

ago to Kosova on a peacekeeping mission. While overseas, the unit was responsible for all aerial operations within their area of responsibility. Company C soldiers logged 2,899 flight hours in 951 missions, they ran multiple mechanical inspections and refueling missions, and dispensed 246,260 gallons of fuel.

The West Virginia National Guard plays a key role in the defense of our country and interests around the world. America could not be prouder to have these men and women as our representatives.

Today I am thrilled to say, Welcome home, Company C.

SUPPORT AMERICA'S CIVIL SERVANTS

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

Mr. HOYER. Madam Speaker, yesterday we passed a Defense authorization bill. That Defense authorization bill had a 1.6 percent increase for our military personnel. That was an appropriate thing for us to do.

However, at the same time we are looking at reducing very substantially the pay and benefits available to our civilian Federal employees. Madam Speaker, I rise out of a deep concern that this Congress continues to ask one group to sacrifice to bring down our Nation's deficit while not asking others to contribute as well.

That one group are average working Americans. Now, they work for the Federal Government, some perhaps the State and local governments. And there is an antipathy towards government by many, many of the public, many Members of this House. That antipathy is, therefore, focused on the workers. But we have substantially fewer Federal employees today than we had 20 years ago, not only in terms of real numbers but in terms of per capita, where the population has substantially expanded and the number of Federal employees per person to be served has been substantially reduced.

With all of the challenges we face today on a national scale, we ought to ensure that those who help devise solutions and carry them out receive the recognition they are due. We talk a good game on this floor; but, very frankly, we turn it over to employees to carry out our policies. We don't do that. They do it.

They should not be constantly subjected to the kind of verbal attacks and legislative assaults we have seen over the last couple of years and that are included in the bills that have passed this House just this past week. I am speaking, of course, about America's public servants.

Those who work in civilian government positions are no less important to our safety, health, prosperity, and general well-being than their military counterparts who protect our freedom.

I honor our troops. I will be wearing a yellow ribbon later today to welcome

home those troops who have fought to protect country, defeat terrorists, and stabilize the international community. They have blessed America with their courage and their commitment and their service.

□ 1020

But Federal civilian employees make certain that the products we buy and the prescription drugs we use are safe. They perform critical research to advance the fight against cancer and other diseases. They help our farmers and ranchers access new markets for their goods. They see millions of passengers travel safely across our skies and keep watch over our ports and border crossings. They ensure a fair playing field for banks and businesses and enforce the rules we have in place to preserve the health of our air and water from pollution.

So many of the public functions we often take for granted are the purview of the hardworking men and women who constitute our Federal workforce. They're middle class Americans, working Americans, who have, in many cases, chosen to serve their country by lending their talents and skills—some for a short time, others for their entire careers.

As an American, I am proud of the work they do, and as a Member of Congress from Maryland, I am proud to represent a great number of them in this House. But for those who believe that most or even a significant number of our Federal workers live here in Washington, Maryland and Virginia, let me set the record straight. Eighty-five percent of Federal employees live and work somewhere other than the Washington metropolitan area—85 percent. They provide essential services to neighbors and communities in all 50 States and every single one of our districts.

Everything must be on the table when addressing the budget. And by the way, I put on the table a zero COLA adjustment 2 years ago sitting in the White House around the table, having talked to leaders of our Federal employees. I said, look, we need to tighten our belt. Americans are having trouble, we have a lot of our neighbors out of work, we need to tighten our belt, and we took a zero percent. We have taken it 2 years in a row, a \$60 billion contribution already by Federal employees—\$60 billion. We say we can't raise a nickel of additional taxes from the most well off in America, but we can take \$60 billion from average working men and women in this country. Everything must be on the table.

I'm deeply disappointed, however, that we continue to attack these public servants unfairly and single them out. Now when I say "we," I mean the Republican bills that have been offered on this floor and have been discussed.

When middle class families across the country are struggling to make ends meet, Federal employees have already accepted a 2-year pay freeze.

That was appropriate. That was acceptable. But continuing assault on just one segment is not. This comes on top of salaries that are already lower than those for comparable private-sector jobs. Let me repeat that because there is a prejudice that somehow Federal employees are vastly overpaid. In fact, the Federal Salary Council's annual report last month found that Federal workers are paid, on average, 26.3 percent less than comparable private sector jobs.

Now some people don't understand that because what we ask our Federal employees to do requires for the most part high skills. We have a lot of engineers, scientists, and doctors at NIH, at Goddard NASA and in the FBI, highly skilled, highly educated people, a 26.3 percent differential in pay for comparable work that is done in the private sector.

Now most of you who, many of you are sitting there, and perhaps our viewers, are saying, oh, no, that's not true, I know it's not true, because I see what the average salaries are. What they don't see are the average requirements for skills.

Madam Speaker, America's public servants are already making a contribution because they loved this country and recognized that when times are tight, everyone—everyone—everyone has to pitch in, even the best off in America. A belief in smaller government does not grant one license to diminish the contribution made by those who serve in government. If we cut government and need less people to run it, that makes sense.

But what does not make sense is to undermine the ability to recruit and retain the quality of people that we need to continue to make this country, in partnership with the private sector, the greatest country on the face of the Earth. We must always remember that we are blessed, as Lincoln said, with a government of the people, by the people and for the people, that this is us together, the one who serves and the one who benefits from that service. It is the bond of a neighbor and that of a fellow American. Let us remember that. Yes, we need to tighten the belt in a notch. We need to make sure that we are on a fiscally sustainable path. But let us do so in a way that has everybody contribute, not just an unfavored few who serve us well.

FIXING THE PAYROLL TAX

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

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Madam Speaker, one of the items of unfinished business remaining to this Congress is extending the payroll tax cut of last year that funds Social Security. It is an inframarginal tax cut, meaning that it doesn't change economic incentives and therefore it doesn't produce lasting economic growth. But it does provide

great relief to working families, allowing them to keep more of their earnings at a time of declining incomes, shriveling assets, and rising prices, and it should be extended. But it must be extended responsibly to avoid doing further damage either to the economy or to the Social Security system that this tax supports.

That means we have to make up the lost revenue. Now the Democrats have said, well, no problem, just tax the rich. In fact, they say that a lot. The problem is that the tax increases they propose are marginal tax increases, precisely the kind of tax increase that does enormous damage to the overall economy. Remember, more than half of net small business income would be subject to their tax increase—at precisely the moment when we're depending upon those small businesses to create two-thirds of the new jobs that our people desperately need.

Now the measure passed out of the House this week also does far more harm than good. Unfortunately, the House added \$167 billion to this year's already crushing deficit, mostly to pay for the payroll tax cut, purporting to repay 1 year's tax relief over the next 10 years. How does it do that? Well, in part, it tacks on additional fees to mortgages backed by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. This shifts the burden to home buyers, who will end up paying far more in new taxes that are now hidden in their mortgage payments than they will ever get back from the tax cut. True, under the House version, the average family will save over \$1,000 in payroll taxes, but if that family takes out a \$150,000 mortgage backed by Fannie or Freddie, they'll end up paying an extra \$3,000 as a result of this bill—\$1,000 of tax cuts for \$3,000 of extra mortgage payments.

Put more bluntly, the House version kicks the housing market when it's already down, making it that much more expensive for home buyers to re-enter that market and adding to the pressures that have chronically depressed our home values. Worse, the House version would turn Fannie and Freddie into tax collectors for the general fund. If the House bill is enacted, we will have constructed a cash machine for government with an adjustable knob. And given the insatiable appetite of this government, the odds are far greater that that knob will be turned up and not down in coming years.

Ironically, one of the reasons to continue the payroll tax cut is because of shrinking family assets—mainly the value of their homes. The House version adds to the downward pressure on their home values while telling them we're doing them a favor. Some favor.

Fortunately, there is a way to extend the payroll tax cut, protect the Social Security system, and avoid doing further harm to the economy, and that's the measure offered by Mr. LANDRY of Louisiana, H.R. 3551. That bill was given short shrift in the House last week, and that's a shame.

Mr. LANDRY's bill would give every American the choice to receive the year of tax relief in exchange for delaying their retirement by a month. According to the Social Security chief actuary, this would pay for itself. It would give every family in America the choice of deciding for itself whether the benefits of the tax cut are worth the cost of working a month longer. It would provide tax relief for those families that need it without doing harm to the Social Security system that the tax supports and without shifting the burden to pay for it to home buyers, as the House version does, or to job creators, as the Senate version would have done.

It's not too late to fix this problem the right way. And I would strongly urge the House to take Mr. LANDRY's bill more seriously in the closing days of this session.

□ 1030

BILL OF RIGHTS DAY

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

Mr. COHEN. Madam Speaker, today is the 220th anniversary of the passage of the Bill of Rights. It was declared Bill of Rights Day by Franklin Roosevelt back in the forties and it's an anniversary that's too often overlooked.

Ken Paulsen, the President of the First Amendment Center in Nashville, Tennessee, at Vanderbilt University's campus and the American Society of News Editors, recently wrote that the Bill of Rights is "a document that guarantees core personal liberties, including freedom of expression and faith, a fair judicial process, the right to bear arms, and protection against unreasonable government seizures . . . yet almost no one takes time to reflect on the importance of December 15th and the anniversary of these fundamental freedoms," and particularly what they really are. That's why I wanted to come to the well today and spend a few minutes reflecting on this amazing document and the freedoms that we derive from it.

It's easy to take our Bill of Rights for granted. Of course we have the right to speak our minds. We don't live in fear that the police will break down our doors without exigent circumstances or a warrant. It would be ridiculous to imagine a church of America to which we all must belong and to which we must worship according to its dictates; but you only need to look across the globe to the Arab Spring and elsewhere to see millions of people protesting and risking their lives just to have a taste of the freedoms we take for granted, and you realize how fortunate we are.

When the Constitution was ratified, there were very few individual rights guaranteed. It was mostly about setting up the structure of government.

But Thomas Jefferson and others argued that the Bill of Rights was necessary to protect individuals from their government. Think about how wise the Founders were to ensure that the very government they were establishing would not encroach on certain fundamental liberties of the people. As Jefferson wrote in letter to James Madison, "a bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on Earth."

Since Jefferson was not part of that Constitutional Convention, James Madison took up the task of drafting a bill of rights. After much debate and compromise, 10 amendments were approved and added to the Constitution. Right at the very beginning, we find the bedrock of the Bill of Rights, the great five freedoms of the First Amendment: religion, freedom of speech, press, to peacefully assemble, and petition of government. Those are the most basic freedoms we have, but they're not always without controversy.

From the so-called "War on Christmas" to government-led prayer in school, we continue to debate what the free exercise of religion and the establishment clause meant. And that is not new.

Thomas Jefferson found himself deep in the war over religious liberty as well. In response to attacks that he was insufficiently religious, he wrote in a letter to Benjamin Rush, "For I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." He went on to explain in his famous letter to the Danbury Baptists that there is "a wall of separation between church and State" since "religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God."

But that does not put the issue to rest. We continue to wrestle with these issues today. But the Bill of Rights, particularly the First Amendment, is what enables us to work our differences out peacefully through the democratic process.

We have the right to speak our mind without fear that the government will stifle dissent. We have the ability to hold our government accountable with a vibrant free press because an informed citizenry is what keeps democracy strong. And we have the right to protest when we're dissatisfied with our government.

Whether it's actions by the Tea Party or the Occupy movements, the people are exercising their right to assemble and petition their government for redress of grievances. As elected officials, it's up to us to consider their causes while also protecting their rights.

I remember back in 1993 when I was a Tennessee State senator, in one week I stood on the legislative plaza and I defended the Second Amendment urging the passage of Tennessee's right to carry bill, and the next week I was on the plaza supporting a woman's right to choose, which comes through the