

935 trucking companies had closed in the first quarter of this year, and they only counted trucking companies with five trucks or more. Two weeks ago we heard in a hearing of the Aviation Subcommittee that eight airlines had shut down, had ceased operating in the last year-and-a-half, and one more was in receivership.

We are at a very dangerous point. We don't have to produce all of our oil or all of our energy, but we have got to start producing a little bit more, or these foreign energy producers are going to know they can keep on raising these prices, and as I say, they are going to hurt a lot of working and ordinary Americans in the process.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MCHENRY) is recognized for 5 minutes. (Mr. MCHENRY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FACING AMERICA

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

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, last week the House went on recess to spend time in our districts commemorating our independence as a Nation. These celebrations every 4th of July are always a time to remember and honor the history of this great country. We think of the great moments when the United States of America shone as an unparalleled leader in liberty and achievement; the brave men who stormed the beaches of Normandy, followed by the Marshall Plan and the Berlin airlift; the Wright Brothers becoming first in flight; or, of course, Neil Armstrong taking that giant leap for mankind.

Perhaps above all, though, Madam Speaker, America's great moments have been expressions of great ideas. Our Nation was born out of the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. It established an enduring national philosophy based on the truth that we are all created equal and endowed by our Creator with inalienable rights.

Since that beginning, bold ideas have defined our Nation; the idea that government must be of the people, by the people, and for the people; the idea that checks and balances must be built into the very structure of government to ensure its responsiveness to the American people; the idea that every man, woman and child has the right to freely practice their faith; the idea that all ideas should be allowed to be freely expressed. This is our history and our heritage.

But Independence Day is not just a time to reflect on our past. It is also an opportunity to consider where we are headed. I believe that today, we as

Americans are currently grappling with very fundamental philosophical questions, and answers to these questions will present complex challenges in their implementation.

A central question is how to apply our core principles to the new challenges that we face. How do we secure ourselves against new threats without diminishing the civil liberties that we hold dear. How do we wage a war against Islamic extremism without appearing to treat those of the Muslim faith with the very intolerance that fuels extremism. How do we end the scourge of illegal immigration, while continuing to be that shining city on the hill to the many legal immigrants who have always helped to make this country the great Nation that it is.

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How do we engage in the worldwide marketplace while ensuring that Americans can successfully compete in a very dynamic economic environment?

Madam Speaker, there are those who say that America is bitterly divided today over these questions. It is certainly true that there is great diversity of opinion in how to address the security and economic challenges that we face. But if we are willing to engage each other in honest and open debate, this diversity of opinion is our great strength, not our weakness.

We as a Nation are facing substantial new challenges that demand a great clash of ideas, just as our Founders intended. Unfortunately, the recitation of inflammatory talking points has supplanted sincere and honest debate. The shrill voices of talking heads are no substitute for true engagement.

I believe Americans have grown weary of politics as usual, of the endless fighting that takes place here in Washington. But not because of the existence of opposing views. Americans have grown weary of the obstinacy, the hardened positions and intolerance of differing opinions, the refusal to truly engage in an open and substantive way.

Madam Speaker, in a country of over 300 million people, there will never be uniformity of opinion, but there can and should be a deep respect for that clash of ideas and an interest in reaching broad consensus on the great issues of our day. This is the essence of the United States of America, and it is the essence of why we last Friday celebrated our Nation's independence, the freedom of ideas, all ideas, to be debated, debunked, or developed in this messy process of democracy.

Madam Speaker, I truly believe that our country will rise to the challenges we face today, just as we have always done. And we will accomplish this through open, sometimes heated and passionate, but always respectful debate. The celebration of our independence is always at least a temporary unifier of America. But this year, we cannot afford to confine this unity to one day, the Fourth of July. I believe we should use this time to renew our

belief in a country that is bound together, not driven apart, by the clash of ideas out of which our great country was born.

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

(Ms. FOXX addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. WELLER of Illinois 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 New Jersey (Mr. GARRETT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey 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 Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SHUSTER 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 Georgia (Mr. BROUN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BROUN of Georgia 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 Illinois (Mr. KIRK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. KIRK 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 North Carolina (Mrs. MYRICK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. MYRICK addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. TIM MURPHY of Pennsylvania 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 Georgia (Mr. PRICE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

CREDIT CARDHOLDERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mrs. MALONEY of New York. Madam Speaker, I wish to address the Chamber tonight on the Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights.

In recent years, the playing field between credit card companies and credit cardholders has become very one-sided. It is no surprise that it is average American cardholders and not the credit card companies who are getting the short end of the stick.

A credit card agreement is supposed to be a contract. But what good is a contract when only one party has any power to make decisions, and one party makes all the decisions? Cardholders deserve more bargaining power. The United States Congress can and should help level the playing field between card companies and cardholders.

I introduced the Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights, H.R. 5244, to give American credit cardholders a fair deal. We now have over 155 cosponsors in this body. My comprehensive credit card reform bill takes a balanced approach to reforming major industry abuses and improving consumer protections for cardholders.

Put simply, the Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights protects cardholders against arbitrary interest rate increases any time and for any reason; prevents cardholders from being unfairly penalized; protects cardholders from due date gimmicks; shields cardholders from misleading terms, and empowers them to set limits on their own credit and to better control their own credit; prevents card companies from giving subprime credit cards to people who cannot afford them; and requires Congress to provide much better oversight of the credit card industry in general.

The Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights fosters fair competition and free market values. It sets no price controls, no rate caps, and no fees. It merely requires the card companies to let consumers know when they are jacking their fees up and increasing their rates. I believe the free market works best when consumers are empowered to make their own choices, and my bill would give cardholders the information and the rights they need to make choices about their own credit.

The balanced provisions in my bill are the deliberative result of over a year of careful study and analysis. Over the last 2 years, I held numerous congressional hearings and meetings to determine how Congress, Federal regu-

lators, and credit card companies could work together to help improve services and protections for cardholders.

There is no doubt that credit cards are very important to our economy. They offer cardholders instant access to a convenient and flexible source of financing, and have enabled many people to start new businesses, pay for tuition, or make other major purchases. Credit cards also provide many people with a safety net to help solve cash flow problems or cover unexpected expenses. But cardholders are increasingly confronting problems with unfair industry practices embodied in one-sided contracts, and this must be changed.

In recent months, the House of Representatives, under the leadership of Financial Services Chairman BARNEY FRANK, succeeded in passing major mortgage reform legislation and an economic stimulus plan. The Senate is now following suit. Both of these important steps will help get our economy back on track, but we cannot overlook credit card reform. It is a critical part of the equation, and one Congress will be turning its attention to.

Over 155 of my colleagues have already signed on as cosponsors of this important legislation. In the coming months, I plan to continue to build on the support this bill has gained, and I plan to work with BARNEY FRANK to get this marked up in committee so we can bring it to the floor for a vote.

Consumers deserve to know where their elected officials stand on credit card reform that affects their lives. This is a critical issue of importance to my constituents, and we must show them that Congress is ready to restore some balance between consumers and credit card companies.

When I started to work on this issue, one of the first things I did was hold a roundtable discussion with many of the stakeholders, major credit card issuers, as well as leading consumer advocates. From this discussion, I developed a series of principles that have guided the development of the legislation. I am going to take a few minutes to describe each of these principles, explain what the bill does to achieve them, and provide real-world examples of what this means to the average credit cardholder.

The first principle is that cardholders deserve protection against arbitrary interest rates any time and for any reason. Right now, credit card companies have the right to raise a customer's interest rate for any reason. This has made it very difficult for many consumers to understand how and why they have had their interest rate changed and hiked up on their credit cards.

Compounding this problem is that when a new higher interest rate is applied, it not only affects future purchases, it also raises the interest rate on existing balances. Consumers are often only made aware of these new

higher interest rate increases only after they have gone into effect.

To counter this problem, the Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights requires credit card companies to give a customer 45 days' notice of any and all interest rate hikes, and allows them the option to just say "no," to opt out of the interest rate increase. In return, if the cardholder opts out of the new rate, they are required to close the card and pay off the existing balance at the payment schedule they agreed to.

And here is a real-world example. A person has a \$1,000 balance and a 9.9 percent APR interest rate. One month, she pays her utility bill one day late. The credit card company charges her a \$35 late fee and raises her interest rate from 9.9 percent to over 29 percent, but does not tell her about the rate increase until she gets her next statement in the mail. The new rate is applied to the entire existing balance of \$1,000. And the consumer can try and get a new card at a lower rate, but until then the \$1,000 debt will be growing at a 29.99 percent rate of interest.

Under the Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights, the customer would still be charged the late fee, but they would be notified that, in 45 days, their interest rate would be raised from 9.9 percent to over 29 percent. This would give them more time to try to apply for a new credit card with a lower interest rate; or, they could decline the higher interest rate on the card, close the account, and pay off the balance at the old 9.9 percent rate.

I have got to say, under the Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights, the customer could still be assessed the higher interest rate for missing payments on other bills, but that new higher rate would only apply to purchases and balances going forward and not retroactive on their existing balances. They would also have the ability to opt out of the rate increase, close the account, and pay off their existing balances at the old rate.

Another principle in the bill is that cardholders who pay on time and don't go over their limit should not be penalized. The so-called double cycle billing is a confusing practice that certain card companies employ to charge cardholders more interest. It affects cardholders who go from paying off their balances in full to carrying a balance. Here is how it works.

Most card companies charge interest on the remaining unpaid balance from a cardholder's previous billing cycle. Card companies that use double cycle billing, however, charge cardholders interest on the entire balance from the previous cycle even if the cardholder paid part of it off. Card companies that use double cycle billing are effectively charging interest on balances that have already been paid. How fair is that? The Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights bans this really unfair practice called double cycle billing.

Here is a real-world example. A cardholder usually pays off her credit card