

Fortunately, the bill included sunset provisions, allowing Congress to revisit the law, reflect on its implementation, and fix those parts of the law that have clearly become overreaching. Four years later, Congress has failed to seize the opportunity to do so.

I urge my colleagues to oppose the leadership's attempt to irresponsibly rush another flawed bill into law.

Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past. Let us instead strike the right balance between our national security and our constitutional rights.

At a time when so much of the world questions our commitment to our own values, I urge my colleagues to show the American people and the world that we will defend our country, but that we will do so in a way that protects those rights that make it worth defending.

OUR ECONOMIC EXPANSION CONTINUES

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

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, recent reports and statistics are showing that the American economy has rebounded from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and is back on its historic track of growth and productivity.

In November, 215,000 new jobs were created for a total of 4.4 million new jobs over the last 2½ years. Our economy grew at a solid 4.3 percent in the third quarter, and unemployment is at a low 5 percent rate. In addition, the productivity of American workers is at an impressive annual rate of 4.7 percent, the fastest pace in 2 years.

Mr. Speaker, this astounding economic growth has all taken effect ever since we passed, and the President signed, the jobs and growth bill into law in May of 2003.

However, we in Congress still have work to do. We must make these tax cuts permanent, cut wasteful spending, and create an environment so that key sectors of our economy, such as the telecommunications industry, can reach their full potential.

If we continue on this path, the ultimate winner will be the American people.

THE PATRIOT ACT REAUTHORIZATION

(Mr. LARSEN of Washington asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I am here today to highlight the contents of H.R. 3889, the Combat Meth Epidemic Act, which has been included in the PATRIOT Act conference report. As a co-chair of the Meth Caucus, I worked with our caucus members to craft a comprehensive meth bill that would attack our Nation's meth problem on multiple fronts. While I would have preferred a straight up-or-down

vote on a stand-alone meth bill, these meth provisions do benefit our communities.

Meth has been attacking this country, starting on the west coast and moving steadily eastward. It devastates communities, affecting not just meth users, but families, neighborhoods, public health, the environment, and crime rates.

This conference report takes necessary steps to limit access to a key meth precursor, pseudoephedrine. Significantly, it will allow for an additional prison sentence for individuals convicted of cooking or selling meth where children reside. Children are too often the silent victims of this drug. So this will help protect them by authorizing grants to assist children who have been found in meth labs.

For the first time, Congress is passing comprehensive anti-meth legislation that gives our local law enforcement and communities the tools, resources, and standards to protect themselves against the scourge of meth.

THE BORDER PROTECTION, ANTI-TERRORISM, AND ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION CONTROL ACT

(Mr. BEAUPREZ asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BEAUPREZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning in support of H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act, because I believe it is past time we took serious steps to secure our borders and the safety of this country.

Rest assured, this legislation is not perfect nor is it a silver bullet, but it is a good start in terms of shutting off the magnet that is drawing people into our country to work illegally. Specifically, this bill contains provisions to establish the mandatory use of an employee eligibility verification program, designed to help employers hire only those who are in this country legally.

I submit that I am just as pro-business as anyone else in this Chamber. As such, I believe the Federal Government has a duty to provide the business community with the tools necessary to abide by the rules and then we need to enforce them.

I believe the Border Protection Act takes us a big step in that direction.

FIX THE MEDICARE BENEFIT

(Mr. BISHOP of New York asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Mr. Speaker, hundreds of seniors in my district showed up to five town hall meetings I hosted over the past month to explain the Medicare drug benefit.

For as much interest as my constituents demonstrated, they are just as confused and frustrated by the daunting task, as President Bush put it yesterday, of understanding and then

choosing a drug plan from the dozens of plans with different premiums, deductibles, copayments, and lists of covered drugs.

Through no fault of their own, seniors are already encountering delays in their applications. Consequently, many will not receive their drug cards until after the sign-up deadline.

But we should not be surprised by a benefit whose flawed design was the result of ideology prevailing over practicality.

It is up to us here and now to make sure seniors understand their benefit and receive, without further delay, the affordable, life-saving drugs they deserve.

The first step should be extending the deadline by at least 6 months. I urge my colleagues to support this simple measure.

Seniors should not be rushed or penalized as they make this very important decision.

IRAQ SOLIDARITY DAY

(Mr. PRICE of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, Iraqis tomorrow will vote and America will stand firmly behind them for this historic milestone. While we look into the future, it is instructive to look back just a few short years. Iraqis lived in fear. "Freedom of expression" were three words most Iraqis thought they would never experience, and a brutal dictator oppressed millions of people.

Now optimism and success are sweeping Iraq. Hundreds of candidates vying for 275 representative spots are a product of this success. In the span of a few short years, Iraq's economic sector is setting the stage for growth. Introducing a new currency, reopening their stock exchange, loans to encourage small businesses, and infrastructure improvements are just a start.

More Iraqi security forces are being trained every day; and today, over 210,000 have been trained and equipped. The election this week is the next important step that must be taken in order to allow our men and women to begin coming home, having accomplished a great deal.

Mr. Speaker, tomorrow will be a historic day for Iraq, and all America will watch proudly as we witness freedom and democracy coming to reality before our eyes.

MEDICARE DRUG PLAN

(Mr. DEFAZIO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, the President breezed through a senior center yesterday, and he said, well, the Medicare drug plan seems perplexing, but he urged seniors to sign up anyway. It's a good deal, he said, of the program.

Well, it's a great deal for the pharmaceutical industry because it protects

their profits, and they get subsidies. It's a fabulous deal for the private insurance industry because they are getting subsidized to offer plans which they can change on a daily basis in terms of senior benefits, and seniors can only sign up once a year; but it isn't necessarily a good deal for many seniors. So the President gave bad advice.

Very low-income seniors, yes, they should, if they are not covered by another plan, look very carefully at their options and probably sign up. Others with very high prescription drug costs who don't have another plan, perhaps, but some would be losers under this plan. Many others, it is questionable whether they should sign up, and the government is not making it easy for them.

Minimally, we should extend the penalty deadline. After all, if the pharmaceutical companies and the insurance companies can change the seniors' benefits on a daily basis, why is it seniors can only sign up for one plan a year, can't change plans and will be penalized if they don't sign up by May?

□ 1030

IMMIGRATION REFORM

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

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to stress America's need for border security reform. We should be supporting those who enforce our laws, not rewarding those who break them. I believe our border security problem can be managed and controlled, but to do so, we need the vital assistance of our local and State governments.

Local law enforcement personnel see the repercussions of illegal immigration every day, but unfortunately, they do not have the clear authority to handle this problem, nor do they have the infrastructure and financial resources to turn illegal immigrants over to Federal authorities. This has to change.

The House version of our border security plan cannot be complete without language to help local authorities enforce our laws. My friend and colleague from Georgia (Mr. NORWOOD) has introduced the CLEAR Act, and I am a proud cosponsor of this legislation.

As we debate immigration reform, we must remember that illegal immigration is both a national and a local problem, and our solutions must assist law enforcement at all levels.

CONGRESS SHOULD STAY IN SESSION UNTIL IT EXTENDS ENROLLMENT PERIOD FOR PRESCRIPTION DRUG PLAN

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

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, this House should not adjourn for the

year before we extend the enrollment period for seniors to sign up for the Republican Medicare prescription drug plan. I did not support the law, because I favored a benefit within the actual Medicare program. Instead, Republicans chose a plan that forced seniors to choose from multiple plans.

President Bush and congressional Republicans say it is necessary to have multiple drug plans competing in order to help drive down costs, but a report from the Government Reform Committee says the complicated drug benefit has failed to lower drug prices. The prices available to seniors are over 80 percent higher than those negotiated by the Federal Government for veterans and 60 percent higher than the prices available to consumers in Canada.

Instead of lowering drug prices, the new prescription drug plan has resulted in mass confusion for seniors. Seniors should have the time to make the best choice for themselves rather than be penalized if they do not make a decision by May 15.

We should extend the deadline by 6 months before we leave for the year and support the Stark-Schakowsky bill, H.R. 3861.

TRIBUTE TO JAMES HOLMES, JR., SECOND HARVEST VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

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

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Mr. James Holmes, Jr., for being named America's Second Harvest Food Bank 2005 Volunteer of the Year.

Mr. Holmes is the founder of the community garden at the Children's Home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. For the past 7 years, he used land at the Children's Home to grow 70,000 pounds of fresh produce to feed the hungry.

When Mr. Holmes started this project at age 76, he had never planted a seed in his life. Nevertheless, he pursued this project with a passion. As a former board member at the Children's Home, he convinced them to donate 3 acres for the garden and to allow staff to assist with the farm equipment.

Mr. Holmes is to be commended for his tremendous efforts. He raised the start-up funding to purchase supplies, recruited and trained hundreds of volunteers, and invested thousands of dollars of his own money to buy a tractor and build a storage building and irrigation system. Each year, he organizes the planting of the garden, schedules people to volunteer twice a week and joins the crews that work through the hot summer months and into the fall harvest.

It is an honor to have compassionate, caring, and hardworking people like James Holmes, Jr., in the Fifth District.

HIGH ENERGY PRICES

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

Mr. CARNAHAN. Mr. Speaker, as this body prepares to adjourn for the year, we have an opportunity to look back at what the people's House has done for the American people. The answer, when it comes to addressing skyrocketing energy prices, is not much, especially for those most in need.

As winter weather settles in around the country, millions of American families are facing skyrocketing home heating prices with even greater impact if cold temperatures persist into the spring. Americans are also feeling the effects of soaring energy prices at the gas pump. The double burden of these added expenses will be far too much for many families.

Rather than taking the opportunity to address these costs for those most in need, the Republican leadership instead gave billions of dollars in tax breaks to those who need it least, big oil and gas companies that have posted not just record profits but the largest profits in the history of the world.

Mr. Speaker, Congress should not leave this year without repealing those tax breaks for big oil and converting the savings to low-income and senior Americans that need the help the most.

HELP DEFEND THE RESPECT OF CONGRESS

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

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, as elected officials, we hold ourselves to the highest standards. As Members of Congress, we pledge to defend the Constitution and uphold the laws of the United States. We are elected to serve the public trust. A breach of law by a Member of Congress is a serious offense that should have very serious consequences.

Taxpayers should not pay for the retirement benefits of a Member of Congress convicted of a felony. That is why I am introducing the Congressional Integrity Act of 2005, to restore trust in the Congress. It is joined by 12 other majority Members, moderates and conservatives for reform.

This important ethics legislation will lead us back to integrity in public life. The Congressional Integrity Act of 2005 would deny a congressional pension to any Member convicted and denied final appeal on a range of crimes directly related to their public duties, including bribery, including illegal compensation, including fraud, solicitation and tax evasion.

Mr. Speaker, similar legislation passed the House in 1996 by a vote of 391-32. It is time to finally pass this important reform.