

abandoned homes in my district and across the Nation.

Remnants of the foreclosure crisis still linger everywhere. Home values plummeted during the country's economic crisis and have continued to decline year after year due to the blighted and abandoned homes. Nationally, nearly 4½ percent of mortgages are in foreclosure. More than a quarter of mortgage borrowers are underwater, and 11 percent of all homes are vacant.

City and State governments need our help. In the Cleveland area, 15,000 homes are vacant and in need of demolition. Demolishing these structures will cost approximately \$100 million.

Homeowners are depending on us to help stop the free-fall of their property values. It is time we develop and pass meaningful legislation that promotes the revitalization of our neighborhoods.

PICAYUNE 5A FOOTBALL STATE CHAMPIONS

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

Mr. PALAZZO. The city of Picayune might be small, but its legacy is one of strength and power. In the early 1900s, trains out of New Orleans stopped in Picayune to pick up steam engines to power them northwards and uphill. This vision of a powerful locomotive steaming ahead is a good metaphor for this year's Picayune High School Maroon Tide football team.

According to Head Coach Dodd Lee, people who really like what they do usually do it pretty well, and if that's the case, Coach Lee's players must really like playing great football.

In a 38-21 win over Starkville, the Maroon Tide clenched the 5A win, bringing Picayune its first State title since 1986.

Aside from the obvious desire to win on both sides of the ball, Picayune has some secret weapons on their team, namely: quarterback, Ben Hickman; leading rusher, Deronte Magee; receiver, Justin Mark; kicker, Dalton O'Meara; and a small but mighty pair of linebackers, Troy Egana and Cody Smith.

Congratulations to the city of Picayune and to Picayune High School on their State championship.

PROTECTING WORKERS' RIGHTS

(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, it's no secret that my Republican colleagues really don't want to extend the payroll tax cuts and unemployment insurance. Republican Members have called it a gimmick. They've admitted the only reason they brought it up for a vote was that they didn't want to take the political heat for raising taxes on the

middle class. But instead of coming up with an honest compromise designed to actually pass, Republicans have filed a bill with provisions that wind up actually hurting the middle class and many still struggling in this slow economy.

Playing risky political games with our clean air, our clean water, raising Medicare premiums on seniors, that's not the way Americans expect us to govern, and designing a bill that can't pass is the type of political games that my Missouri constituents are fed up with. We need an honest bill now.

I call on my Republican colleagues to stop the obstruction, stop the distraction, stop the games. Let's pass a real payroll tax bill now.

WE MUST DO BETTER

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

Mr. JOHNSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong objection to the animosity and gridlock that's been the overarching theme of this first session of the 112th Congress.

I make dozens of calls and similar personal contacts directly with my constituents every day, probably more than any other Member of Congress. These people live in the real world beyond the beltway environment in which too many public officials live and work, sheltered from reality, by communication primarily with each other in a self-created climate that bears little similarity to the rest of America.

In my years in public office, I have never heard the level of anger I hear today. Our approval ratings are in the tank, and they should be. We are gripped in gridlock because people on both sides of the aisle in both Chambers and in the White House are more concerned with politics than progress.

As our economy continues to stagger, our attention should be focused on putting people to work and providing a stability in public policy. We can only do that through cooperation, compromise, and civility.

My message to leadership and membership, including myself, in both Chambers is this: We have to do the business the people expect us to do, efficiently and in an adult-like manner. Anything less is both irresponsible and unacceptable. We can and we should do vastly better than what we are.

TAXES

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

Mr. BACA. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome our troops back; and as we welcome them back, let's make sure we take care of them while they're here in the United States as well and make their lives a lot better.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to stop showboating and get to work. If Congress does not act by the end of the year, 160

million Americans will face a tax hike next year and another 60 million people will lose unemployment benefits.

Failure to extend unemployment benefits has a real impact on men and women across every State, people like Norma Lopez from my district in Ontario. While Norma has been looking for work, her unemployment benefits have kept her from getting foreclosed and has helped her make car payments.

Unfortunately, the Republican proposal is full of poison pills and amendments that make the bill dead on arrival in the Senate. Republicans are asking seniors to pay more for Medicare and they're leaving the unemployed out in the cold, yet they refuse to ask millionaires and billionaires to pay their fair share.

Stop the political games. People's lives are hanging in the balance. They deserve help. Let's work together on a compromise bill that will help all of us.

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THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE WATCHING AND WAITING ON THE U.S. SENATE TO ACT

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

Mr. BONNER. Mr. Speaker, with the American people looking on, Members of the House, once again, find ourselves in a waiting position—waiting and waiting and waiting on Senator REID and his Democrat majority in the U.S. Senate as they decide whether they are going to let the government shut down tomorrow night at midnight; whether they are going to let tax relief for millions of Americans, middle class families, expire at the end of this month; whether they are going to let long-term unemployment benefits expire; and whether they are going to keep America's doctors from being hammered with a 27 percent increase on their Medicare reimbursement.

Mr. Speaker, the people's House is doing the people's work. As you know, we've passed 28 bills, all aimed at creating new American jobs. Sadly, all the majority on the other side of the Capitol seem able to do is poke sticks at what we've done, but they haven't offered a realistic option or passed a single thing.

Mr. Speaker, the clock is ticking, and the American people are watching and waiting on the Senate to act.

STEM EDUCATION

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

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, I believe that one of the keys to keeping our country globally competitive is to increase the number of American students who are prepared to pursue careers in science, engineering and technology. So it is with special pride that

I note that, last week, the White House honored Tamara Brown from Hamburg, New York, as a champion of change for her work with young women and their parents and teachers.

Seven years ago, Tamara founded Tech Savvy, a program using fun and innovation to inspire students to explore their talents in science and math and to pursue our Nation's careers of the future. In bringing together industry, academic and community leaders, Tamara has helped so many young western New Yorkers discover their full potential. She has helped prepare them for some of our Nation's highest-paying and most competitive career fields.

I applaud Tamara Brown for helping girls from western New York train for careers in science, and I congratulate her on this wonderful recognition.

BIG GOVERNMENT IS THE TOP CONCERN FOR AMERICANS

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

Mr. HULTGREN. Some in this Chamber believe that the answer to our Nation's problems is more government, that we need more unchecked spending, more unelected bureaucrats, and more rules and regulation in our everyday lives.

Yet, in a Gallup Poll just this week, 64 percent of Americans across the political spectrum responded that their biggest fear and the greatest threat to our country is Big Government. They've seen, just as I've seen, that burdensome rules and regulation and out-of-control spending and debt bring us nothing but high unemployment and an uncertain future for our kids and our grandkids.

That's why the House Republicans have been working tirelessly this year to pass pro-growth, pro-jobs bills that will restore the confidence our Nation's job creators need to put Americans back to work again. Yet nearly 30 of these bills, which would restore reasonable regulation, reduce spending and create a smaller, less intrusive Federal Government, continue to languish over in the Senate, which still refuses to address the needs of unemployed Americans.

We can't wait. Pass these jobs bills so that Americans can start working again and so that America can move forward.

IN THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS, CHANUKAH, AND KWANZA, LET'S PASS A CLEAN BILL

(Mrs. CHRISTENSEN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. This year and every time the Democrats have tried to do the right thing for the American people, the Republicans say "no" unless they add their poison pills. In the past, that might have led to negotia-

tions that might have ended in a bipartisan solution—but not so today.

Today, Republicans are trying to force us to accept the Keystone pipeline before we are sure it is safe for the communities it will traverse and won't make the air we breathe dirtier than it already is. The President is right to wait until those things are assessed. In their zeal to kill the Affordable Care Act, they want to slash the Public Health and Prevention Fund and other programs that keep people healthy and reduce health care costs for families and our country.

Democrats have been calling for passing our Make It in America and other jobs bills, but the Republicans insist on jobs that damage the public health and on killing jobs in the only sector that is growing—health care. Because they have not helped the recovery, our fellow Americans still need the payroll tax deduction and unemployment insurance and a fix of doctors' Medicare reimbursements so that they can continue services to the millions of Americans on Medicare.

Let's do a clean bill in the spirit of Christmas, Chanukah and Kwanza.

A big "welcome home" to our troops. I thank them all for their service.

TROOPS RETURNING FROM IRAQ

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

Mr. CICILLINE. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor our brave men and women returning home from Iraq, especially Rhode Island's Company D, 126 TAC.

Thank you for your tremendous dedication, selfless efforts, and courageous service to our country.

Tragically, thousands of our servicemembers have made the ultimate sacrifice, and I join all Americans in honoring their service and sacrifice and those of their families.

It is because of you that we are able to enjoy the great freedoms, privileges, and rights we have here at home.

With the homecoming of our troops from Iraq, we must keep our promise to our veterans. On the battlefield, the military pledge is to leave no soldier behind. As a Nation, let it be our pledge that, when they return home, we leave no veteran behind. We must do everything we can to honor them by guaranteeing they have the help they need in finding employment, in securing housing, and in accessing quality health care.

The men and women who have served our country demonstrate the ideals of bravery and patriotism. Now let us work together to create a future worthy of their service.

REPUBLICAN EFFORTS TO CUT UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

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

Mr. PETERS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to oppose Republican efforts to slash unemployment benefits.

Earlier this week, House Republicans passed legislation that would cut 40 weeks of unemployment benefits and impose new hurdles for Americans relying on this critical lifeline. With five job seekers in the United States for every available job, the average time it takes an unemployed worker to find a new job is 10 months. Instead of passing the American Jobs Act and getting our Nation's long-term unemployed back to work, Republicans are cutting benefits which millions of Americans rely on for groceries, utilities, and rent.

The Republican plan would hurt workers who are having difficulty in finding new jobs and would pull billions of dollars out of our still-recovering economy. Poverty is at its highest level since 1993; but unemployment benefits kept over 3 million Americans, including 1 million children, out of poverty in 2010; and now Republicans are fighting to gut this necessary lifeline.

During this holiday season, when millions of Americans are worried about being able to pay their rent, I urge my colleagues to oppose slashing unemployment benefits.

BENNY COCKERHAM, III

(Ms. EDWARDS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to our servicemen and -women who end their mission in Iraq.

Like many, I woke this morning to the End of Mission ceremony, and I thought about Corporal Benny "Gray" Cockerham, III of North Carolina. He was the son of my good friends Ben and Jill Cockerham. He lost his life at age 21 in al-Anbar province in Iraq on October 21, 2005.

Like his father, he joined the Marine Corps in service to this Nation, and he is survived by Ben and Jill; his wife, Amanda; and his brother, Adam.

And like the 4,486 other men and women who lost their lives in Iraq, the mission has ended.

I want to pay tribute today to all of our servicemen and -women for their service and for their sacrifice and especially to my friends Ben and Jill for the loss of your son. I remember when he was born on June 28, as we shared a birthday, and I want you to know that the Nation is ever grateful for all your sacrifice and for your service.

HONORING UNILEVER NATIONAL PARKS CONGRESSIONAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

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

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, I too rise in honor of our troops who served honorably not only in Iraq but who continue to serve throughout the world in