

not been in the majority for well over a generation, that there seemed to be a lack of a vision for the future, and that there was an acceptance of mediocrity and failure and second-class status for America.

Our belief was, at that time, that we could come together with a number of other Members and try and at least give voice to a new idea, a new vision, a more positive vision for America. We worked together with other Members and formed what was called the Conservative Opportunity Society because we thought that that was a positive vision for the future of America, consistent with Republican principles and, more importantly, consistent with and expressive of American principles. We thought it was an antidote to what we saw leading us at that time as the liberal welfare state. I think history has shown that, with the election of Ronald Reagan and the embracing of the Conservative Opportunity Society vision of America, that America could turn around.

We are confronted with what I believe to be a failed Presidency at the present time. We are confronted with questions and some great despair in families around America for the failure of an opportunity for jobs. And I would suggest that, at this point in time, it is appropriate for those who have visions, those who are ready to challenge the conventional wisdom, those who believe that America's best days are ahead, not behind, to come to the fore.

There are those who look at the faults of Newt Gingrich. I'd like to suggest that he was the one person that I know that had a vision in this House of how this House could be changed, how we, working as an institution, could work with a President to make changes and, ultimately, how this side of the aisle could, for the first time in a generation, actually be the majority.

Following his ascendancy to Speaker of the House, we actually had balanced budgets. We actually had some bringing down of some of the size of the Federal Government. We actually had some progress around the country. So I would say, for those who look at the faults of others, let's look at their accomplishments.

This is a time when it seems to me we ought to be serious about the future of America. We ought to be bold about the future of America. We ought to have some confidence in the greatness of America, the greatness of its people, not necessarily the greatness of its government. We need to have a good governmental structure that allows the greatness of the American people.

There are some on the Presidential debate scene today who are willing to challenge us with bold ideas. That has been done in the past and has proven successful. It seems to me we should not shrink from the future; we should embrace the future. We should, in fact, be leaders of the future.

I am not one elected to this House to be satisfied that the future of America

for my children and my grandchildren is any less than what it was for me as a child growing up. I will not stand here and allow us to act in vain so that the sacrifices of my parents, some call the Greatest Generation, I say one of the greatest generations, will have been in vain. They worked hard. They accepted the challenges of the future with an innate confidence in the goodness of the American people, the capabilities of the American people, and, yes, the common sense of the American people.

My hope is that as we go forward in this year, those of us who seek office for both the House, the Senate, and Presidency will accept that mantle of leadership that has been cast upon us from those in the past.

PENALIZING UNEMPLOYED AMERICANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my concern that Republicans are attempting to penalize unemployed American citizens who do not have a high school diploma. Last month, House Republicans included a provision in the payroll tax cut bill, which is presently in conference, to establish an educational requirement for recipients of benefits.

The provision, Mr. Speaker, would require recipients of unemployment benefits to have at least a high school diploma or a GED or be enrolled in classes to obtain such a degree. This requirement, Mr. Speaker, would affect an estimated 248,000 workers in the first 3 months of enactment, and disproportionately affect older workers, forcing certain unemployment recipients to either enroll in adult education programs or forego the benefits they need to support their families. This is a disgrace.

In 2010, half a million workers age 50 or over who received unemployment insurance lacked a high school diploma. For most of these individuals who have worked more than 30 long years, returning to high school makes very little sense. They are the bricklayers and the carpenters and sanitation workers and housekeepers in our communities.

In the case of workers under the age of 50, adult education might be useful, but is largely unattainable. Currently, State and local adult education programs do not have the capacity—we know that—do not have the capacity to meet this demand. Waiting lists for these programs are proliferating and certain to worsen due to a 20 percent decline over the past decade in Federal funding for adult education programs and \$1 billion in cuts to job-training programs in fiscal year 2011.

Creating an educational mandate as a condition of eligibility to receive unemployment insurance benefits, Mr. Speaker, is punitive. It's misguided.

It's egregious, even by current Republican standards.

While there are certainly benefits to receiving at least a high school education, establishing a blanket policy that denies unemployment benefits to low-skill workers who have lost their jobs due to no fault of their own, without ensuring they have unrestricted access to educational opportunities, sets up hundreds of thousands of Americans to fail.

It seems incredibly cynical to require participation in adult education and job training as a condition of receiving unemployment benefits while simultaneously eliminating meaningful Federal support for these programs.

Mr. Speaker, it is unconscionable to put additional strings on this crucial relief that do nothing, nothing to address the real causes of the current unemployment crisis. It is a difficult time to be unemployed in America. It is a difficult time to be unemployed in America, but House Republicans seem determined to make it even more difficult.

I urge my colleagues to join me and stand up against this education mandate and fight for policies that can actually help bring the unemployment crisis to resolve.

RECOGNITION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

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

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, starting January 29 of this year, Catholic schools across the country will initiate their annual observance of Catholic Schools Week. The theme for this year is "Catholic Schools: Faith. Academics. Service."

The 2012 theme emphasizes the principles of Catholic school education, which families in my district and across the country highly value. The theme focuses on three priorities that are distinct to Catholic schools. Children are taught faith, not just the basics of Christianity, but how to have a relationship with their God; academics, in which Catholic schools are held to very high standards.

Earlier this year I was proud to recognize the Nativity of our Lord Catholic School in Warminster, Pennsylvania, for receiving the 2011 National Blue Ribbon of Excellence Award.

□ 1050

Finally, the third principle in the 2012 theme is service, the giving of one's time and effort to help others. It is taught both as an expression of faith but also of good citizenship.

Schools typically celebrate Catholic Schools Week with mass, open houses, and activities for students, families, parishioners, and the community at large. In addition to this year's list of activities, some schools in my district will host events welcoming families

from schools with which they will be merging. While the Archdiocese of Philadelphia contemplates its plans for continuing to provide students with a rigorous academic curriculum in concert with spiritual values, families and parishioners can reflect upon the three principles of Catholic Schools Week—faith, academics, service—not simply as a theme but also as a guide for their future decisions.

Mr. Speaker, Catholic Schools Week is truly a time to demonstrate the intangible value of Catholic education. I'm extremely grateful for the hard work and dedication of the administrators, faculty, students, and parents who've created an environment fostering academic excellence, spirituality, and service.

POVERTY IN AMERICA

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

Ms. LEE of California. As the founder of the Congressional Out of Poverty Caucus, I rise again today to remind this body about the crisis of poverty in America, which really should prick the conscience of every Democrat and Republican. As we begin to consider legislation for this year and budgets for the fiscal year 2013, we must do more to help millions of Americans living in poverty.

We must do more for the millions of Americans who are looking very hard for a job and working hard every day to move up the ladder of opportunity, really trying to remove these very difficult barriers.

We must not balance our budgets on the backs of the most vulnerable, the poor, and low-income individuals, and we cannot allow any budget cuts or authorize new spending on programs that will increase poverty or increase income inequality in America.

We also must commit to taking bold steps to reducing the devastating impact of poverty in America, and that is by creating jobs. It's inexcusable and immoral to fail to take the strongest possible action to bring immediate help to those Americans in need.

We cannot continue down the path that leads to increasing poverty, inequality, and income disparities which focus more and more wealth in the hands of the few and leave millions of Americans behind. With nearly 50 million Americans in poverty and half of all Americans in low-income households, we cannot wait. We must act now.

Mr. Speaker, poverty doesn't just hurt families and the children who grow up in families trapped by poverty, but it costs our Nation hundreds of billions of dollars in lost productivity and slows the Nation's economic growth. We must act to strengthen funding for programs that not only prevent hunger, homelessness, crime, and maintain access to education, but we all must create initiatives to demand goods and

services which boost our economy. That means that small businesses across America need customers, and they need customers right now.

So we must extend the expiring unemployment benefits. We can't abandon the millions of job seekers before they find a good job. We should also immediately add an additional 14 weeks of tier I unemployment benefits for the millions of Americans who have completely exhausted their benefits after 99 weeks. Far too many Americans have exhausted all of their unemployment benefits and are still unable to work. We must not abandon these 99ers.

To achieve these ends, we must ensure that we protect the efficient and effective programs we already have in place and provide strong investments that spur immediate job growth. And we have the resources to do this if we commit ourselves to increasing fairness in taxation to ensure that the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share and enact a reasonable Tax Code that includes financial transactions which will not only raise vital revenue but set some limits to the wild, out-of-control speculation and vulture capitalism that nearly brought down this entire economy.

Also, we must take a bold approach in how we allocate the large savings from our defense budgets as we bring our troops home from abroad.

I'm confident that the President will speak to the moral and economic crises of income inequality and will not forget the long-term unemployed, the poor, our seniors, our students, and the middle class in his State of the Union speech tonight.

I hope the Republicans and Democrats in this body take heed and tomorrow pass the American Jobs Act for the good of the country.

SMART SECURITY: TO CREATE AN AMERICA BUILT TO LAST

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

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, tonight when the President of the United States addresses our Nation from this Chamber, we will hear some good news on the national security front. The end of the Iraq war, for example, is an impressive accomplishment, one that wouldn't have happened if bold progressives hadn't called for our troops to be brought home way back in 2005.

I'm also pleased the President's leadership will make it possible for our military strategic review to call for significant reductions in defense spending.

But on both of these fronts, ending our current wars and long-range national security strategy, I'm hoping for proposals that are bigger and bolder than what we've heard to this point.

Bottom line, Mr. Speaker, we need to end the war in Afghanistan, and we

need to end it now, not 2014. Not at whatever other later date the military brass decides is appropriate. After nearly 1,900 American deaths and more than 10 years of bloodshed and mayhem, we owe it to our troops and to their families, as well as American taxpayers, to bring them home.

This war is not just a moral disgrace, not just a humanitarian disaster, Mr. Speaker; it's a strategic failure. We're spending at least \$10 billion every month to prop up a regime in Afghanistan that is ineffective on its best day and downright corrupt on its worst.

Afghanistan continues to be racked by poverty and violence, and my belief is that by continuing to have military boots on the ground, we're encouraging more animosity towards the United States, giving the Taliban a recruitment tool, and thus, undermining our security.

Mr. Speaker, we need a new security program. We need a new security paradigm, an entirely fresh way of thinking about how to keep our Nation safe. Won't we make more friends and win more hearts and minds if we extend a hand of friendship to the rest of the world instead of rattling the saber at the first sign of trouble?

Actually, that's the heart of my SMART security platform. Why are we spending pennies on humanitarian aid for every dollar we're spending on weapons and warfare? Instead of a military surge, we need a civilian surge, one that lifts people out of poverty, rebuilds infrastructure, promotes education, especially for women and girls, and combats malnutrition and global health problems around the world.

SMART security is a renewed commitment to diplomacy, multilateralism, and peaceful conflict resolution. It would support a dramatic downsizing of the military industrial complex. Believe it or not, the Pentagon consumes 56 percent of discretionary spending with a budget bigger in real dollars than it was at the height of the Soviet threat. And with SMART security, we can reverse that.

Tonight I'm told the President will sound the theme of an America built to last. But no Nation, Mr. Speaker, that exists in a state of semipermanent warfare can be built to last. I worry about how we can be built to last when we have enough nuclear warheads to blow the world to smithereens many times over.

Now is the time, Mr. Speaker. Our common humanity compels us to bring the troops home from Afghanistan and implement a SMART security agenda. Now is the time.

□ 1100

HONORING THE LIFE OF FORMER REPRESENTATIVE ED JENKINS

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

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize and celebrate the