

which I introduced yesterday and which will recognize the importance labor unions play by ensuring a strong middle class by advocating for more equitable wages, humane working conditions, improved benefits and increased civic engagement of everyday citizens—the 99 percent. Ninety-nine Members cosponsored this resolution, and I'm proud to introduce it.

Unions have pioneered benefits such as paid health care and pensions and have helped strengthen access to the American dream by helping to establish government policies and efforts such as family leave, minimum wage, and Social Security. Unions have also been effective in supporting immigrant rights, trade policy, health care and living wage legislation.

Unions have been the voice for everyday Americans—from consumer protections to health, safety, and civil rights. The labor movement has fought to allow workers to negotiate on more equal footing with their employers, providing for a healthy, balanced workplace.

Unions benefit everyone, members and nonmembers. According to the Economic Policy Institute, if more of the 66 million American workers who want to join a union could join one tomorrow, their paychecks and benefits would increase, but so would millions of others. The union premium, as it's called, succeeds in lifting wages of non-union employees in the same industries while not being a deterring factor of the State's economic or its growth record.

Unfortunately, there has been a decline in union membership, due largely to unfair labor practices and scare tactics by union-busting employers. Between 1999 and 2007, more than 86,000 workers filed unfair labor practice claims with the NLRB for being illegally fired by their employer for union activity.

As a result of such efforts to weaken unions, among other things, our economy continues to suffer and the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen, undermining the foundation of the American middle class. Contrary to the belief of union bashers, unions do not increase unemployment or reduce job opportunities. Rather, there are a great deal of facts that correlate the strength of the economy and the middle class to the growth or decline of union membership.

Further, a recent report from the Congressional Budget Office also infers the impact that union membership decline has had on our economy and wealth distribution. The report found that from 1979 to 2007, average inflation-adjusted after tax income grew by 275 percent for the 1 percent of the population with the highest income. For those in the top 20 percent of the population, average real income grew only by 65 percent. However, the bottom fifth rose only by 18 percent. Three-fifths of the people are in the middle, and they grew by 40 percent. So that is

not an equal distribution of growth wealth.

The Wall Street Journal has stated “the main reason U.S. companies are reluctant to step up hiring is scant demand.” Demand is scarce because wages are stagnant while profits are up. The chief investment officer at JPMorgan Chase states: “U.S. labor compensation is now at a 50-year low relative to both company sales and U.S. GDP.” While wages are down, profit margins are up.

Let me ask you to support this legislation. We will continue to stand on the steps of Ohio, march in the streets of New Jersey, in our neighborhoods. I, in addition to the 99 Members of the House who support this bill, we urge its passage.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BENISHEK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BENISHEK. Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of talk about the partisanship and venom in Washington this year. And while we will certainly see fierce debates in the future, I believe Members of this body can still come together and find common ground.

On the surface, my colleague HANSEN CLARKE and I are very different. He is a lawyer representing the city of Detroit with a liberal voting record. I'm a conservative physician representing rural northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. We are both new to this House and share an interest in learning more about the unique challenges facing Michigan's citizens. After meeting HANSEN during freshman orientation, we agreed to tour each other's district.

In August I had the opportunity to head down to Michigan's 13th District in Detroit. There we toured employers such as Edward C. Levy Company and Mercy Primary Care Center and got to have some lunch on Mack Avenue. It was great to learn more about the district and be back in Detroit where I did my medical training. Next week Congressman CLARKE will tour with me in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. We will be meeting with area employers in Marquette and Escanaba, and will be getting a chance to see the splendor of Lake Superior with a visit to Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in Munising. I hope HANSEN will even get to try one of northern Michigan's famous pasties for lunch.

Mr. Speaker, although HANSEN and I are from different parties and dramatically different parts of the State, we are united in the goal of improving economic conditions in the great State of Michigan. We believe that neither party has a monopoly on good ideas, and by working together, we can help shape a better future for our children and grandchildren.

Despite our difference of opinion on many issues, we both recognize that America remains a place in the world

like no other, and that with liberty, courage, and hard work, there is no limit to one's destiny. I encourage all Members of this Chamber to pair up and schedule a visit to a different district.

Congressman CLARKE, I'm honored to have you as my friend, and I look forward to having you in Upper Michigan next week.

WORKING TOGETHER TO SERVE AMERICANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CLARKE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CLARKE of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Congressman BENISHEK for that wonderful invitation for me to visit your district. Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula, it's one of the most beautiful areas you can ever see in the country. It has delicious food and great people. I know I'm going to have a wonderful time. But also, too, my visit to northern Michigan will help DAN and I have another set of common experiences that we can use to help serve our people together.

With his area in northern Michigan and with the area that I'm hired to represent, metropolitan Detroit, we can focus on the common needs of our people. Let me give you an example. When Representative BENISHEK visited the east side of Detroit with me this past summer, we found out we had a lot of things in common. I'm born and raised on the east side. Well, he actually lived on the east side when he attended one of the finest medical schools in the country, Wayne State Medical School in the city of Detroit.

We visited several places, but in particular we visited the Mercy Primary Care Center. This is a health clinic located right in the heart of Detroit. Firsthand, we were able to hear from and see the challenges that many of our veterans are facing. Our veterans—these were young men and women who, because of their loyalty to our country, were sent overseas. They risked their lives. They risked their mental and emotional well-being. Many of them came back to Detroit only to face a place where they can't even find a job. They can't even find a home. They are out on the street with no place to live. No one should have to live in that type of indignity.

Representative BENISHEK, as a physician and as a Member of the House committee that oversees the Department of Veterans Affairs, he wanted to work with me to better serve these veterans. So he and I are now working together with the Department of Veterans Affairs to better provide shelter, health care, and training to these homeless veterans in the city of Detroit. This is an example of how Republicans and Democrats can work together to help our people.

And you know what? It's not really that hard for he and I to work together. The folks that he represents

and the people that I serve in metro Detroit, like all Americans, we all want the same thing. We just want to have a chance to live a decent life. We want those rights that are spelled out in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence, rights of life, of liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, just a chance to live your life as fully as you choose it. That's the American dream.

So while the deliberations of this House many times highlight the differences between Republicans and Democrats, he and I are choosing to underscore how we can work together to serve our people and make this country an even better place to live. It's my greatest honor to visit the Upper Peninsula, and it's also my honor to serve this country as a Representative of metropolitan Detroit.

□ 1110

FARM ACT OF 2011

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. HUELSKAMP) for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUELSKAMP. Mr. Speaker, as I have traveled across the First District of Kansas to host more than 70 in-person town hall meetings during my first 10 months here in Congress, constituents have reaffirmed our shared belief that Washington cannot be everything to everybody and nor should it be. They have told me they can and want to do more with less. They know that the more Washington spends today, the more their children and grandchildren will have to pay back in the future, and likely to a foreign nation.

And while they scale back their expectations, they want Washington to scale back what it asks them to do. The ever-tightening grip and imposition of the Federal bureaucracy's expensive, counterproductive, and unnecessary burdens are killing America's agriculture industry. Today, I will introduce the FARM Act of 2011—Freeing Agriculture to Reap More Act. I am unveiling it today in light of the pending ag discussions we hear are occurring in the supercommittee.

The FARM Act reflects the conversations I have had with constituents and farm groups all across the First District and addresses their concerns about the economic impacts of overregulation. In essence, the FARM Act adds a regulatory title to the farm bill. Given the consequences of overregulation, it merits its own title amid others like trade, research, conservation, or farm credit.

Farmers and ranchers arguably pay some of the largest costs for Washington's crushing burden of overregulation. Whether it is on youth involvement on family farms, pesticide application permits, greenhouse gases, farm dust, farm commercial vehicles, fuel hauling limitations for farm equipment, or livestock emissions taxes, the Federal Government continues to insist that it control the intricate, day-

to-day affairs of America's agriculture community. The FARM Act prohibits this regulatory overreach.

Kansas' family farms do not need Washington writing detailed instruction manuals for them on how much fuel they can or cannot put in their tractors. They do not need Washington prohibiting them from teaching their own children the value and importance of hard work by allowing them to work a few hours on the farm. And they most certainly do not need Washington imposing taxes on them for supposed greenhouse gases emitted by their livestock. No, they need Washington to let them run their operations in the safe and responsible, yet productive, ways they have done for generations. The FARM Act allows our family farms to continue the family tradition without fear of expensive and unnecessary regulations.

Like the families that live and the farms that operate in rural America, small towns in the First District of Kansas also have no need for additional instruction from Washington. That is why the FARM Act prohibits funding for the newly established White House Rural Council. Rural communities are the embodiment of family and entrepreneurial freedom, and this council seeks to replace that freedom with centralized planning schemes. We simply cannot afford more of the President's failed approaches.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the FARM Act of 2011. It's time to stop the overregulation of America's farmers, ranchers, ag communities, and rural America. It's time to put an end to Washington's distrust of America's growers, ranchers, and producers, as well as all of rural America.

VOTER SUPPRESSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHNSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, ladies and gentlemen, nothing is more fundamental in our democracy than the right to vote. Unfortunately, our right to vote is under attack.

According to a new report by the Brennan Center for Justice, voter suppression laws in States across the country could affect up to 5 million voters from traditionally Democratic demographics in 2012. It's no coincidence that this number is larger than the margin of victory in two of the last three Presidential elections.

These voter ID laws do nothing more than discourage and block eligible voters, especially students, the poor, seniors, and minorities. These are Americans who tend to vote for Democrats.

Recently, the media reported that a 96-year-old woman was denied a voter ID card in Chattanooga, Tennessee, because of one of these new laws. Her name is Dorothy Cooper, and she is a retired domestic worker. In fact, she was born in my home State of Georgia,

and she relocated to Chattanooga so that she could find work. She could not get all the documents together, and so, therefore, her request for a government-issued ID was denied.

After Indiana's photo ID law was implemented, the media reported about a group of elderly nuns who lacked driver's licenses and current passports, and they were turned away from the polls. Unfortunately, if States continue to pass these restrictive and unnecessary voter ID laws, we will hear more of these stories.

The Tea Party Republicans are trying to hijack our right to vote so that they can steal the 2012 election. I don't know about you, but I'm disgusted with Tea Party Republican attempts to use voter suppression laws to erode traditionally Democratic voters by blocking their access to the polls.

These voter ID laws do not prevent fraud. In fact, they do nothing other than suppress voter turnout. America has not seen this level of suppression since the days of poll taxes and literacy tests.

More than 30 States introduced legislation this year designed to impede voters at every step of the voting process. These laws do not combat fraud but prevent millions of hardworking, taxpaying Americans, especially minorities, young voters, the working poor, people with disabilities, and senior citizens from casting ballots in 2012 and beyond, making this the most significant setback to voting rights in a century.

Photo ID restrictions disenfranchise eligible registered voters. An estimated 11 percent of U.S. citizens—21 million people—do not have current, government-issued photo ID's. While poll taxes were abolished more than 60 years ago, this new slew of voter ID laws is reminiscent of the days when poll taxes were required, days which none of us want to revisit.

These Tea Party Republicans have been scheming from day one of President Obama's term in office to make sure that he's a one-term President. They want to take "their" country back. So State legislators, in accordance with this scheme, have passed a spate of laws specifically designed to block access to the ballot box by voters who tend to vote for Democrats. It's not fair, it's not right, and it's simply un-American.

Ladies and gentlemen, now is the time for all good men and women to come to the aid of their country.

□ 1120

NATIONAL RECYCLING WEEK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FLORES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. FLORES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize National Recycling Week.

Recycling and the return of recycled materials to the manufacturing process