

find me a Defense Department program with an error rate as low as 3 percent.

I look forward to the time when the Republican leadership stops using hunger as a wedge issue and lets this become a bipartisan issue once again.

I understand that we need to balance the budget, Mr. Speaker. But must it be on the backs of the poor and the most vulnerable in our country?

“Hunger Hits Home,” this wonderful film, shows us the problem facing this Nation. The challenge is presented to us. Are we going to end hunger once and for all or not?

So far the answer from the Republican leadership is a resounding “no,” and I regret very much that decision.

Mr. Speaker, hunger is a political condition. If we muster the political will, we can end it once and for all.

SECURING OUR BORDERS

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

Mr. KINZINGER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I want to just say before I actually get started, we just saw the space shuttle fly over on the back of a 747, and I salute the end of an amazing era in space exploration, and I look forward to the next day of NASA being able to talk about space exploration and how we’re going to get out there so we won’t have to rely on Russians to get to space to continue to do what I think is a very important role of the Federal Government.

I was in Houston—I actually went through the NASA center there about 3 or 4 days ago—but I was in Houston for military duty. I am a pilot in the Air National Guard. I fly an airplane called a RC-26, which is a reconnaissance plane. I did 9 days of duty. And what we did is we were in Texas flying missions on the border of Mexico in order to help the Border Patrol secure that border, to ensure that those people that want to come in here come in here legally and, just as importantly, if not more importantly, to ensure that the drug trade is not being brought into our country, to reduce the amount of drugs being brought in from Mexico, as well as to ensure that terrorists are not making their way through the border by sneaking in through that border of Mexico.

Now, before I went, I expected to see a border that was basically secure because that’s what I’ve been hearing from the administration, that the border is basically secure. Yeah, there are examples of people coming across outside of that but, for the most part, it’s pretty good to go. Well, what I saw was something completely different.

I’m going to tell you just a quick story about somebody who’s on the border every day trying to protect this country against drugs and against terrorism coming through that border. This guy is a Border Patrol agent affectionately known as Uzi. Uzi is a former marine. He was a marine for about 5

years, started a small business when he got out of the Marine Corps, and made the decision that, you know what, he wants to go continue to serve and protect his country.

Now, I flew missions with Uzi. He was on board my aircraft as we went down and we assisted Border Patrol. And the one thing Uzi said to me is, Congressman, look, we’re out here every day in the heat and the sweltering sun trying to continue to protect this country. Make sure you give us what we need here.

And when you hear the stories about how hamstrung they are from actually enforcing the border, and how there are many tools available to them that they’re not allowed to use, it’s actually pretty sad.

Now, look. We want to be a Nation of immigration. We want to be a Nation of legal immigration. But one thing we don’t want to be is a Nation that wakes up one day and finds out that there was another terrorist attack in a major United States city and that, potentially, that weapon of mass destruction or those terrorists actually came in through an unsecure border with Mexico.

I went down there really believing that there was a fence along the line, and I saw nothing of the kind in southern Texas.

□ 1010

Let’s tell the American people the truth. The truth is, we want to be a Nation that respects immigration because most of us here actually are immigrants removed ourselves, but we want to be a Nation that has a legal process to do it. When we have an open border, we’re encouraging people to go around that legal process, and we’re opening ourselves up to attack.

Let’s stand together. Let’s say to respect the immigration and the immigrant history of this country, but let’s do it in a legal way. My eyes were opened, as I did military duty on the border, to the fact that we have a long way to go. This can be a bipartisan issue—it doesn’t need to be Republican versus Democrat—but it needs to be something that we actually finally do, and we stand together and we say we’ll be a Nation that is safe once and for all.

TAXES

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, today is the deadline for filing tax returns. Even though we were given 2 extra days this year, we are running out of time for the Tax Code.

The tax system doesn’t generate enough money for what America needs and spends today. It’s getting more expensive every year to continue the huge array of tax breaks even as the code itself becomes more unfair, com-

plex, and inefficient. It costs over \$160 billion a year for Americans just to comply with the Tax Code.

The path forward should be simple. First, we should stop making the code more complex, which, sadly, the Republican plan working its way forward will do with \$50 billion of additional unfocused tax breaks. At least if we’re going to borrow another \$50 billion from the Chinese, we should use it to fund job-creating infrastructure. For instance, that \$50 billion would enable us to fund a multiyear transportation reauthorization.

We should also repeal the pernicious alternative minimum tax. It was once designed as a tax on very rich people who didn’t pay taxes. Today, no billionaire hedge fund manager pays the alternative minimum tax. Instead, it falls on upper middle-income families, especially those who pay a lot of taxes.

Every year we find some creative way to avoid the consequence of it not being indexed for inflation. Every year we find some way to have a fix, to have a patch to avoid the alternative minimum tax’s full impact. Unless somehow there is a complete breakdown in the political process, which, sadly, is not impossible, as we saw this last year with the FAA reauthorization. If that were to happen, then at least the full fury of 20 to 30 million of upper middle-income and middle-income households who would be forced to pay it—they would force it to be repealed.

We should combine the alternative minimum tax repeal with the imposition of the so-called “Buffett Rule,” where millionaires at least pay as much as the people who answer their phones and drive them to work. This will get back to the original intent of the alternative minimum tax but in a way that simplifies the Tax Code rather than further complicating it.

We should stop the dangerous practice of suspending some of the payroll tax in the name of economic stimulus. We are uncomfortably close to destabilizing the long-term funding mechanism for Social Security. Instead of the payroll tax cut, let’s target a tax credit for lower and middle-income families that will be fair, affordable, and help nurture our fragile economic recovery without threatening the long-term Social Security stability.

We should target for elimination tax breaks that are out of date, like the subsidy of oil that doesn’t reflect current production techniques or the reality of global petroleum markets. We should instead protect subsidies that are key for our future, especially expiring renewable energy tax credits. We should renew the section 1603 Treasury grant program, which reflects current market realities and would actually be less expensive than traditional tax credits.

On this tax day, we should look for some progress towards building momentum for real tax reform. The Romney-Republican House budget refuses to identify any of the massive tax increases that will be necessary to meet

their plan of even more tax cuts for the rich, and not increase the deficit.

With \$4 trillion in expiring tax provisions later this year, we should use some of that economic capacity to make the tax system more fair and simple while we reduce the debt.

The time to begin that process is now—not making the Tax Code more complex, not favoring those who need help the least, not risking long-term Social Security funding, and not borrowing for unfocused new tax relief. Instead, let's deal with investments like renewable energy and infrastructure. Let's use some of this budget capacity to reduce the overall corporate tax rate while broadening the base and closing loopholes.

Simpler, fairer, better for business. Let's eliminate the tyranny of the alternative minimum tax, protect our energy future, and support renewables. There is a path forward, and we should start on it now. What better way to honor American taxpayers on filing day than getting serious with an agenda that can actually be achieved, and should be.

IRS HARASSMENT OF TEA PARTY GROUPS

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

Mr. McCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, a defining aspect of the American tradition is that groups of citizens band together for a wide variety of civic purposes. They recruit volunteers, raise funds, and spend those funds to promote whatever project or cause brings them together.

For more than a century, our tax laws have recognized that such voluntary associations—nonprofits as we call them today—should not be taxed because their proceeds are devoted entirely to improve our communities through education, advocacy, and civic action. Section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code recognizes them today, and civic groups as diverse as MoveOn.org, the League of Conservation Voters, the ACLU, the National Rifle Association, and various taxpayer groups have always been included in this definition.

We don't apply a political test to these civic groups. We recognize the fundamental right of Americans to organize and to pool their resources to promote whatever causes they believe in, left or right. Indeed, whatever their political persuasion, these civic groups perform an absolutely indispensable role in our democracy by raising public awareness, defining issues, educating voters, promoting reforms, holding officials accountable, and petitioning their government to redress grievances. Abolition, women's suffrage, the civil rights movement—all would have been impossible without them.

In order to be recognized as nonprofit groups, these organizations must register with the IRS—a purely ministe-

rial function that in the past has been applied evenly and without regard to their political views. At least until now. It seems that Tea Party groups are today being treated very differently than their counterparts on the political left. For the last 2 years, many have been stonewalled by the IRS when they sought to register as nonprofits. Most recently, they have been barraged with increasingly aggressive and threatening demands vastly outside the legal authority of the IRS. Indeed, the only conceivable purpose of some of these demands is to intimidate and harass.

A Tea Party group in my district is typical of the reports that we are now hearing across this country. This group submitted articles of incorporation as a nonprofit to the State of California, and they received approval within a month. But then they tried to register as a nonprofit with the IRS. Despite repeated and numerous inquiries, the IRS stonewalled this group for a year and a half, at which time it demanded thousands of pages of documentation and gave the group less than 3 weeks to produce it.

The IRS demanded the names of every participant at every meeting held over the last 2 years, transcripts of every speech given at those meetings, what positions they had taken on issues, the names of their volunteers and donors, and copies of communications they had with elected officials, and on and on. Perhaps most chilling of all, the organizer of this particular group soon found herself the object of a personal income tax audit by the IRS.

Mr. Speaker, these are groups of volunteers who pass the hat at meetings to pay for renting the hall. They give of their own time to research issues and pay out of their own pockets for printing flyers. The donations made to them aren't tax deductible, so there is no legitimate purpose in asking for the names of their donors, let alone of their volunteers, unless—and this is the fine point of it—unless the purpose is to harass and intimidate.

□ 1020

Ironically, the same tactics we now see used by the United States against tea parties were once used by the most abusive of the Southern States in the 1950s to intimidate civil rights groups like the NAACP.

No such tactics have been reported by similar civic groups on the political left, so the conclusion is inescapable—that this administration is very clearly, very pointedly, and very deliberately attempting to intimidate, harass, and threaten civic-minded groups with which they disagree, using one of the most feared and powerful agencies of the United States Government to do so.

Mr. Speaker, these facts speak for themselves. They need no embellishment or interpretation. They should alarm every American of goodwill regardless of political philosophy, for if

this precedent is allowed to stand, no one's freedom is safe. I bring these facts to the attention of the House today and ask that they be rigorously investigated and, if found accurate, that those officials responsible be exposed, disgraced, dismissed, and debarred from any further position of trust or power within our government.

STAFFORD LOAN INTEREST RATES

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

Mr. WELCH. Mr. Speaker, in 74 days, this Congress may well hang a financial albatross around the necks of students and families across this country. That's because, on July 1, student interest rates are scheduled to go from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent, literally doubling the interest costs that our kids and their parents are going to have to pay on their education.

We have got to find a way, Republicans and Democrats, to work together and avoid this punishing interest rate increase on our students. This is not about Republicans or Democrats. It's not about red States or blue States. It's not about the 2012 elections. It's about the kids that we all represent. It's about the parents that we all represent.

In my case in the State of Vermont, it's about students like Michael McGurk, who is a freshman at the University of Vermont, and he literally doesn't know whether he's going to be able to go on in college if the interest rates double. It's about parents like Ben Truman and Jennifer Wallace Brodeur, who last month were sitting around the table with their son who was about to go to college and are trying to put the pieces together to be able to afford it.

What this is also about is ground zero for the middle class. This country faces a very fundamental question: Are we a country, are we a Congress that is going to remain committed to expanding and broadening the middle class, making it possible for low-income folks to climb their way into the middle class, making it possible for folks in the middle class to stay there? In order to do that, we have to invest in the future, and that means making it possible, making it affordable, for our kids to get the education they need to get that start.

Student debt in this country is at a crisis point. At \$900 billion, student debt outpaces that of credit cards, outpaces that of auto loans, and there is no end in sight. In Vermont—and again, this has nothing to do with what their political affiliation is—nearly 70 percent of our college students graduate with a debt of about \$30,000. That's real money. That's more than many of those students will make in their first years out of college. It's a tough job market, and entry level jobs don't pay a lot. Students are totally at the mercy of a system that is out of