is a responsibility, and for every freedom a duty.

I just returned from Iraq. Much progress is being made towards a stable Iraq and a democratically-elected government. It is to me irresponsible to enter into the current debate on the very eve of the Iraqi election, the most important election in the history of that country.

Our words should be words of encouragement. Our words should lend support to this important election. Words do have meaning and ideas have consequences. At this critical time, our words should support the Iraqi people, our soldiers and the process.

In Ecclesiastes it is written, "There is a time for everything." The critics are using the wrong words to express the wrong idea at the wrong time.

RISING HOME HEATING COSTS

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

Mr. EMANUEL. Mr. Speaker, right now it is 25 degrees near Washington, DC. It is 22 degrees in my home in Chicago. It is 3 degrees in Denver and a chilly 19 degrees in Dallas. As the song goes, "Baby, it's cold outside."

But for millions of Americans this cold snap is just the beginning of a long cold winter. Why? Because while the mercury drops outside, inside home heating bills are getting a little too hot to handle. In fact, on Tuesday the Energy Department reported that the average homeowner's home heating bill will increase by nearly 26 percent, the largest increase in 5 years. Those who heat their homes with natural gas, nearly half of all Americans, can expect their home heating bills to increase by 38 percent; but taxpayers and seniors cannot expect any help from this Congress.

In fact, the Republican Congress is cutting, cutting home heating assistance to our elderly; and the energy bill we passed this summer will do nothing to lower the cost of energy or gas at the pump, in fact, despite having handed out \$14.5 billion to the energy companies in taxpayer subsidies.

Mr. Speaker, these are the wrong priorities. You cannot hand out money to energy companies while cutting assistance to seniors. It is time to return the people's House to the American people. It is time for a change.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION
OF H.R. 4297, TAX RELIEF EXTENSION RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2005

Mr. PUTNAM. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 588 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 588

Resolved, That upon the adoption of this resolution it shall be in order without intervention of any point of order to consider in the House the bill (H.R. 4297) to provide for reconciliation pursuant to section 201(b) of the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2006. The bill shall be considered as read. The amendment in the nature of a substitute recommended by the Committee on Ways and Means now printed in the bill shall be considered as adopted. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill, as amended, to final passage without intervening motion except: (1) one hour of debate on the bill, as amended, equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Ways and Means; (2) the amendment in the nature of a substitute printed in the report of the Committee on Rules accompanying this resolution, if offered by Representative Rangel of New York or his designee, which shall be in order without intervention of any point of order, shall be considered as read, and shall be separately debatable for one hour equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent; and (3) one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

□ 1030

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). The gentleman from Florida (Mr. PUTNAM) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. PUTNAM. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentlewoman from Rochester, New York (Ms.

SLAUGHTER), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

(Mr. PUTNAM asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PUTNAM. Mr. Speaker, in April Congress passed a responsible budget that called for spending restraint, reduction of the deficit; and by slowing the unsustainable and automatic growth of mandatory spending programs and extending tax relief to families and small businesses, we have successfully accomplished the first two. Now, this rule will provide for consideration of our final commitment to American taxpayers, extending numerous important tax relief provisions.

In 2001, 2003 and 2004, Congress enacted responsible tax relief to help create new jobs, grow America's economy, and put more money in the hands of workers, families, small businesses, farms, and ranches. Following this tax relief, unemployment dropped a full percentage point to 5 percent, and we have experienced 10 uninterrupted quarters of real growth in our economy, above 3 percent, the longest stretch since the 1980s. As was proven by the tax cuts during the Kennedy and Reagan administrations, Federal revenues actually increase after taxes are lowered.

Our expanding economy is led by consumer spending, job growth, and business investment. This is a result of allowing workers to keep more of their hard-earned money, decreasing the tax burden on small businesses so they can expand and hire more workers, and providing incentives for families to save and invest.

Unless we take action today, many of the important tax provisions that have helped our economy grow strong will expire. Without passage of this legislation, workers, families, and small businesses will have less of their paycheck to take home each week.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4297, the Tax Relief Extension Reconciliation Act, not the most eloquent of names but an important one, will continue to build on the economic progress we have already made.

A key part of the American Jobs Creation Act of 2004 was a return to fairness for those who live, work, and raise families in States with no State income tax. The State and local sales tax deduction is particularly important to those in my home State of Florida and nine other States because it gives every taxpayer the opportunity to deduct State sales tax from his Federal tax bill, something that other higher-tax States have enjoyed for some time. This provision is set to expire in 3 weeks. While I will continue to work to make the State and local sales tax deduction permanent, this bill extends the provision for an additional year, which is an important step forward for fairness.

The bill also extends several tax incentives to enhance the affordability of higher education, including tax-deferred education savings accounts and tax credits for post-secondary education. It allows all taxpayers to deduct up to \$4,000 of higher education expenses, which will help more students go to college.

For teachers, the tax bill extends an important above-the-line deduction to help them contain the costs of out-of-pocket classroom expenses such as books, supplies, and computer equipment. We all know that our hard-working educators are covering for some of our neediest students, and this bill lets them keep the tax deductibility of their generosity.

In an effort to encourage savings and stable retirement security, this tax bill allows lower-income families that contribute to individual retirement accounts and pension plans to continue receiving a Federal match in the form of an income tax credit for the first \$2,000 of annual contributions. This encourages families to save and plan for their own retirement. While we were unable as a body to settle on a Social Security reform plan, surely we can all agree that encouraging low-income families to save for retirement and giving them the tools to do so is a sound economic policy.

Our bill freezes the rate on capital gains and dividends and prevents an increase of the tax burden on 24 million families. It is imperative that we extend this tax relief so our economy will continue on its upward track.

New data released at the start of December show that our economy continues to strengthen and grow. The Labor Department reported that employers added 215,000 jobs in November, after adding 44,000 in October and 17,000 in September in the wake of devastating hurricanes.

The jobless rate remains unchanged at 5 percent. The economy grew at an annual rate of 4.3 percent in the third quarter, much stronger than expected.

Forecasters' outlooks for coming months are upbeat as well. November's increase in payroll, the largest since July, was broad-based. Construction employment rose by 37,000. Employment in professional and technical services rose by 22,000. Health care employment rose by 20,000 jobs. Manufacturers added 11,000 jobs last month following an increase of 15,000 in October.

The most recent Commerce Department report shows overall consumer spending increased at a 4.2 percent annual rate, exceeding expectations. Purchases of nondurable goods surged 3.6 percent, exceeding expectations. Housing spending came in at 8.4 percent. Business investment spending rose at 8.8 percent, exceeding expectations.

Obviously, the current tax policy of this Congress has encouraged economic growth, and to raise taxes now would close the door of opportunity that is open for so many today.

Mr. Speaker, this rule provides for consideration of a substitute bill.