

the ill-effects of our progressive Tax Code. Perhaps more important, it would reduce the Federal Government's power over the lives of taxpayers and get the government out of the business of trying to micromanage the economy.

The major features of a flat tax include a single flat rate. All flat tax proposals have a single rate that is usually less than 20 percent. The low flat rate solves the problem of high marginal tax rates by reducing penalties against productive behavior such as work, risk-taking, and entrepreneurship. It has an elimination of special preferences. A flat tax proposal would eliminate provisions of the Tax Code that give preferential treatment on certain behaviors and activities. Getting rid of deductions, credits, and exemptions also helps to solve the problem of complexity, allowing taxpayers to file their tax returns on a simple form.

There should be no double taxation of saving and investment. Flat tax proposals would eliminate the Tax Code's bias against capital formation by ending the double taxation of income that is saved and invested. This means no death tax, low or perhaps no capital gains tax, no double taxation of savings, and no double taxation on dividends. By taxing income only one time, a flat tax is easier to enforce and more conducive to job creation and capital formation.

There are two principal arguments for a flat tax: growth and fairness. Many economists are attracted to the idea because the current tax system with its higher rates and discriminatory taxation of saving and investment reduces growth, destroys jobs, and lowers incomes. A flat tax would not eliminate the damaging impact of taxes altogether, but by dramatically lowering rates and ending the Tax Code bias against saving and investment, it would boost the economy's performance, especially when compared to the current Tax Code.

Under a flat-tax system, I believe in only three taxable deductions: a child tax credit, a mortgage interest tax deduction, and a charitable contribution deduction.

Mr. Speaker, we want families to have children, and we want children to have homes. Most importantly, we want Americans helping Americans. This system would end the class warfare rhetoric perpetrated by President Obama and eliminate many, if not all, special interest loopholes that have been created over decades of Tax Code manipulation.

Look at other countries around the world that have implemented and are in the process of implementing the flat tax. Economic growth increases, unemployment drops, and we see more compliance with the tax law.

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Nations such as Estonia and Slovakia are widely viewed as role models since

both have engaged in dramatic reform and are reaping enormous economic benefits. Since instituting the flat tax, Estonia has thrived and become a member of the European Union.

The flat tax was implemented in 1994 at 26 percent and has since fallen to 21 percent of income. From 2001 to 2007, Estonia's economy grew by an average of 9 percent per year, which, as we just saw with our recent GDP growth statistics for the first quarter of 2.2 percent, we are severely lacking. In 2003, its unemployment rate was in excess of 12 percent. Just 5 years later, only 4.5 percent of its population was without jobs. Compare that, Mr. Speaker, to the anemic GDP growth of the economic recovery under President Obama.

I think the most important thing we have to come to understand is that this time in history truly does belong to the American people. The money, the resources belong to the American people.

The liberal, progressive approach that one should give more money to the government in order to better society is a flawed approach and, please, Mr. Speaker, tell me where a social, egalitarian, welfare, nanny state has ever been successful in the world. Thomas Sowell once said:

Liberals seem to assume that, if you don't believe in their particular political solutions, then you don't really care about the people that they claim to want to help.

I do not believe that I can spend the money of over half a million people I represent in south Florida any better than they can themselves. We should be coming up with ideas of how to keep more money in American pockets to invest in our economy instead of propaganda-esque divisive rhetoric separating the American people for the spoils of politicians.

Let's start treating the American people as adults and find our own integrity and character, Mr. Speaker. The key thing that has to accompany this is that we must reduce the size and scope of government as well because as we start to focus more on Main Street, as we start to focus more on the hard-working American taxpayers and what is truly best for them, then we can have that investment at their level; we can have the growth at their level.

When President Obama talks about increasing investments in government, I must simply inquire: What is the rate of return?

We grew the bureaucracy of education, and the standards of education in the United States of America dropped. We created the Department of Energy, and still we are not energy independent. We bail out private sector industries yet experience the slowest economic recovery in U.S. history.

Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons that I came to the United States Congress is to begin enacting sweeping reforms that show the American people that we are serious about turning this economy around and that we're serious about

creating the right type of policies that set the conditions of job creation. We're talking about economic freedom for the American people as opposed to economic dependency upon government. This incredible, exorbitant system that we have is complex to the point where it is causing more pain for the American people and causes them to not have the freedom that they deserve nor faith in any of us.

Mr. Speaker, I reject the notion that fairness comes from wealth redistribution. True fairness rewards merit, creating the conditions for economic success and achieving your goals. That is the American way, to promote individual industrialism to honor the entrepreneurial will and spirit of our countrymen.

Mr. Speaker, a simple question: Why did your ancestors come to this country? Did they come to get a fair system of forced income redistribution?

The government cannot and never will save our country nor our economy. Unless we let our children earn their successes, we will hand them a country in decline, one where they will need to rely on government for their success. It is immoral to pull the ladder of success out from under our children's feet like this.

And how can I explain this to my children, my two daughters, Aubrey and Austen? How would you explain this to your children, Mr. Speaker?

We have never done less with America in our history, and I believe here in Washington, D.C., we need to try doing a lot more with less of the resources of the American people.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, let us show the American people that we stand steadfast and loyal to this constitutional Republic and to the preservation of a legacy of liberty, freedom, and democracy for subsequent generations. To all others who would stand contrary to those simple beliefs, well, Mr. Speaker, in the words of the great philosopher, Mr. T, I say that "I pity the fool."

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

STUDENT LOANS

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

Ms. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today, I thought, not to speak personally, but as I listened to the gentleman from Florida, as I have listened to Members as they've taken the floor today, I thought I'd like to share a story with the American people, Mr. Speaker, and it's my own story.

I went to college at Wake Forest University. I remember the day I was accepted, I was so excited. My parents were excited, too, but we knew, as a family with six children, my father having served in the United States Air

Force for 30 years, that they wanted for me what they wanted for all of us, and that was the chance for the American Dream in a different way than they had.

We knew that in order to do that, that it would take a combination of academic scholarships, grants, loans, and savings to put together what it would take to receive a college education, and so that's what we did as a family. I stand here today to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that it gives me great sadness to know that Republicans on the other side of the aisle would have student loan interest rates increase, double, by July 1 without acting in this Congress.

Today, very sadly, what we did was we said to families—and particularly to women, girls who want to go to school—that you have a choice: We'll either double your interest rates to 6.8 percent beginning in the first year of your college loan or you can have preventive health care services. Imagine for the young women across this country that their choice is preventive health care services or the ability to go to school on a student loan, have that loan, the interest rate low, and then pay back that loan over a period of time. What a horrible choice.

Now, we've listened earlier as people talk about building the American Dream and climbing the ladders of opportunity to success, but that ladder has rungs. One of the rungs of that ladder, as my family well knew when I became a freshman in college, is the opportunity to get a college education, to do better than the previous generation. It's what we want for all of our children.

I went to school on student loans, and I went to school on student loans at a time when, between undergraduate school and then law school, I effectively had almost \$100,000 in student loans. A quarter of that, about \$25,000 of that, was paid out to some bank that made a profit.

Instead, what we have done as Democrats is we, in 2010, passed a package of reforms for student loans, lowered the interest rate of student loans so that it was affordable, made those loan payments affordable and manageable, made sure that when you were coming out of school, if you had a job that didn't pay you as much as you needed or wanted, that your student loans would be able to be managed and at an interest rate that was affordable. That's not what I had, but it's what we were able to give our young people today.

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It's what Republicans in this Congress have decided to take away. So, then in 2007, we passed the College Cost Reduction and Access Act. It provided relief to students from high interest rates by lowering those interest rates. When I came out of undergraduate school and law school, I had this array of student loans that had different interest rates. Little did I know that when I tried to consolidate those loans,

I actually ended up paying the higher interest rate.

Today, when students are graduating from college under what Democrats did in 2007, we actually, in this Congress, made sure that the interest rates would be affordable, that students would then be able to manage them, and that they would be able to pay their loans back. So I want to tell you something that I'm not really proud of, and that's that I also got in trouble paying my loans back. I didn't make as much as I needed to pay those and to balance my other responsibilities. It was difficult, but over a period of time, because the program, in fact, was affordable, because I knew that we all had—my neighbors—we all had my back, that I could pay those student loans back over a period of time.

Do you know, Mr. Speaker, just 1 month before I was elected to Congress, I paid my last student loan? I can still remember that day in January writing that check to pay the last of my student loans. Do you know how proud I am to have been able to do that? The reason is because I knew that when my son was going to college, we were doing the same things that my parents did when I went to college, collecting the savings and academic scholarships, but also putting together a package of loans that would be affordable for him to go to school.

It's what we do. It's sort of that contract that we have from one generation to the next generation. I borrowed for my student loans; I paid those student loans off. My son borrowed some for his student loans and is now in the process of paying those off.

But let's look at what Republicans would have us do. First of all, we know that if we don't act by July 1 that interest rates will, in fact, double from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent for 7 million students across this country. Already, students across our country bear nearly \$1 trillion in student loan debt, and they struggle in this difficult economy, as many are struggling, to pay those loans. But think what would happen if the interest rate on those loans was allowed to increase to 6.8 percent, to effectively double that interest rate.

Well, what does that mean for your average student? Well, Mr. Speaker, what it means is that a student on average coming out with \$23,000 in debt would have to pay roughly an additional \$11,000 over the course of that loan period to make up for that additional interest. This makes no sense whatsoever.

I think that students across the country must be wondering what it is that Republicans are doing here in Congress that would have them double their interest rate, especially when we're talking about a part of our population that's done everything that we've asked of them. They succeeded in high school. They're going on to college. They are coming out with a promise of a hope for a good job and to be able to do better than the previous generation. And we're saying to them—Republicans in this House are saying to

them, instead, we want to double your interest rate. We want you to pay not just the \$23,000 that you owe, but an additional \$11,000 in interest.

More than that, what we've heard from some even on this House floor is that there are many on the other side of the aisle who don't believe that we should have a federally subsidized student loan program at all, education for those who are wealthy who can afford it, but for middle class families, not the ability to get a student loan and to pay that loan back in a manageable way over a period of time.

So we stand united as Democrats and say we are not going to sacrifice middle class families and stack them up against women's health care. We want to make sure that we pay for these lowered student loan interests by ending a corporate tax break. That seems fair enough. Yet, Republicans on the other side of the aisle will simply not be reasonable and agree with what the overwhelming majority of American people agree to, and that is that we should have student loans that are available and accessible to middle class families.

So I'll have more to say on this, Mr. Speaker, but at this time, I would like to recognize the gentlelady from Oregon, new to the Congress, who will join me in this discussion about student loans and student loan interest, Ms. BONAMICI.

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you to my colleague for yielding. I'm so happy to be here today with my colleagues in support of preventing a drastic hike on student loan interest rates. Education truly is the key to improving our economy and ensuring a strong America for generations to come, but current barriers to higher education jeopardize those goals for too many. Education needs to be accessible to everyone, not just to those who can pay tuition out of their pocket.

I'm proud to be a cosponsor of the Stop the Rate Hike Act, which will prevent a jump in student loan interest rates, but not at the expense of health care for vulnerable populations and women.

Federal student loans play a significant role in improving access to education. If we allow interest rates to double on July 1, this key component of college affordability will become an increased burden on millions of students across the country who currently have student loans. The average amount of loan debt for these students is more than \$23,000, and if we don't prevent this hike in interest rates, they will see their debt burden increase by an average of \$1,000 just this year.

Now, I'm pleased that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle recognize the importance of preserving affordable interest rates for students, but I'm disappointed in proposals that would guarantee these rates at the expense of other struggling populations. The prevention and public health fund is a

critical tool that decreases costs and improves access to health care for a number of populations, including women and children. If fully funded, in 2013 women and children will have access to many lifesaving screenings and preventive care, like funding for breast and cervical cancer screenings and childhood vaccinations. Without this important fund, many women and children would not be able to access these tests, leading to poorer outcomes and increased costs on our health care system in the future. Now, I'm hopeful that the Senate will act to prevent a jump in loan interest rates and send a bill back to the House that does not cut preventive health care funding.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to improve our education system, create jobs, and continue our economic recovery without reversing the important steps forward we've made to improve access to health care.

Ms. EDWARDS. I thank the gentlelady from Oregon, and I was just reminded as I listened to her that in her State of Oregon, something on the order of 119,000 students will see an increase of about \$93 million in interest rates if this takes place on July 1.

In my own home State of Maryland, 103,400 students would see an increase in interest rates if the rate is allowed to go up from 3.4 percent now to double at 6.8 percent, and in Maryland, that would be to the tune of \$80 million. These are extraordinary numbers, and that burden would be borne by those to whom we've said, you've done the right thing, you've gone to college, you've paid for your college, and now you're going to be able to repay your loans, but we want you to pay additional student loan interest because the Republicans have refused to act without also taking away preventive health care.

These are really extraordinary numbers, Mr. Speaker, and I think when the American people hear about the danger that is afoot come July 1 with the increase in student loan interest, middle class families all across this country will be completely outraged.

With that, I'd like to yield a few minutes of time to my colleague from New York (Ms. CLARKE).

Ms. CLARKE of New York. I thank the gentlelady for yielding. Today, the House passed H.R. 4628, the Interest Rate Reduction Act, or, as I like to refer to it, the "take from the poor—give to the poor not in our interest act."

This Republican-led bill will prevent the student loan interest rate from doubling to 6.8 percent, but in doing so would effectively gut the prevention and public health trust fund, a key component of the Affordable Care Act. When my Republican colleagues finally acknowledged the need to prevent student loan interest rates from rising on July 1, I had a glimmer of hope, hope that somewhere in their hearts remained some small bit of compassion for their fellow Americans. But I was quickly slapped back into reality when

I saw that the Republicans intended to pay for this bill, as they usually do, on the backs of middle class families and the poor.

The prevention and public health trust fund was created to ensure adequate funding for preventive health initiatives. These initiatives help to improve the health of poor and middle class families and, by improving health, also help to lower health care costs.

Initiatives supported by this fund are successful because they are community-based, and as such, are uniquely tailored to the needs of targeted communities. Already, there are several key initiatives supported by the fund that benefit Americans. Two of the initiatives which directly benefit the 11th Congressional District of New York are the Chronic Disease Prevention Act, which enables communities to use evidence-based intervention to reduce chronic conditions and prevent heart attacks, diabetes, strokes, and other conditions; and the HIV/AIDS Prevention Act, which focuses on HIV prevention in high-risk populations and communities by increasing HIV testing opportunities, linking HIV positive persons with needed services and filling critical gaps in data collection.

To eliminate funding for programs that improve the health and lives of millions of Americans and lower health care costs is not prudent, which is why this ill-conceived bill is the wrong way to address this crisis. Luckily, there are two ways that this crisis can be averted. Specifically, I ask that Speaker BOEHNER bring to the floor either H.R. 3826, a bill introduced by my friend and colleague, Representative JOE COURTNEY, or H.R. 4816, a bill introduced by another of my Democratic colleagues, JOHN TIERNEY.

While both bills will prevent an increase in the student loan interest rate, H.R. 4816 would also pay for this by decreasing the amount of subsidies given to Big Oil companies. So, as opposed to paying for this interest rate freeze on the backs of the middle class and the poor, the Democratic-sponsored H.R. 4816 would require that Big Oil companies pay their fair share.

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So in closing, I'm issuing a call to action to all students, postgraduates, and their families: pick up the phone, email, tweet and send a Facebook message and demand that he immediately either bring H.R. 3826 or H.R. 4816 to the floor for a vote.

So, my colleagues, we have a challenge ahead of us: Do we take from the poor to give to the poor, or do we do what is right by the American people? And that is, to make sure that our students' interest rates do not increase and that we meet the demands for health care in our civil society.

Ms. EDWARDS. I thank the gentlelady from New York. And I just wanted to point out to her, as she well knows from New York, that 422,000 students, if

this is allowed to happen on July 1, would see an increase of interest rates from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent. For those 422,000 students in New York, that would mean \$340 million in increased interest rates.

So I think we can see all across the country and, just really, Mr. Speaker, would like to urge our students out there and our families to think about what this would mean for them, 7 million students across this country doing exactly what we ask them to and facing a doubling of interest rates on July 1.

I notice that we've been joined today by my colleague from Ohio, who's going to help us understand also what's happening in the State of Ohio—the home of Ohio State, where I know a lot of students must be paying attention to the fact that their interest rates will double on July 1.

Mr. RYAN.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I thank the gentlelady, who is also a graduate of the University of New Hampshire Law School—two proud graduates.

I would just like to chime in and talk a little bit because Ohio is a State that, since the inception of the State into the Union, we have always, in Ohio, made investments into our schools, our colleges, our universities through the land grant system and whatnot, because there was always this deep appreciation for education, knowing that as we move, as this country moved throughout the industrial age into the information age now, how essential it is for our kids to be able to go to school and to be able to go to community college and to be able to go to college and to be able to take a loan out, which many, many years ago they really didn't have to do because the Pell Grant was at a level that they didn't really necessarily need a loan. You could get a part-time job or a summer job or work back in your community throughout the year, over the holidays, and be able to supplement. Your parents could help out a little bit, and you would be able to get an education.

Today, because of the explosion in education costs, many of us believe that there is a responsibility for all of us collectively as a society to do something that we can't do on our own, and that's make investments in education and allow every citizen in this country, if they want to, to go to college. But knowing that not everyone wants to go to college, maybe they want to go to community college, which is fine, but it's about ramping up the education level in the United States of America, and it's about making sure that it's affordable.

This is kind of a divisive issue here in Congress. Today, it came to a head right here on the House floor, where there was one side of the aisle that said we want to make these investments and make sure that the student loan rates don't double to 6.8 percent from 3.4 percent because that will be a burden on middle class families and that

will be a further burden on parents who are cosigning or paying these student loans, or more of a burden for the student who wants to graduate from college and then maybe go out and have a decent start in life without a \$20,000 or \$30,000 or \$40,000-a-year debt hanging over their head. That would do a lot to stimulate the economy. And we have the other side who said, well, we don't want to do that, but the political pressure got so hot that we're going to do that, and we're going to take it out of screenings for poor and middle class women to get cancer screenings.

Now, what I really dislike about what's happened in this country in the last few years, it's come down to either screw the little guy or screw the little guy. We can't do one or the other. We can't ask for the Buffett rule. We can't ask for a little bit more money from Warren Buffett so that we can invest into these kinds of things. We certainly can't ask the oil and gas industry to pay a little bit more and close a loophole so that we can afford to pay for education for all of our citizens. We can't restructure the Tax Code and make investments that are going to yield a huge benefit for early childhood, for example. So what are we doing?

This doesn't make any sense because America hasn't become successful because we failed to invest. We became successful because America always invested. We always put money into education. We always put money into research and development. We always made sure that our education level was to the level of the technology of its time.

□ 1400

And that's what we're talking about here. And in Ohio, we need these investments because the middle class in Ohio has been squeezed, consistently squeezed. For 30 years, wages have been stagnant.

So now, if you're sitting in Ohio, and you're a member of the building and construction trades, plumbers and pipe fitters, or cement masons or electrical workers, now in Ohio, they're trying to pass a right-to-work-for-less legislation too, which means that the average worker in a State that has right-to-work-for-less laws, makes about \$1,500 a year less than a State that doesn't have it. Their health insurance is 2.6 percentage points lower in right-to-work States. Your pensions are lower.

So imagine you're this person who's trying to make ends meet in Ohio, and your wages have been stagnant for 30 years. And now they're going to say—the Republican Party is pushing—we'll do right-to-work. So you'll see lower wages, lower health care benefits, and worse pensions.

Then the Republicans in Congress, in the House, are passing a bill saying, oh, by the way, you're only going to make \$1,500 a year less. But if you have a student loan that you signed on to for your son or daughter, you're going to

have to pay double that interest rate. Or if you get a student loan, you're going to have to pay double the interest rate that it is now.

If you have health care, and maybe your kid was going to stay on it because he's under 26, or she's under 26 years old, the Republicans want to repeal that. So now your kid's got to go out and get health care and pay more on a student loan, while you're making \$1,500 a year less, and your pension's going to be less, and your health care's going to be less.

What are we doing? This is not the kind of America that we all believe in. And the student loan issue, I think, cuts right to the heart of it.

Then you have this compounding assault on the American worker, whether it's right-to-work-for-less, or whether it's destroy collective bargaining, as they tried to do in Ohio last year. And now it's the student loans. And now we can't even ask Warren Buffett to help out.

I think it's time for us to all wake up as Americans and say, wait a minute, where's the balance? Where's the fairness? Where's the investments into our future?

Many of us are either sons and daughters or grandsons and granddaughters or great grandsons and great granddaughters of immigrants. And the value placed upon education in those families is because that was the way out. That was the way out. That was the way to have success in America.

And what scares me about this is that this is not the kind of America many of us believe in. This is not the kind of America many of us want, and this is the kind of America that is very, very shortsighted and where we're going to end up.

Let me just say, lastly, and I'll yield back to the gentlelady, do we really think, with 300 million to 400 million people in America, do we really think that we're going to be competitive with 1.3 billion or 1.4 billion people in China, 1.2, 3 or 4 or 5 billion people in India, if we're not making the adequate investments into education?

And so these folks at home who will have to deal with right-to-work, student loans, less pensions, less health care, less this, less that, at the same time the tax burden is going to be pushed onto them. They'll be forced to vote on the local property tax for police and fire. They'll be forced to vote on a local property tax for their local school levies, mental health, the whole nine yards. And it's getting continuously squeezed for the middle class. And this student loan issue, and what's happening with the rates here and the cuts that are being made here are a major part of that.

Ms. EDWARDS. I'd like to thank the gentleman. And I'm reminded as he's speaking that there are middle class families in Ohio and all across this country for whom this isn't just about feeling good about making sure that young people can go to college. It's

about making certain that our middle class families aren't just struggling, but they're really surviving in this economy and in the economy going forward.

I was reminded again that in Ohio 379,000 students would see an increase of about \$294 million if this increase in student loans is allowed to go forward. And I think about those students at Ohio State University, at Oberlin College, at Xavier. I could name a lot of them.

I remember, as a second grader, living on Wright Patterson Air Force base in Dayton, Ohio, and there was not a moment in second grade that my parents didn't impress on me that one day I would go to college. My mom and dad didn't know how I would go to college, but they knew that I had to go. And at the time I was such a fan of all those great Ohio universities.

But I also knew that were I to go then or to go now, that in addition to our savings and to academic scholarships, and maybe even Pell Grants, I would also need to take out student loans. And that's the situation that students in Ohio and across this country face, in realizing that on July 1, without action by this Congress, Republicans and Democrats owe it to middle class families to make sure that those student loans don't increase. Everything else is increasing. Let's not increase the interest rate on student loans. And I thank the gentleman.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I think when you're looking at a State like Ohio, and like many States, like Maryland, like Pennsylvania, where you're retooling your economy, you've got to grow scientists, engineers, people involved in technology, in math, and you've got to grow that field so that we can generate the new generation of jobs necessary.

And you've also got to educate the workforce. So no more high school diplomas. Not even a year. But get into these apprenticeship programs that the unions have. Get into the community college so we start lifting up.

If we want to do advanced manufacturing, if we want to sell products globally to the world, and wind and solar and the new renewables, whatever the case may be, batteries, whatever, those workers on the factory floor have to have skills that they're not going to get in high school, and this is all part of that program.

So I want to thank the gentlelady for taking the time to do this Special Order and look forward to continuing to support her and the Democrats as we try to bring some sanity to this place.

Ms. EDWARDS. I thank the gentleman. Yet again, here we are, we're talking about a situation where, since January, the President and congressional Democrats, since January of this year, have been urging Republicans to please act so that we don't see an increase in student loan interest from 3.4 percent, a doubling, to 6.8 percent.

And here we are in April; and April is a time when many families, young people have received their notification that they've been accepted into college. They've received maybe notification of a scholarship opportunity.

They also know that their families may have to dig into their savings, or they'll have to get a job; and then they begin to think too about applying for and receiving that student loan so that it puts together the full package of what's needed to go to college. Those are the decisions that here, in April, families all across this country are making. And they're making those decisions, not knowing whether this Congress is going to fail to act that would result in an increase and a doubling of student loan interests, that would cost students not just the \$23,000 in debt that they're likely to graduate college holding on to and needing to repay, but an additional \$11,000 over the course of that loan, over the history of that loan and the repayment. I think it's really shameful.

I look that there are some in this country who didn't have to worry about how to pay for college. I know that there are some in this country who didn't have to wake up and know that they had to get into a work-study program, or do like I did, wait tables in addition to going to class, in addition to receiving loans, in addition to receiving scholarships to pay to go to school. But that's the exception in this country; it's not the rule.

The overwhelming majority of students across this country who go to college, who want to do better because their parents want them to do better than they did, have to do a combination of things in order to afford college, whether it's a 4-year institution or community college and getting those skills to put you into the workforce or an apprenticeship program. This is the situation that our students and their families are facing.

With that, I'd like to yield time to my good friend from Rhode Island (Mr. CICILLINE).

□ 1410

Mr. CICILLINE. I thank my colleague, Ms. EDWARDS, for having this conversation this evening and to say how important it is for me and the residents of my State, the State of Rhode Island.

Rhode Island is, of course, the home of the great Senator Claiborne Pell after whom the Pell Grants were named for his great work in ensuring there was access to affordable higher education. There was a recent report that was done that said from the year 2008 to 2018, it's estimated that there will be 47 million job openings created, and more than 30 million of these jobs will require at least some level of post-secondary education.

So this is really about thinking about the future of the economy of our country and our ability to meet the demands of the new economy of the 21st

century. And it's an economic imperative for families that they have the ability to access higher education and to do it in an affordable way.

In my State, this is particularly important where we have very high unemployment. Young adults in 2010 from the ages from 16-24, there is an unemployment rate in Rhode Island of nearly 27 percent, and in 2011, at 22 percent for that same age group. That's between 16,000 and 17,000 young adults without the ability to find work in those 2 years.

This is a very important issue. I have talked to so many of my constituents, both students and families, who are worried about their ability to continue to access education, that are making decisions as they're getting their letters in the mail about where they are going to go to school and thinking about what those costs will be.

What is incredibly disappointing is what we saw today in this Chamber; we've seen this movie before. We saw it during the extension of the payroll tax cut. We saw it in the transportation bill, this idea of a very urgent need that we have to address working in a bipartisan way and at the very final hours, some poison pill is thrown into the bill that is obstructing progress on this issue. Today it was women's health and children's health and cutting nearly \$12 billion from an important wellness and prevention fund to do this.

Look, we have got to do this for the sake of young people in this country who are in school, who have school loans, who are thinking about new opportunities. We have got to prevent this increase in interest rates. It's important to families who are struggling in a really difficult economy, but it's also important to the future of our country. We have got to be in the position to ensure the best talent has the ability to access education in this country.

You know, there are so many young people who, without school loans, will never have the opportunity to pursue higher education and to pursue their dream or to make a life for themselves and their family. We have a responsibility to be sure that we keep these rates low, as low as we possibly can so that young people and families are not having to struggle with this additional burden at a time when we want to be encouraging as many young people as possible to be pursuing higher education and the opportunities and careers that come with it.

I come from a State that understands that investing in education is critical to families and critical to economic opportunity. Education still is the best tool to bring people from poverty into the middle class and beyond, and we have got to make sure that it's available to every single American.

I'm very disappointed today that the measure was undertaken in the way that it was, and the President has already indicated an intention to veto

this proposal. There are other proposals that we have in this House I'm a cosponsor of that will do this in a responsible way that have bipartisan support in the Senate. We have got to do this for the sake of young people in this country, and we owe it to families to ensure that this rate does not double on July 1.

I thank the gentlelady for her leadership on this, and I am proud to continue to be part of this important fight for the sake of the future of our young people and for the sake of the future for our country.

Ms. EDWARDS. I want to thank the gentleman from Rhode Island and just want to point out to him, as I've pointed out to others of my colleagues here, and thank you so much for your eloquence, not just about what those loans mean to individual families, but what they mean as an economic imperative for the 21st century. As Democrats, we recognize that.

I would note that in the great State of Rhode Island, we have an opportunity for 43,000 students in your State, Mr. CICILLINE, to make sure that students aren't facing an additional \$34 million in increase because of what might happen on July 1.

As Republicans and as Democrats, we can do something about this. We don't have to get to a point where we're saying to students for the future that we really don't care about you. We don't care about the fact that we helped you do and be all that you can through high school, but now we're going to dump you when it comes to going to college.

So I thank the gentleman for his leadership.

Up until today, the Republican majority has simply refused to acknowledge that this hike would affect millions of students and families, 7 million students across this country. Perhaps today after a reversal by the assumed Republican Presidential nominee, we voted on a bill that would finally address the issue. But it's so sad that they did that at the expense of health care for working families.

No one understands that more than the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia, my friend and my neighbor. I'd like to take a moment to recognize her and her leadership. If I recall, she taught at a law school and understands those students who really struggle to get through and make sure they're doing what they need to do academically, but that they're able to pay for a quality education; and I'd like to recognize the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON).

Ms. NORTON. I want to thank my very good friend from Maryland, Congresswoman EDWARDS. It's so typical of her to come to the floor on an urgent issue like this.

I have to chuckle when you say about my having been a tenured professor of law at Georgetown, the gentleman from Rhode Island who was one of my students and the gentleman from Detroit was another. So it makes me feel

pretty ancient, but it makes me feel very good, also, to see that my students got elected to the Congress while I was still here.

I can't imagine what the gentleman from Rhode Island went through because I never experienced it, but he probably had college loans coming out of college. Don't even let me talk about tuition at Georgetown Law School. A very good law school, but one of the most expensive in the country.

As a matter of fact, I'm still a tenured professor of law at Georgetown because under the rules of the House, you can teach and still be a Member. So I teach one course there every year. I'm coming to the end of the school year. I go over every other Monday just to keep my brain intact. Sometimes this is a place that gets your brain out of order. It's certainly out of order when it comes to student loans.

The notion that we have to come to the floor today to plead for student loans during a recovery from the great recession, when these great people get out of school, they are not likely to get a job. The very least you would think this Congress could do effortlessly would be to say, Look, you had to take loans; you have to pay interest. We know that means that you're going to be delayed years from doing what all of us did, which was to buy a house pretty early in our careers.

These students will not have the credit to buy a house. First of all, they'll have to pay off their loans. They can't liquidate them in bankruptcy. As with other debts. Now they face the possibility of a doubling of their interest. When Democrats were in power, we adjusted those interest rates. What a cruel hoax, to let them double, particularly since we're just coming out of a recovery.

College students are now beginning to get jobs for the first time. They have started out their careers without any jobs and are faced with humongous loans. I don't know how people go to graduate school like my good friend from Rhode Island.

Of course, if you go to certain kinds of graduate schools, there are stipends but for people in graduate education, there are only loans on top of their undergraduate loans. If you go to law school and medical school, you're really on your own. Those are professional schools. You're going with a huge amount of debt.

In my own district, which, remember, is only one city, the borrowers this year were almost 65,000, and if the interest rates increase, it will bring them to something over \$13 billion.

□ 1420

I don't even want to tell my constituents that. They're depending on me to do something about it. And here on the floor we hear nonsense about "how are you going to pay for it?" Are you going to pay for it by stripping health care for women, children, for your parents in order to keep your interest rates

from going up? Are you going to pay for it by leaving Big Oil alone in order to keep your interest rates from going up? Our values are way off-kilter when we haven't reached a solution by now, when we're this close to a drop-dead date. That's what it will mean for many students.

We haven't come to an understanding, first, that we'll raise it. The President had to go around the country, making it clear that this issue was on the front burner, because it certainly wasn't there until he did so. Now people come forward. For example, Mr. Romney said, he's for making sure these rates don't go up. But does he have an idea about how to make sure they don't go up? Why doesn't he tell our colleagues here in the House how to make sure they don't go up so that they don't hurt one group of citizens in order to help another group of citizens?

So we come to the floor today—I along with the gentlelady from Maryland and the gentleman from Rhode Island—because we don't intend to let this issue go until we, in fact, find a way to pay for the loans we have told young people to take.

We told them, Go to college. Yes, you'll have a little debt, but go to college and you are made. We've already broken that promise because they come out of college now, and they don't have the workforce opportunities that we, ourselves, had. Let's not break another promise—the promise that they will not be stuck with a debt which is much greater than the debt they already pay. The debt they already pay will delay their coming into the same kind of life style that their parents have. Yes, they're going home to live with their parents because, if you've got this student debt, you're hardly able to go out and rent an apartment in Washington, in Maryland, or in Rhode Island. Yes, they're going home. If we want to make sure that they're able to strike out on their own, the one thing we don't want to do is to burden them with a greater debt than they already have, and they have on the average a \$25,000 debt.

Even when I got out of school—you know, that was sometime in the 18th century—I cannot imagine what I would have done with a \$25,000 debt. Even in real terms today, that's a lot of money, friends. If we care at all about our young people, we will find a way that does not rob Peter to pay Paul in order to relieve them of this debt.

Ms. EDWARDS. I want to thank the gentlewoman and thank her especially for her leadership.

As you were speaking, I was doing a little calculating. I went to undergraduate school at Wake Forest University. I had academic scholarships and some student loans, and I also waited tables in order to pay for my expenses. Had I not been able to get those student loans, having only the combination of academic scholarships and waiting tables, I would not have been

able to have afforded to go to school. I came out with student loan debt from undergraduate school, and then I worked for a time, saved a bit, and went to law school. But even out of law school, I still couldn't pay all of my living expenses and all of my tuition without also taking out student loans.

When I finished law school, the combination of my loans from undergraduate school and my loans from law school totaled about \$75,000 plus. Over the period of time that I paid that back, I paid back a total of about \$100,000 because of the combination of interest rates over the period of time. I paid my last student loan payment almost 1 month to the day before I was elected in my primary election in coming to Congress.

My mother raised six children. We knew almost from the time that we could speak a word that we would go to college. My father was in the United States Air Force. He served for nearly 30 years. We lived all over the country and around the world. They worked really hard, but with six children on a military income and retirement, they knew that they wouldn't be able to fully pay out of savings—what savings with all those mouths to feed?—in order for us to go to college. They wanted their children to go to college. They wanted their children to have the kind of opportunities for the future that they did not have for themselves.

My story, though it happened some time ago, is the story of American families today, whose young people are preparing to graduate from high school. They're preparing for high school graduations over these next couple of months. They want to go to college, and many of those students right now, today, in having received those April notices of college admissions and financial aid determinations, know that through some combination of savings and loans and Pell Grants and work and work study that they will put together the puzzle pieces of a college education so that they can afford it. Parents and students all across the country are making this decision.

For those students who are coming out of high school in this season, July 1 is our deadline. July 1 is our deadline to ensure that interest rates will not double from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent because, by August 1 and late in August, those students will have to pack their trunks and their bags in order to go away to college. We owe them the commitment to know what their obligation is going to be for the repayment of those student loans and to know that they will not be faced with a doubling of interest rates over the course of their period of time in college.

Let's think of what this means to them. What it means is that we're saying to our students, we want you to study engineering and science and math and technology. We want you to come out of school and to be teachers and to be inventors and innovators and entrepreneurs. But we are unwilling to

make sure that you're able to do that by giving you the tools that you need for success.

One of those things for some students across this country—for many students, for 7 million students—is the ability to get student loans that are affordable, and to have some sense that over the period of time that they're in college and they graduate college and the economy is better and they get jobs that they will be able to repay those loans so that some other generation of students can also go to school and do the same thing.

So why am I passionate about this? I am passionate about it because it's my story, and because it's the story of middle class families all across this country who know that they want to do better, who struggle to do better, and who experience the rug being ripped out from under them because we want to ask our middle class families to either double your interest rates or sacrifice your health care. Those are the choices we're asking our middle class families to make. In today's economy, there is not a greater predictor of individual success than a good education. This is a fact. But if it's a fact, then we need to make the investment that makes that fact a reality for our students across this country.

Right now, as many have pointed out on this floor, the unemployment rate for Americans with a college degree or more is about half of the national average. That means that, when you graduate, even if you have student loans that are affordable and can be repaid, you have some opportunity to do that because you will have done better, and you will have had the opportunity to do better than the student who only gets a high school education. The incomes for those who graduate from college are twice as high as those who don't have a high school diploma.

□ 1430

Higher education, whether we're talking about a 4-year institution or a 2-year institution at a community college, is the clearest path that we have to middle class success. If we are going to build a ladder of opportunity for the American people, then one of those rungs has to be student loans and another rung is a Pell Grant; another rung is job training; another rung is to make sure that our families are eating and that our children are immunized. There are many rungs. And this Congress has an obligation to make sure those rungs of that ladder are available to the American people.

Democrats and Republicans both say they want to build a competitive workforce, but let's be clear that it's the Democrats—my colleagues here in the Congress—who time and time again actually stand up for the students with the skills that will be needed to comprise that competitive workforce.

So I look at the things Democrats have done over this period of time. We've increased the maximum Pell

Grant from \$4,050 in 2006 to \$5,550 in 2010. We created the American Opportunity Tax Credit that provides a maximum of \$2,500 in a tuition tax credit to eligible families and students. We created income-based repayment to ensure that graduates can manage their loan repayments during stressful economic times.

I remember when I came out of undergraduate school and law school and really wanted to work in the public-interest sector, and I did. But I wasn't paid as much as some of my colleagues who were going into law firms and other kinds of practice. Would that I could have paid my student loans back based on my income.

Well, that's the kind of opportunity that we've provided for students for the future. We've provided loan forgiveness for graduates who actually go into public-interest careers, who go into teaching careers after 10 years of loan payments. We've required schools to have an online calculator so that students and families can estimate their costs based on their family's financial situation. We've supported Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other minority-serving institutions. This is the way that Democrats have supported middle class families and poor families in their ability to achieve the American Dream. I would only ask that my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle do the same.

With that, we have about 5 minutes left to continue our conversation with the American people. So I will yield just a moment to the Congresswoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON).

Ms. NORTON. I want to thank my friend from Maryland.

I want to add to her list because importantly when our party, the Democrats, took control, the interest rates were where they will go in July. They were at 6.8 percent. We felt the pain, and we lowered those rates to their present 3.4. But the way they were phased in, they would go up again to 6.8. Do you see what we were trying to do in 2007? We recognized this was a major issue and took those rates down, which I'm sure encouraged many people to go to college in the first place.

Now we have young people with an unemployment rate of about 14 percent if you're between 20 and 24. That's terrible when you consider that nationally it's about 8 percent. And I'm very distressed that already there is an almost 15 percent increase delinquency rates in student loans, which will add to the interest rates were talking about and the interest rates that we're trying to keep at least level.

I want to thank you again for leading this Special Order so that America knows before it's too late.

Ms. EDWARDS. I thank the gentlewoman.

Now I would like to recognize for a moment the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. CICILLINE).

Mr. CICILLINE. I want to thank the gentlelady for yielding.

I want to say that the gentlelady from the District of Columbia is right, Georgetown Law School is very expensive.

I too had student loans to go to law school and worked two jobs also as a waiter to do that. And I didn't know anybody who was in law school with me that wasn't there with some loan. I didn't know anyone that I met that either they or their parents wrote a check for the tuition. That's the experience of millions and millions of families all across this country.

I was listening to the gentlelady recount all of the work that the Democrats have done in investing in education, and it's because we realize it's not about us. It's about the future of our country. These are investments in young people who are going to be the leaders of this country, and access to education is so central to the American Dream.

I really just want to conclude by thanking the gentlelady for leading this conversation. I hope it will help really be a call to action for young people all across this country on Tuesday. I'm having a call-to-action in my district encouraging young people to demand that Congress do the responsible thing, prevent this rise in interest rates, but also continue to make the investments we need to make in education for their sake and for our sake.

I thank the gentlelady for the time.

Ms. EDWARDS. I thank the gentleman, and I thank all of our participants today in calling attention to the fact that Democrats have proposed ending tax subsidies for oil and gas companies so that we can use those savings and actually help to pay for need-based college loans where they are and to help pay down the deficit.

Republicans are cutting taxes for the wealthiest Americans, and they're throwing that debt onto students and families.

To be clear, this is not a partisan issue. It's a student issue; it's a family issue; it's an American issue. It's about our competitiveness in the economy. And I want to call all young people across this Nation of all political persuasions to reach out to their Members of Congress and say, stop the increase on student loans from doubling from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent, costing millions of dollars to students across this country.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time.

THE STUDENT LOAN RATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PALAZZO). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) for 30 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, it's always an honor to be able to speak here in the House of Representatives.

It has been a good day because here in the House, despite what some may think, we voted overwhelmingly to