

FUNDING FOR DISASTERS AND HONORING OUR RETURNING SOLDIERS

(Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, we just finished debating and reviewing, although the time was very short, the language that would fund this Nation. That is our duty.

I'm concerned, however, that some of the cuts impacted our seniors, our young people, and our environment. We must do better, and I certainly disagree with cutting again the appropriations for this Nation impacting our veterans and their families another 2 percent.

I voted against it, and I believe that we must ensure that if America is hit by a disaster, we pay for it. We have to fight this fight again.

However, Mr. Speaker, as our soldiers return, I thank Members who are wearing the yellow ribbon, but I ask you to go home and yellow ribbon your district offices. Ask your cities and hamlets and States to put yellow ribbons out to welcome the troops who are coming home and say a job well done.

It ended yesterday with the casing of the colors in Iraq. It is our obligation and duty to not let one soldier come home to a silent America and a silent community.

HONORING CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

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

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I awoke this morning to unfortunate news. A friend of mine and one of the world's most brilliant writers and intellectuals, Christopher Hitchens, passed away yesterday.

Christopher Hitchens was a brilliant man who was a writer and a provocateur. You may not have disagreed with him, you may not have agreed with him, but I think everybody knew that Christopher Hitchens was well-versed on the subject on which he spoke and could express it in a way unlike any other. I don't think there was a more erudite, knowledgeable individual on the face of this Earth.

He has left us.

To me, he was a good friend. He made my visit to Washington here easier. To his friends, he was loyal, gracious, and fun. To his foes, he was a feared enemy, a feared foe.

The world was lucky for his being here, and I was lucky for my life intersecting with his. The world shall miss him, a life well lived.

Rest in peace, my friend.

END OF WAR IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BROOKS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the

gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. FORTENBERRY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the official end of America's 9-year war in Iraq. In a low-key ceremony in Baghdad, U.S. troops lowered the American flag of command that flew over the Iraqi capital. The 4,000 remaining U.S. servicemembers in Iraq will leave by this year's end.

The Iraq war was a painful and difficult time, extraordinarily costly in terms of Americans, America's lives and resources. Nearly 4,500 Americans, including 45 Nebraskans, were killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom. 227 Nebraskans were wounded in combat. Tens of thousands of Iraqis lost their lives. We lost good men and women, individuals full of life and blessed with talent, whose proud families awaited their return to the country they loved so dear and served so well.

But in spite of our wounds, we are proud—proud of our fallen heroes, proud of the veterans who have come back to us, proud of their sacrifice, proud of their noble vision that has significantly changed the global environment where democratic ideals are now making steady gains everywhere.

The work of our troops, steadily done in the midst of extensive public debate and strategy deliberations about the war was the strength of this mission. These troops achieved what was set before them. The victories were theirs. Their unwavering commitment, their skill, and their bravery got the job done.

The troops' efforts unbound an Iraqi people held hostage for decades by an egomaniacal dictator. Insurgencies led by terrorists seeking to wreak havoc and disorder were put down by our troops. Space was created to allow Iraqis the time necessary to build the foundations of a representative government in a more open society.

But there are still challenges and significant obstacles. It would have been preferable, Mr. Speaker, for a small stay-behind force to remain for ongoing response and stabilization efforts.

The way forward will not be easy, but today Iraqis determine Iraq's future. No longer constricted by the dictates of a despot, they have held elections, they have written a constitution, and hopefully they will build a culture that respects the rights and dignity of all of their people.

America and the world needs a stabilized Iraq. Our security is strengthened by it, and we will continue a strong, diplomatic relationship to help achieve it. An Iraq that protects the rights of all of its people, Sunni and Shiite, Christian and Yazidi, and employs a government that maintains order and preserves liberties will be an Iraq that can help transform the entire Middle East looking for a new way forward.

The foundation for this has been laid, after much toil and bloodshed, by valiant American soldiers who return to us now as modern-day heroes.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1420

FAIRTAX

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WOODALL) is recognized for the remainder of the time.

Mr. WOODALL. Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the time.

I want to get to tax policy here in just a moment, but I want to take just a few minutes, having just passed the appropriations bill for fiscal year 2012, to talk about how long that's been.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know you have been a proponent of regular order since you came to this body. But as I went back and looked to see when was the last time the House was able to operate not under a continuing resolution but under a regular appropriations process, Mr. Speaker, it's been since December of 2009. December of 2009 is when we last passed an appropriations bill.

Now granted appropriations bills come in all sorts and sizes. The one we're dealing with today came in the large size. We'll call that the jumbo size. I know the minority whip shares my passion for that. My hope is we will be able to get to regular order next year and go through each appropriations bill one by one by one.

But what I say to you, Mr. Speaker, is that I came to this body a year ago to make a difference, and I wanted to make all the difference last January, I'll be honest with you. And when I couldn't do it all in January, I hoped that we could do it all in February. When we couldn't do it all in February, I hoped we could do it all in March. And, of course, we were able to pass the budget here in the House, the budget that took the first step towards reforming entitlements that we've seen come out of this body since I would argue Lyndon Johnson began these programs in the 1960s. But we have begun to make a difference.

As I look at this stack of papers here that represent the spending, the appropriations process, for 2012, Mr. Speaker, it's the first time in 2 years we've had that. Of course, over a thousand days since the Senate has been able to pass a budget. We have made progress. As 2011 comes to a close, I hope we can celebrate some of those successes along the way.

Because in terms of real spending, Mr. Speaker, in this document what we see is for the second year in a row, the first time since World War II, two consecutive years, Mr. Speaker, with this leadership team and this appropriations committee and this bipartisan House, we've been able to reduce Federal discretionary spending—\$95 billion.

A lot of folks say, well, ROB, is that going to be funny math? Is that going to be just some items but not all

items? As you know, Mr. Speaker, that's everything. That's the regular appropriations process, that's the so-called emergency spending, that's the war spending, what they call the OCO account. That's everything. And we've brought it down \$95 billion in just 1 year, just the 1 year you and I have been here, Mr. Speaker.

But it can't all be done in appropriations bills, Mr. Speaker, you know. Only about a third of all of the money that goes out the door here in Washington, D.C., goes out the door through this process that we did today, the appropriations process. The rest of it goes out through mandatory spending programs—Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, interest on the national debt—those mandatory spending programs.

In fact, as you know, Mr. Speaker, we could zero out everything else. We could decide there will be no Congress, there will be no White House, there will be no FBI, there will be no Army, there will be no Navy, no Marine Corps, no Coast Guard, no Air Force, no parks, no Environmental Protection Agency, no Education Department, no nothing. We could zero out absolutely everything that we fund through the appropriations process and the budget still wouldn't be balanced. Not cutting it. Zeroing it out. And we still couldn't balance the budget just on appropriations bills alone.

There's two sides of every budget balancing operation, Mr. Speaker, as you know. There's the spending side, and there's the revenue side. I want to talk about the revenue side here for just a minute.

I put up a poster here, Mr. Speaker. You can't see it from where you sit. It says H.R. 25, the FairTax. I'm going to leave it up here the whole half hour, Mr. Speaker, because H.R. 25, named the FairTax, is the only tax bill in Congress, the only piece of legislation on either the House side or the Senate side that goes into the Tax Code and says every exception, exemption, exclusion, special carve-outs, special favor, anything that gives you a break over your neighbor, your company an advantage over the one next door, all of those tax breaks, special exceptions, loopholes—gone.

It's the only bill in either the House or the Senate that does it.

But that's not even the good news, Mr. Speaker. The good news is it's also the most popular fundamental tax bill in either the House or Senate as well. That's right. More Members of this body have cosponsored the FairTax than any other fundamental tax reform legislation that's been introduced here. And more United States Senators in the other body have cosponsored their version of the FairTax than any other fundamental tax reform proposal in the Senate.

Now, why is that important? Why is it important to end all the loopholes?

Well, Mr. Speaker, the chart I have here is the cost of tax expenditures. Now tax expenditures—I've got to tell

you that's a tough word in conservative circles because the government doesn't actually have any money. As you know, Mr. Speaker, every nickel that gets spent in Washington, D.C., got sucked into Washington, D.C., from the heartland from back in my district in Georgia, from back in your district, from somebody's family kitchen table. Every nickel that gets spent in Washington got sucked up here to Washington, D.C.

Oftentimes when we talk about taxes and we talk about giving people their money back, that's not spending, that's giving people their own hard-earned money back.

Today, Mr. Speaker, when we have \$15 trillion in national debt, when the amount of money we owe has eclipsed the entire productive capacity of America for an entire year, our entire annual GDP, the question now is when you have a tax break, when you agree to let a loophole into the Tax Code and let somebody else pay less, what happens? Well, what happens is that we then borrow more.

That's a new debate, Mr. Speaker, because so often we can talk about tax cuts like the capital gains tax cut, like interest in dividends. We can talk about tax cuts that stimulate the economy, tax cuts that we think will help the economy grow faster and bring more revenue in; but all tax cuts aren't like that. Some tax cuts are just free money that you're giving away to people. Instead of passing a bill that says, I hereby give you a hundred dollars, it makes Congress feel better to pass a bill that says, I hereby tax you a hundred dollars less. I'm going to bill your neighbors for it, and I'm going to bill your kids for it, and I'm going to bill your grandkids for it, but I'm going to tax you a hundred dollars less.

It's time, Mr. Speaker, for us as conservatives to be honest about where the Tax Code takes this country when we fill it full of loopholes and exemptions, because I will tell you, and you know better than most, Mr. Speaker, the art of the loophole is a time-honored Washington tradition.

□ 1430

It's not something that has been perfected by Republicans. It's not something that has been perfected by Democrats. It's not even something that was perfected by the Whigs, Mr. Speaker. It's been around as long as taxes have been around.

And the folks who work in this town who try to manipulate the Tax Code have been around just as long as well.

But let's look at this. Let's look at what's happening in 2012, just in 2012. The annual budget deficit for 2012, Mr. Speaker, is projected by the Joint Committee on Taxation and the Congressional Research Service to be \$1.1 trillion and change. It's a \$1.1 trillion projected budget deficit for 2012.

How much money do you think we've carved out in loopholes and exceptions and exemptions and carve-outs and de-

ductions and credit? How much money do you think we've carved out? \$1.065 trillion. That's a powerful message, Mr. Speaker. We could balance the budget this year if we eliminated every single tax break in the U.S. Tax Code.

Now, that's a debate worth having.

I don't want to eliminate every single deduction in the U.S. Tax Code, every single credit in the U.S. Tax Code. Every credit in the U.S. Tax Code is not created equally. Every deduction in the U.S. Tax Code is not created equally. There are some that help move this economy forward, and there are some that don't. That's the debate that we have, and this is the end result of it.

What if we started over from scratch, Mr. Speaker? What if we started over from scratch with a bill like the FairTax—with something that ends all loopholes by starting a Tax Code that has no loopholes, that ends the loopholes by starting a Tax Code that has no loopholes?

So often we talk about reforming the Tax Code as if we're stuck with the Tax Code that we've got. Are we? I tell you we're not. That's what this body does. This body could zero out the entire Tax Code and start again with a blank sheet of paper tomorrow. We have that ability; we have that authority; and we ought to use it.

If we used it today—again, just to understand the magnitude of the exceptions and exemptions in the Tax Code, when you go and you say, Golly, I'm in the 15 percent bracket; I'm in the 25 percent bracket; I'm in the 10 percent bracket—when you talk about those things, the exceptions and exemptions total over \$1 trillion in 2012 alone.

Now, where are those? Where are those exceptions and exemptions going, Mr. Speaker? This next chart quantifies those.

Number one, a list of exceptions and exemptions: exclusion of employer contributions for medical insurance premiums and medical care, \$609 billion.

Hear that, Mr. Speaker. Half of all the money that's included in loopholes, exemptions, exceptions, exclusions, carve-outs in the United States Tax Code goes to employers to subsidize their purchases of health insurance for their employees.

Candidly, Mr. Speaker, I hear from employees day after day after day, and they say, ROB, how come I don't get those same tax breaks to purchase my own insurance? Why am I held captive—captive—by my employer? Since when did my employer get entrusted to make the best health decisions for me and my family?

I will tell you that this provision that originated in World War II, with wage controls here in Congress, has led to so many of the third-party payer problems, the health insurance inflation challenges, that we have in this country today.

\$609 billion is what you, Mr. Speaker, and your family and every other American family has to pay more because we've chosen to subsidize the business

purchase of health insurance, which has the secondary and tertiary effects of trapping you in the job that you have because you can't get insurance at your next job; that has the effect of trapping you with the insurance policy that you have because your employer only offers one policy; that has the effect of your having a third-party payer so that it insulates you from the true cost of health care.

Trouble after trouble after trouble with the American health care system comes from the United States Tax Code, Mr. Speaker—and we can do better.

\$357 billion is the deductibility of mortgage insurance on owner-occupied homes. It's the mortgage insurance deduction—again, a deduction that millions of American families take advantage of. It's a deduction that, arguably, has a tremendous effect on the real estate market and on our real estate agents and on our construction companies—on and on and on. There are things tied into the deductibility of mortgage insurance.

I remember once upon a time, Mr. Speaker, I was listening to an elected official talk. He had some folks in his office, and they said, We have to, have to, have to have the deductibility of mortgage insurance because the only reason we're able to sell real estate in this country is that folks are able to deduct their interest, and that makes a difference.

This elected official said, Well, how about if we double interest rates? Is that going to help us sell more homes?—because it'll certainly help folks deduct more interest. The answer was no.

What we need are low interest rates to sell homes. We have low interest rates in this country today, but it's one of those things that, whether Republicans or Democrats, folks have agreed that we want to subsidize interest payments for folks who own homes. There is no such subsidy program for folks who rent.

Is there a good reason for that? Maybe there is. Certainly, the argument has been made time and time again, but it's something that we have chosen to do in this country, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know that, even for those Americans who defend this deduction to their dying breaths, do they know that it comprises a full third of the value of every deduction, exemption, exclusion that exists in the United States Tax Code, because it does—half of the deductions and exclusions come in from the mortgage interest deduction, others from the medical insurance and premium deductions for employers.

Finally, of the biggest of our deductions and exemptions is the deduction for 401(k) plans, which is down here at the bottom, of \$356 billion—again, deducting money that we're saving, right?—because the power to tax is the power to destroy, Mr. Speaker—you

know that—time and time again as you advocate for lower taxes, because what we tax today is income and what income is is a measure of your productivity, and what we need in today's economy is more productivity, not less productivity. The power to tax is the power to destroy.

So rather than taxing savings—because we don't have enough retirement savings happening in this country, because we don't have enough thrifts happening in this country—we've given folks a tax break to encourage them to save.

Is that a laudable public goal, Mr. Speaker? I'm sure it is. I'm sure that it is.

We need more Americans to take saving for their retirement more seriously. The question is, What's the best way to get that done? Is it the United States Tax Code? But does America know that that's what's happening today, that today \$356 billion of tax revenue is forgone in the name of encouraging retirement savings?

It's a debate that has to happen in Washington, D.C.—these are the big ones—because so often we argue about things as if it's the little ones that find the dollar. It's not the little ones that find the dollar; it's the little ones that find the headlines. You don't find headlines about the mortgage interest deduction or the employer health insurance deduction. You find headlines about the “bridge to nowhere” and how in the world that got in the Transportation bill. But understand that this is big business.

Now, I'm not here to pick on lobbyists, Mr. Speaker. I think lobbyists perform an important role in this town. I can't be an expert on every issue, and I can't hire staff. I've got Alex Poirot on my staff down here today. He knows a lot about a lot, but he can't know everything about everything. So, when I need more information, I will go to folks involved in the industry. We call those folks “lobbyists.”

I'll tell you, the best lobbyists in the world are the ones who fly up from back home—the teachers in your community, the caretakers in your community, the physicians in your community. Those members of your community who come up here to talk about their issues are the best lobbyists in town, but there are firms up here that have lobbyists as well.

□ 1440

There is a line in “The Distinguished Gentleman.” Mr. Speaker, I'm going to date myself by going back to when Eddie Murphy's movies were funny, back in the day. “The Distinguished Gentleman” was a tale of a fellow who got elected to Congress by accident. And he was going along with the process, and he walked up to a powerful committee chairman. And the committee chairman said, How do you feel about sugar subsidies? Eddie Murphy, being Eddie Murphy and a new Congressman said, Well, Mr. Chairman,

how should I feel about sugar subsidies? And the chairman said, It doesn't matter, because if you support sugar subsidies, we're going to get you money from the confectioners and the bakers. And if you oppose sugar subsidies, we're going to get your money from the cane growers and the beet growers.

There are folks on every side of the issue in this town. So whenever there's an issue that's a contentious issue, you can call in one side, you can call in the other, and you can hear both sides of the argument. Folks who are experts, folks who have been working on these issues for decade after decade after decade. Well, when the Federal tax bill for America's businesses is \$10 billion, it doesn't take much of an investment in lobbying for special exemptions in the Tax Code to make that happen.

Now let me go back and look at corporate income taxes over time. I'm in the camp that tells you, corporations don't pay taxes, Mr. Speaker. Corporations do not pay taxes. Consumers pay taxes. I'm from Atlanta. If you add a tax on the Coca-Cola Company, what do you think is going to happen? They're going to raise the price of Coca-Cola. Right? That's what happens every single time that—we already have a competitive market. Coke and Pepsi are competing in a cutthroat beverage market out there today. They're already suppressing their prices as much as they can. There is only one taxpayer in America, and it is the American consumer. When we tax businesses, we just make the businesses the tax collector, and they raise their prices. I end up paying the tax when I buy the goods. They collect those taxes, and pass them on.

But according to our friends at Citizens for Tax Justice—and you are not going to hear me quoting Citizens for Tax Justice very often, Mr. Speaker, because we don't agree a lot. But they pay a lot of attention to how much money is being spent in this town to manipulate the Tax Code. They say \$475 million is being spent to manipulate the Tax Code in this town. Now, folks, it's our fault. We created the Tax Code. I don't blame the IRS for the way the Tax Code works. Congress created the Tax Code. Congress tells the IRS what to do. So for businesses to spend \$475 million, for individuals to pay folks to come and lobby for the United States Tax Code, that makes sense. Why do you rob banks? Because that's where the money is. Why do you lobby the Tax Code? Because that's where the money is—not in these appropriations bills that we're doing today, but in the Tax Code.

Trillions and trillions and trillions of dollars in revenue, Mr. Speaker. And with the stroke of a pen, a loophole, an exception, exemption hidden somewhere in what is now 76,000 pages of code, you can save money for your client. You can get a break that your competitor doesn't get. And who ends up paying that bill? Every other American family. And if we don't pay that

bill today, we end up borrowing that money, and our kids pay the bill, and our grandkids pay the bill for years and years and years to come.

This isn't rocket science, Mr. Speaker. This is Economics 101. I do it when I go to speak to high school classes. I say, you know, I've got a job in my congressional office. You're going to get to serve your neighbors. You're going to get to serve your country. It is going to be a wonderful thing. And I pay \$10 an hour. Who wants to come? All the hands go up around the room. Then I say, But I'm going to have to put a tax on that because we have bills to pay in this country. So I am going to put a \$9 an hour tax on that, but you will still be able to take home that last dollar. Who wants to come work 80 hours a week for me for \$1 an hour? And all the hands go down, Mr. Speaker. That's economics 101. There is a sweet spot here. They called it the Laffer curve in the 1980s. There's a sweet spot where you can raise tax rates and continue to raise income for the government—tax receipts, and if you exceed that rate, you begin to shrink tax receipts for the government.

I remember a story, Mr. Speaker, this was over on the Senate side, a Senator from Washington State who ran the Finance Committee at the time. And the question was, What would happen if we raised taxes to 100 percent on all Americans who make over \$250,000 a year? What would happen? What would happen if we raised taxes on all Americans making over \$250,000 a year to 100 percent? Well, he asked that question to the tax scoring committee, and folks got excited, sent back a good message, and said, Oh, golly, if we did that, we'd raise this big pot of money to help pay Federal bills. Big pot of money.

Well, come on, Mr. Speaker, you tell me, what would happen if we raised taxes on you to 100 percent? Well, I tell you, you would quit coming to work. You have got a heart for service. But you also have bills to pay. Folks would adjust their behavior. No one would make over \$250,000 a year anymore.

The power to tax is the power to destroy. When you tax at 100 percent, you destroy 100 percent of all that economic production. You know what's sad, as I look at this Economics 101 chart, Mr. Speaker? It's that it's America that has this disastrous, destructive, detrimental Tax Code. The former Soviet Bloc countries, Mr. Speaker, they have flat taxes. They have consumption taxes. They started with a blank slate after the fall of the Soviet Union, and they created tax codes that work. They rejected the communist system and said, What if we have a flat tax on everything that's easy to pay?

Mr. Speaker, I know we have to have taxes in this country, and I don't mind paying them. I don't mind paying them. I love the freedom that we have in this country, and I know freedom isn't free. What I don't like, Mr. Speaker, is having to pay someone to help me pay my taxes—I'm a smart guy—to

have to pay someone to help me pay my taxes.

If we're going to collect taxes from folks, it ought to be easy, and the more complicated we make it, the less revenue we collect. And who has proven that point? The former Soviet Bloc countries. That's where we look for economic vibrance today, Mr. Speaker. That's where we look for Tax Code success today. Country after country after country threw out their old code, adopted a flat consumption tax, a flat income tax, made it easy to pay, easy to comply with, and raised the revenues to their national treasury. We could do that very same thing. There's a sweet spot, and we are not in it.

Mr. Speaker, we sometimes get swept up in partisanship here in the House. I know you avoid it. I try to avoid it. But sometimes it happens. But when it comes to the issue of reforming the Tax Code, it's not a partisan issue. I'll point to this quote from President Barack Obama in a speech he was making on international tax policy reform. He says, Our Tax Code is full of corporate loopholes that make it perfectly legal for companies to avoid paying their fair share. Now his take on it is a little different from mine.

You know, the U.S. Tax Code defines what folks have to do. I almost think it's your patriotic duty to pay as little tax as you legally can. Don't send your extra money up here. Whoever is encouraging you to do that, don't do it. Keep as much of your own money as you can because I promise you, you're going to spend it better than I will.

□ 1450

It's not from lack of trying. It's not from lack of trying. Keep your own money in your pocket; send as little as you legally can.

But, yes, the Tax Code has been warped over time to make it very difficult to tell what is someone's fair share. What is their fair share?

Now, the top 10 percent of all income earners in this country, Mr. Speaker, pay 60 percent of all of the income taxes. The top 10 percent pay 60 percent of all the income taxes. The top 50 percent pay 100 percent of all the income taxes. About half of America today pays no income taxes whatsoever. In fact, a growing amount of American families are actually receiving money from the Tax Code instead of paying money into the Tax Code. That's not what the Tax Code is for.

But on both sides of the aisle, we agree that this Tax Code isn't working. The President thinks it isn't working because it allows folks to pay nothing, and that's not fair. I'd tell you it's not working because it allows one company to pay one amount and its neighbor company to have to pay twice that amount, and that's not fair. Equity is what's fair. And I'll tell you, Tax Code for corporations, it shouldn't go from the 30s down to the 20s. It shouldn't go from the 30s down to the teens. It should go from the 30s down to zero,

Mr. Speaker, to zero because businesses don't pay taxes. Their consumers pay taxes.

I pay taxes when I shop at Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart's not paying the tax. They're raising the price on the good, and I'm paying the tax and you're paying the tax and every American family that shops there is paying the tax.

So how do we get to something that defines our fair share? Well, Mr. Speaker, that brings me to the heart of the FairTax. I don't like the divisive games that are being played in America today, Mr. Speaker. I don't know why it is that what we see in the media and what we sometimes hear from the podiums is language designed to divide America. I can't think of a single strength of this country, I can't think of a single trait that makes this country great that is enhanced by dividing America. That's why we always talk about the American Dream, Mr. Speaker, something that unites us, something that brings all of our disparate views and hopes and dreams together into one understanding of what makes this country different from any other country on the planet.

Mr. Speaker, my idea of fair when I sit down with a blank sheet of paper to try to design a brand new Tax Code for this country, fair doesn't mean that we're going to try to ensure equal outcomes for every American. Fair means we're going to start with a level playing field for every American.

Have you ever been in a community, Mr. Speaker, and you see somebody driving a brand-new Porsche and you wonder if they're paying their fair share? Have you ever been walking past a clothing store, you and I might be on our way down to the Goodwill or Salvation Army or T.J. Maxx or to Marshall's and you see somebody walking into Brooks Brothers and you wonder if they're paying their fair share?

You know, I remember growing up, I had a good friend who lived next door. The family had everything—boats, lake houses, beach houses, brand-new cars, fancy clothes. And when it came time to apply for college aid, we both filled out our applications. I didn't get a penny in Federal financial aid because I got a note back that said: Dear Sir, Your family saved too much.

Your family saved too much.

My buddy next door—fancy cars, fancy houses, fancy clothes, he got back a note that said: Congratulations, you qualify for a subsidized college education.

You qualify for a subsidized college education.

Why? Because in all of these flush years that your family has had, you spent it all. So now in your time of need, you have nothing and you qualify for a bonus.

Mr. Speaker, that is not anything that makes this country great. What makes this country great is people being able to make their own choices about how they're going to live their life and the Federal Government doesn't bail them out.

Mr. Speaker, you and I weren't here when the bailouts came down the pipe, but I guarantee you that we would've both voted "no." We would have both voted "no" for every penny of bailout money that came down the pipe because the American Government is not supposed to be about bailing out anybody. The American Government is supposed to be about protecting the freedom of the American people. And that includes, Mr. Speaker, freedom to fail. Freedom to fail.

You get to make the choices you want to make about your life, but you also have to bear the consequences. If you want to take great risks, if you have great success, you benefit from that. And if you have great failure, you pay the price for that. We cannot insulate people, Mr. Speaker, from the consequences of their actions. But over and over again, that's what the Tax Code does.

Oh, if you lose money, we want to protect you. If you make money, we want to punish you. I don't get that. I don't understand that. Fairness for me is a level playing field for opportunity, not a level playing field for outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, you know we talk every day in this Chamber about jobs; and by talk, we act every day to promote an environment in this Nation that grows jobs.

What do you think, Mr. Speaker, the American Tax Code does when a multinational corporation is trying to decide where it's going to put its next plant? What do you think it does? Because I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, with absolute certainty that America has the highest corporate tax rate of any nation on the planet. The number one highest.

So you're a business person, Mr. Speaker. Where do you want to locate? Do you want to locate in a country that has ended all of the loopholes, that has restored a fairness to the marketplace for a level playing field, that allows our free enterprise system to work? Or do you want to locate your business in the country that has the single highest corporate tax rate in the world? Those are easy decisions, Mr. Speaker, and companies are making them every day.

I talked to a CEO in my district about 6 months ago. He said, Rob, I'm going to be leaving. He said, The government has made it hard to pack up and leave. It's going to take me about 2 years, but I'm taking every job that's in this district and I'm moving them to Switzerland because it's just not worth doing business in America any more.

Mr. Speaker, we have the hardest working workforce on the planet. We have the best education and transportation infrastructure on the planet. We have the finest education system on the planet. Nobody, nobody gives you more bang for your buck than the American worker, and yet people are deciding to take those jobs overseas. Why? It's not the American workers' fault, Mr. Speaker. It's our fault as we

have crafted a Tax Code that doesn't work, as we have crafted a regulatory structure that doesn't work. But the good news is—and it's good news, Mr. Speaker—that there's nothing wrong with America that this body can't fix. Because I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, there's nothing wrong with America that this body didn't cause.

Government is not the solution to our problems, and many times government is the creator of our problems. I do not want this body, no matter how august, I do not want my 435 colleagues, no matter how well-studied and well-intended, to decide for me how my life should be led. That's never been what America was about. What America is about is making your own decisions for yourself, making your own decisions for your family, and knowing with absolute certainty, Mr. Speaker, absolute certainty, that by the sweat of your brow, by the power of your ideas, by the commitment that you make, you can make your tomorrow better than your today.

I'll tell you, that's the American Dream, Mr. Speaker. It's not about how much money you have in your pocket. It's not about what kind of house you live in or what kind of car you drive. It's about that you can decide today that you're going to take actions for yourself and for your family and you're going to make tomorrow better.

Hope, Mr. Speaker. Hope is a priceless commodity. A priceless commodity. And I fear we're not growing hope in this country, Mr. Speaker, like we used to. I fear we are extinguishing the candle of hope in this country. And not out of malice, Mr. Speaker. That's what makes it so insidious. It's not out of malice. It's out of folks who believe in their heart deep down inside that they're passing these policies because they want to make America better.

□ 1500

Mr. Speaker, America was better when Americans were running America. The whole idea of a Republic isn't that we get to be king of this land collectively. Our job is simple. It is to protect the freedom of individuals back home so that individuals back home can make the decisions that work best for them.

I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I come from the great State of Georgia. We're a little conservative in our part of the world and proud of it. If anyone is looking for a good conservative part of the world to be a part of, I invite you to come down. We've got some good real estate prices and a good job market. Come on down and be a part of what we have, Mr. Speaker.

But I read a story about my friends in California. Now, I enjoy visiting California. I don't want to move there. But it was a story about the Teamsters unionizing marijuana growers in California because medicinal marijuana is a big business out there in California these days. And so they unionized the

marijuana growers. So if you work hard, apply yourself and join the union, you can be a junior marijuana grower at \$25 an hour I'm told. And if you really work hard and really apply yourself, you can exceed where you start and become a senior marijuana grower and get close to \$35 an hour. That's what I'm hold.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's wonderful for those folks in California. We're not bringing unionized marijuana-growing to the great State of Georgia. I'm not trying to stop the folks in California from doing what they want to do, but it's not going to come to our great State of Georgia. And that's what makes this country great. We can choose for ourselves, as individuals, as families, as communities, and as States how it is that we want to live our life—but not with the United States Tax Code.

Mr. Speaker, the Tax Code manipulates every facet of your life—every facet of your life. If you're going to buy a green car, we're going to pay you money. If you buy a car that burns too much gasoline, we're going to charge you a fuel premium. If you receive your income from dividends, we're going to give you a tax break. If you receive your income from working hard on the line every day, you're going to pay full freight. If you've had a great year this year, even if you hadn't made another penny in the rest of your life, we're going to tax you like you're rich. If you make a little bit this year, even though you've made millions every other year for the rest of your life, we're going to tax you like you're poor.

Mr. Speaker, we manipulate behavior in line item after line item after line item in the United States Code; and, candidly, folks on both sides of the aisle defend it. They defend it as if we're really smart here. And I'll tell you, folks here work hard. I'm not down on Congress. Folks here in Congress work hard. But they don't know everything, nor can they, nor should they be burdened with that responsibility. But that's what happens in the Tax Code: let me pass this tax incentive, because if only we encourage this behavior, all of America will be happier. And it's easy to hide things in the Tax Code. Again, it's 75,000 pages.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage you to take a look at H.R. 25, again, the single most widely cosponsored piece of fundamental tax reform legislation in either the House or the Senate. And, in fact, it's the most widely cosponsored piece of tax reform legislation in both Chambers. It ends every loophole.

Mr. Speaker, you hear folks every day down here on the House floor: I want you to end the loopholes for rich people; I want you to end the loopholes for oil companies; I want you to end the loopholes for Solyndra and the solar companies; I want you to end loophole, loophole, loophole, loophole. Mr. Speaker, there's one bill in the House that does it all, and its H.R. 25. No loopholes, no exemptions. We all

pay the same. And it lets our free enterprise system work, Mr. Speaker.

We talk about creating jobs in this country, Mr. Speaker. We have to do that. But our Tax Code is destroying jobs. We have to create new jobs; but, Mr. Speaker, that's hard. Preserving the jobs we already have has to be a part of that. And yet we run jobs overseas each and every day in large part because of our Tax Code.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, the FairTax is revenue neutral. So many folks think about a conservative Republican like me liking every tax cut he can get his hands on. I do. I'm a big proponent of leaving more money in individuals' pockets. I will always believe the American family will spend their own money better than we will spend it on their behalf in Washington. Always. But, Mr. Speaker, there are bills to pay in Washington. We do need to support our troops, we do need to defend our homeland, and we do need to protect our border. And so the FairTax brings in every penny of revenue that we bring in today. It's revenue neutral.

In fact, given the bill that's in front of the Senate right now on payroll taxes, we're actually going to bring in more revenue with the FairTax than we bring in with the current system, but it's designed to be revenue neutral because I know that we must pay taxes. But we mustn't make it hard to do. That's a choice we've made in this body, and it's the wrong one.

Mr. Speaker, take a look at H.R. 25, the FairTax. You can find out all about it at www.fairtax.org, all the information, all the studies. We started with a blank sheet of paper, we came up with a plan that starts everyone on a level playing field. And so far, Mr. Speaker, we've attracted enough cosponsors on both sides of the Hill to make it the single most popular fundamental tax reform bill in Congress.

I thank you for giving me this time this afternoon to talk about it, and I yield back the balance of my time.

FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A further message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 2009. An act to improve the administration of programs in the insular areas, and for other purposes.

CONGRESS REPRESENTS ALL OF AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Happy holiday to America. Let me reinforce that we live in a great coun-

try, and that is evidenced by the opportunity of Members to come to this democratic body and the other body to speak about the values of this Nation and the importance of our democracy and our responsibility to address the concerns of all Americans. It is good for us to have an opportunity for a dialogue and to be able to listen to each other.

I know that I'll be joined shortly by the whip of this Congress, Mr. HOYER. So let me just quickly say that I remember serving in this Congress when President Bush was the President, and I always made the point that once we are elected, even as we come from constituency, even as we come out of tough political battles, it really is the oath that we take that ensures that we represent all of America, whether we have the glory of coming from a State that is claiming progressiveness or one that is conservative. When we get on that train or airplane or drive that car and come to Washington, D.C., we represent all of America.

So let me quickly just say that you're looking at a stack of papers that represent the approach that my Republican friends took to fund the needs of the American people. Under the Democratic Caucus and the Democratic Congress of last Congress, we had the appropriations bills, almost 12 of them, come to the floor, and Members openly debated all of the issues around the different bills dealing with transportation, housing, homeland security and defense. They had an opportunity to be on the floor. The constituents could email or call or say what is that in this particular bill. But under this Republican leadership, this is what they brought us and gave us 1 hour to read these pages because of the emergency of funding the American people.

That's not a way to run a country. It's not Democratic or Republican. It's not conservative or liberal. It's just not the way.

And I would offer to say that we're committed and should have done this weeks ago, extending the payroll tax relief, providing for 160 million working Americans and extending the unemployment, helping 6 million Americans. You see, I don't believe that those Americans care whether we are conservative Republican, whether we twitter, whether we email or whether we speak on the floor of the House. They want us to abide by the oath that we take when we stand and affirm our relationship with the United States and our obligation and duty to the American people.

When our soldiers who are coming home now, yesterday being the last day of war in Iraq, the casing of the colors, not one soldier that I visited in Iraq or Afghanistan ever put up and said, I'm a Republican or I'm a Democratic. Every one of them was proud to be an American. And that's what we are obligated to do on this floor.

□ 1510

You know, it saddens me to report to you and the American people, my colleagues, that the banks of America have \$64 trillion in their accounts, refusing to spend it, to yield, to loan it to small businesses or those who want to buy homes. Our businesses have over \$1.12 trillion in cash on hand.

It saddens me to hear that businesses who are protected by our flag and our soldiers and can do business in a democratic setting, just because of wanting more money, they will lift up their business and take it to another country and remove the employees who invest in this country. It saddens me.

I ask the simple question: Where there is a benefit, is there not burden?

And I do want to correct any impression that we tax Americans 90 percent. Yes, we need tax reform, real tax reform. We need to help Americans keep money in their pockets. But I can tell you, out of \$10, we don't take \$9. We want people to be able to work and reap the benefit of their work.

But may I just share with you that America is an umbrella on a rainy day, that when there are hurricanes and tornados and earthquakes, you expect us to come running and restore your communities. You expect us to take care of the dams and bridges, the highways, to ensure that America's infrastructure is working, that the electric grid can withstand a cyberattack, a potential homeland attack, if you will.

After 9/11, you asked America why, and you wanted us to get busy and get to work and ensure the homeland is protected. And I sit on the Homeland Security Committee. Every day our responsibility is to read the fine lines in the classified information to make sure that we are in front of the terrorists, whether it's a lone wolf or whether it is a massive attack. We have been fortunate, because of our young men and women in the military, because of our intelligence community, that we have not had a major attack on our soil since 9/11. That's what the government is all about. You cannot throw the baby out with the bathwater.

And we have some other responsibilities as well. The responsibilities of ensuring our children are safe and that we don't allow and condone sexual abuse of our children or bullying of our children. Yes, you can make a national statement on that, though we want families to get help and children to get help, but the circus that is going on in Penn State is so unacceptable.

I've introduced legislation to stop the Federal funding of any entity that covers up or tolerates child sexual abuse. I have introduced legislation to make a stand against the bullying and ask communities and school districts to establish best practices to help our children and families.

And then it is important to note that we do need to have the harmony and the collegiate collaboration that really speaks of this grand place, this august institution of which we've had so many