

Well, the American people are asking: Why not simply compromise on a clean extension of the payroll tax credit for 160 million workers and unemployment insurance? Why not ensure that 160 million hardworking families can benefit from the average of \$1,000 they will receive from the payroll tax credit—again, right into the economy.

Yesterday the Republican majority decided they would rather risk raising taxes and digging into the pockets of families all across this country. Well, Mr. Speaker, not even Scrooge could do what we saw on the floor yesterday. In the end, our holiday humbugs—the Grinch, Mr. Scrooge, and even Mr. Potter—learned that there is redemption. It's time for our House Republicans to do the same. I urge the majority to instead bring to the floor a sensible and thoughtful piece of legislation to extend unemployment compensation and the payroll tax credit.

REPUBLICAN AGENDA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. FUDGE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. FUDGE. Mr. Speaker, after a year of attempts to eliminate Medicare and obstruct any kind of jobs bill, the Republican agenda is clear: eliminate the deficit at any cost, including at the expense of our most vulnerable, while adversely impacting our economic recovery.

More than 1.6 million American children were homeless at some point in 2010. These are children under the age of 18 living in emergency shelters or in shared housing, and many are living on the street. Now, in 2011, the number of homeless children continues to increase. There are more homeless children today than after the natural disasters of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The recession's economic devastation has left 1 in 45 children homeless, millions of Americans are out of work, and we have pushed unemployment rates to levels not seen in decades.

We continue to see poverty soar. In 2010, nearly one in six Americans was living in poverty. As poverty surged to its highest level since 1993, median household incomes declined, which is why it is maddening to me that we in Congress can't agree or even come to a point where we can agree to compromise on policies that will help struggling Americans.

In the 49 weeks since the Republicans took control of this House they have failed to pass a single bill to encourage job growth. They pledged to focus on economic recovery, but they have failed to deliver. I have sponsored four jobs bills in the last 6 months, but none of them has been brought up for a vote. What the majority has done is try to advance their own political agenda. Their priority is clear: eliminate the deficit at any cost on the backs of the most vulnerable.

This year, Republicans proposed a budget that would privatize Medicare

and make Medicaid a block grant, sacrificing care for our seniors, our sick, and our poor. The Republican budget slashed more than \$6 trillion—with a “t”—over the next decade from Medicaid, SNAP, Medicare, and many other programs supporting low- and middle-income Americans. The majority suggests these drastic changes while leaving in place tax cuts for the wealthiest and \$40 billion in Big Oil tax loopholes.

The majority's budget would devastate poor communities and middle class Americans. It pushes seniors into the hands of private insurance companies and forces them to pay more out-of-pocket expenses. What we need is a bold approach, Mr. Speaker, to maintaining these programs rather than finding ways to defund or derail them.

Almost 6 million workers have been unemployed for a year or more in this country, so we know there is a strong need to extend unemployment insurance. What we've seen this week makes me skeptical. Here we are at the end of one of the most unproductive congressional sessions we've had in recent history. In this end of the year drama, Republicans play the role of the Grinch who stole Christmas.

Yesterday, the House passed a bill that slashes unemployment insurance by 40 weeks in the States that are hardest hit, including my own home State of Ohio. If signed into law, beneficiaries without a high school degree would be denied insurance unless they use the benefits we're giving them to pay for getting their GED. The bill also allows States to force recipients to take drug tests.

In 2010, unemployment benefits kept 3.2 million Americans—including nearly 1 million children—from falling into poverty. I don't even want to imagine the magnitude of the problem if we fail to extend unemployment insurance now.

During this holiday season more than ever, Americans feel there is no way out. Last week, a woman in Texas, who was originally from the State of Ohio, killed herself and shot her two children because they were denied SNAP benefits. One of those children has died. Mr. Speaker, this is desperation, homelessness at its worst.

THE END OF THE IRAQ WAR: WELCOMED BUT TRAGICALLY OVERDUE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, since the spring of 2004 I've stood here in this very spot 415 times to call for an end to foreign wars and the start of a new, smarter approach to national security. In most of those speeches my tone has been one of insistence and beseeching. Seldom have I been able to echo good news or declare a sense of accomplishment, but Mr. Speaker, today is different. As the President will reaffirm

in a speech at Fort Bragg today—and it moves me almost beyond words to say this—the war in Iraq is finally over.

After 105 excruciating months, after so much heartbreak and despair, after so many shameful episodes—such as the “Mission Accomplished” banner, Abu Ghraib, the outing of Valerie Plame, and so much more—our troops are finally coming home from Iraq, all of them.

Much credit goes to President Obama for making good on his promise. When he was sworn into office, there were 142,000 U.S. servicemembers deployed to Iraq; by the time the calendar turns in 2012, there will be zero; zero.

□ 1050

But this day would not have come unless some very brave people had spoken up for peace at a time when the polls and the conventional wisdom said that President Bush and his Iraq policy were unassailable.

I've been proud to work in particular with my friends, Congresswoman BARBARA LEE and Congresswoman MAXINE WATERS, in establishing the Out of Iraq Caucus. Many of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle stood shoulder to shoulder with us, including our late friend, Jack Murtha, who's opposition to the war represented a major turning point in the Iraq debate.

Of course, no one displayed more courage than the heroic men and women who served in Iraq with honor and selflessness. They present the best our Nation has to offer. I only wish that their elected leaders had served them better over the last decade.

But, Mr. Speaker, we must be careful. We must be careful about turning this into an occasion of triumph or celebration. The end of the Iraq War is welcome, but tragically, overdue. Too much has been lost in precious American blood, in badly needed public treasure, and in our moral core as a Nation. The end of this war comes too late for nearly 4,500 Americans whose parents, spouses, children, and friends will miss them desperately this holiday season and every other day of the year.

Many thousands more are home from Iraq with broken minds and bodies, with scars they will carry for the rest of their days. We must keep our promise to them to provide the benefits that they so need and deserve.

I don't know how we atone for the deaths of thousands upon thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians. Our military occupation in Iraq is over, but our bilateral engagement with Iraq most certainly will go on. There is still plenty of human need in Iraq, and we must have an obligation to help alleviate that.

It is critical that the United States be a peaceful and constructive partner with Iraq, investing in development, providing the civilian support that will empower its people, and strengthening its democratic institutions. Now is the moment. Now, more than ever, we must move to a smarter security in Iraq.

Finally, it is critical to remember that the end of the Iraq War does not mean we are a Nation at peace. The war in Afghanistan lingers on, violently and senselessly, still undermining our national security and weakening our country. We must, Mr. Speaker, move more quickly than ever to end that conflict.

It is time to bring our troops home, all of our troops, safely home, now.

ADMINISTRATIVE OVER-REGULATION

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

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, it's an honor to follow my friend and colleague from California who's retiring at the end of the Congress, which is another year. Even though we disagree probably too many times to count, no one questions her passion and her commitment, and her moral consciousness of doing the right thing. So give me a chance to publicly state that, and I look forward to serving with you in the final year together.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor to read a letter from a businessman in southwestern Illinois who is closing up the business.

But even more timely than that was a Wall Street Journal editorial today. I mean, I was bringing the letter down anyway, so then I decided, looking at the Wall Street Journal editorial. And it's titled, "Regulation For Dummies." The White House says its rulemaking isn't costly or unusual. The evidence shows otherwise.

First paragraph. "The White House is on the political offensive, and one of its chief claims is that it isn't the over-regulator of business and Republican lore. This line has been picked up by an impressionable columnist, so it's a good time to consider the evidence in some detail." So they go through the analysis.

It ends up by saying the evidence is so overwhelming that the Obama regulatory surge is one reason the current economic recovery has been so lackluster by historical standards. Rather than nurture an economy trying to rebuild confidence after the financial heart attack, the administration pushed through its now famous blitz of liberal policies on health care, financial services, energy, housing, education, and student loans, telecom, labor relations, transportation, and probably some other industries we've forgotten. Anyone who thinks this has only minimal impact on business has never been in business.

Now, the column was dated December 14. This letter was dated December 7.

"You are the finest customer that we have served or you are one of the finest professionals that have served these customers.

"After 61 years, of which 58 were wonderful years in the construction business and having been associated

with the greatest of people, it's with much sadness and disappointment that we have to announce that we will be closing December 31, 2011.

"You all know that we served the private sector. We've enjoyed working with industry, aviation, and all private businesses and entrepreneurs. We always felt that you were the pulse of the whole USA. It's sad to say that, through no fault of yours, that this pulse has slowed to a level that can no longer sustain the quality of service we have always felt obligated and more desired to provide.

"Our government is wonderful in that it provides for our common defense, our highway infrastructures and a few other worthy endeavors. However, they are, in fact an expense, an expense that we should enjoy funding. Though when they lose sight of the true fact that we in the private enterprise pay the bills and do not support an environment in which we can flourish with the fruits of our hard work, the funding will soon cease to exist.

"Government cannot produce revenue or prosperity, but they, like us, could enjoy both if they look at themselves as any other hired service organization that has to be worth the money they are getting paid. That's the way all of us have to operate and what gives us pride in what we do.

"God bless you. Thank you. And we pray that we all find American leadership to restore the pulse and pressure of the great private sector and the American Entrepreneur again. You are the Heartbeat of America. Again, God bless you."

And so, these two written, one column, one letter, occurring simultaneously almost, highlighting the point that it is this regulatory regime pushed on by the executive branch that is, if not outright destroying jobs, it's making it very difficult for jobs to flourish. That's why in the bill last night we moved the Keystone XL pipeline, connected with the Boiler MACT. That's why we've done some other bills to, at least legislatively, put barriers into the excesses of the regulatory regime here from the executive branch.

Mr. Speaker, I think this was timely to come down to the floor and share this letter, and I thank you for the time.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 12 noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 58 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until 12 noon.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer: Gracious God, we give You thanks for giving us another day.

You have blessed us with all good gifts, and with thankful hearts we express our gratitude. You have created us with opportunities to serve other people in their need, to share together in respect and affection, and to be faithful in the responsibilities we have been given.

We wish to acknowledge before You, O God, the sacrifice of so many American men and women and many allies during many years of our commitments in Iraq. We thank them, and You, for their service and ask for Your continued blessing upon them as they now live into a future more secure because of their efforts.

In this moment of prayer, please grant to the Members of this people's House the gifts of wisdom and discernment, that in their words and actions they will do justice, love with mercy, and walk humbly with You.

May all that is done this day be for Your greater honor and glory.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GRAVES) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. GRAVES of Georgia led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed without amendment a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 2845. An act to amend title 49, United States Code, to provide for enhanced safety and environmental protection in pipeline transportation, to provide for enhanced reliability in the transportation of the Nation's energy products by pipeline, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the Senate has passed with amendments in which the concurrence of the House is requested, a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 2867. An act to reauthorize the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, and for other purposes.