

that today's lead editorial deals with this under the headline, "ObamaCare's Great Awakening," with a highlight line, "HHS tells religious believers to go to hell. The public notices." Yes, Mr. Speaker, the public noticed.

Let me just read the opening of that editorial:

The political furor over President Obama's birth control mandate continues to grow, even among those for whom contraception poses no moral qualms, and one needn't be a theologian to understand why. The country is being exposed to the raw political control that is the core of the Obama health care plan, and Americans are seeing clearly for the first time how this will violate pluralism and liberty.

Mr. Speaker, in the last few days, a strategist in the President's campaign—not the Secretary herself or an administration official—has suggested that, well, maybe something can be done. Really, Mr. Speaker? Are we leaving dealing with First Amendment rights violations to campaign staff for resolution?

This latest controversy has given us yet another reason to repeal ObamaCare, a bill forced on America by the last Congress and this administration. Given the obvious willingness of regulators to force their value system on all Americans regardless of religious belief, the editorial comes to the right conclusion: "Religious liberty won't be protected . . . until ObamaCare is repealed." Mr. Speaker, the time for repeal is now.

PUTTING THE BRAKES ON RUNAWAY DEFENSE SPENDING

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

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke testified on Capitol Hill last week and warned us that deficit reduction "should be a top priority" and that current spending projections are unsustainable. In response, the gentleman from Wisconsin, who chairs the Budget Committee, said that we needed to get our fiscal house in order, otherwise, "it's going to get ugly pretty fast."

To him, I would say: It's already ugly. It's really ugly for 13 million Americans who woke up this morning without a job to go to. And it would get uglier still if we embraced his vision of a shredded safety net and a voucher program that ends Medicare as we know it.

Here is what I find particularly distressing and disturbing: for my colleagues in the majority, every other sentence out of their mouths is about reducing Federal spending, and yet the programs they want to cut are the very ones that are keeping working families afloat. They never seem to aim their ax at the part of the budget that has shot through the roof the last 10 years and now eats up more than half of discretionary spending. I'm talking, of course, about the Pentagon budget.

It doesn't make any sense that the military industrial complex has gotten a virtually blank check while important domestic programs—and also important civilian international programs that promote national security—look for change in the couch in order to survive.

If we're in belt-tightening mode, then we should all be in belt-tightening mode. But if there are Federal dollars available—and there certainly are—I want to know why we can't make strong investments in the food stamps program, Head Start, or Pell Grants. If there's enough money to give the Pentagon a staggering \$700 billion-plus a year, I want to know why we can't make relatively modest, but meaningful, investments in paid family leave or early childhood education.

The good news is that the President of the United States gets it. With the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he is taking a strong first step toward putting the brakes on runaway defense spending.

□ 1100

But I think that we need to do more and we need to be much bolder. When we spend more on defense than the next 10 nations combined, clearly our priorities are out of whack.

The Cold War has been over for 20 years, and yet we still have tens of thousands of troops stationed in Europe. This makes no sense at all. Something else that doesn't make sense: our presence in Afghanistan. And it's not just the peace and justice folks who are calling for the end of this misguided adventure. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel L. Davis, Army "brass," is asking, "How many more men must die in support of a mission that is not succeeding?"

He goes on to say, "You can spin all kinds of stuff, but you can't spin the fact that more men are getting blown up every year."

Mr. Speaker, what we need is a fundamental overhaul in the way that we think about protecting America. We need to be smarter about national security.

SMART Security means replacing weapons systems with humanitarian aid and development. It means a civilian surge instead of a military surge. It means peaceful diplomacy instead of military devastation. It means lifting up and empowering innocent Afghan people instead of occupying their country and perpetuating a war that has killed them by the thousands.

This SMART Security approach is not only the better way to protect our interests and keep our country safe, it comes at a fraction of the cost of what we are spending.

Mr. Speaker, for the sake of our national conscience, also for our national treasury, it's time to do the smart thing and bring our troops home. Don't ask me; ask Colonel Daniel Davis.

GETTING AMERICA BACK TO WORK

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

Mr. DOLD. Mr. Speaker, small businesses are reluctant to expand today. With so much economic uncertainty, our local job creators don't know if they can afford the risk of hiring a new worker.

As a small business owner myself, I know the pressures of meeting a budget and a payroll. I employ 100 people, and for me that's 100 families. I have to make sure that I can ensure that we can provide health care insurance and other benefits before it is time to hire new workers.

Mr. Speaker, there are 29 million small businesses in our Nation. Here, in this body, I believe our goal has to be to create an environment that enables those small businesses to have the confidence to be able to grow and thrive, to be able to add that one new worker. And think about where we would be at that point in time, Mr. Speaker; 29 million businesses across the Nation all hiring just one worker, we'd have a different problem on our hands.

The partisan rhetoric and the lack of progress in Washington is hindering businesses from hiring more people. But I do believe we can come together and tackle some of these problems. Washington has to stop viewing legislation through a political lens and start viewing it through the eyes of the American people.

One area we can agree on is the payroll tax extension. The House voted at the end of the year to extend it for an additional year. The President has asked that we extend it for a year. The holdup is yet again in the United States Senate. Senator HARRY REID would rather play political games with this important measure, and now some Members are asking for a 2-month extension.

Mr. Speaker, I say enough is enough. We need to extend this tax holiday for the entire year. Small businesses don't have the luxury of hoping that we'll get it right. So let's come together today and pass the yearlong extension in both the House and the Senate. Let's give hardworking American taxpayers the relief that they need.

Mr. Speaker, new regulations are also hindering small businesses from expanding. Hundreds of pages of new regulations in the President's health care law, hundreds of rules that have still yet to be written in Financial Services with regard to Dodd-Frank are hindering the financial services industry. Small businesses do not know what new rules are coming next; and, thus, they can't prepare for the future and job growth remains, at best, uncertain.

But we can and must find common ground on regulations. No one is arguing for the elimination of regulation, Mr. Speaker. What we need is smart regulations. It's vitally important we

have clean water, safe working environments, and rules to protect families' investments. Even the President has called for smarter regulations and repealing burdensome regulations that are around this Nation. We can repeal burdensome regulations that are nothing more than red tape and barriers for job creators. We can replace them with smart regulations that truly make our country better and give job creators the certainty they need to grow and thrive.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we must stop the enormous deficit spending that's going on right here in Washington, DC. This next year, Mr. Speaker, we're faced with another trillion dollar deficit. If my business, my small business back in Illinois, ran the way the government runs, I'd be out of business inside of the month. It's time we in Washington rein in this out-of-control spending. We cannot ask hardworking American families all across the country to live within their means but then turned around and allow Washington to take their hard-earned money and spend it without regard to the future consequences of our children and grandchildren.

It's time we pass a budget that puts our country on a viable economic path forward. When we do this, it will signal to the rest of the world that we are serious about our economic health; and, thus, we'll be able to empower job creators to invest here at home and create jobs right here in our local communities.

Mr. Speaker, I am optimistic about the future. I'm optimistic that we can do this, that we can come together. Spurring our economy and talking about growth isn't a Republican idea or a Democratic idea, but it is certainly an American idea. It's time that we put people before politics and progress before partisanship. It's time for us to work together today for the future of our country and get America back to work.

BIRTH CONTROL INSURANCE COVERAGE

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

Ms. MOORE. Mr. Speaker, I'm here today to be a voice for the millions of women and men who are celebrating the recent decision by the Secretary of Health and Human Services regarding requiring all businesses and corporations to provide birth control insurance coverage, a lifesaving benefit for women, millions of women. Under this new rule, virtually all women would have access to birth control coverage without a copay through their employer health plan.

If you listen to the political pundits in this town, you will come to the conclusion that people do not support the Obama administration's decision and that people of faith are en route to the White House prepared to storm it be-

cause of this decision. But if you talk to the average American, you will realize that there is absolutely overwhelming support for the decision on the birth control benefit. This support crosses party lines as well as religious affiliation. In fact, a poll released just yesterday found that roughly 6 out of 10 Catholics support requiring employers to provide their employees with health care plans that cover contraceptives.

Let's be clear. This decision represents a respectful balance between religious persons and institutions and individual freedom. It is very important to clarify that the law contains an exemption for religious institutions. What that means is that approximately 335,000 churches or houses of worship can choose not to provide birth control coverage for their employees. So if you're the secretary at the church or if you are employed by the archdiocese, they do not have to provide birth control coverage for their employees. It was very important for Health and Human Services to carve out this exception with respect to separating church and State concerns.

□ 1110

We are not requiring that Catholic churches go out and buy contraceptive coverage for all—in spite of what you have heard over TV. But this rule does require that religiously affiliated universities and hospitals—which are operating as large businesses and employ and serve a diverse array of people—would have to follow the same rules as other businesses. This is the part that keeps getting lost in the debate: the sole purpose of these institutions is not to offer people a place of refuge and worship. It is not a place for people of faith to go to gather in fellowship and worship. The purpose of these institutions is to provide health care, is to provide an education, football teams for their clients or for their students.

No one is trying to take away religious freedom but, rather, this ruling preserves personal freedom. The concept of separation of church and state protects these 335,000 places of worship. But the concept of separation of church and state does not mean that a church can use their bully pulpit to separate millions of women from critical health care benefits. Just imagine that women, on average, spend 30 years attempting to prevent pregnancy. Just think about what it means for the health of a woman, the health of her family to give birth or die trying for 30 years.

I understand that some people are worried and protective of their religious freedom in part because they're being misled by what this HHS ruling actually does; but I also worry that some people in the faith community are being exploited and used to create a diversion.

Another fact that people keep ignoring is that many religiously affiliated hospitals and universities already pro-

vide birth control to their employees through their insurance packages. I mean, it's standard at many of these workplaces. This is a nonissue for many Catholic and religiously affiliated colleges and universities already. And we're not talking about just a few workers. We're talking about millions of secretaries, janitorial staff, nurses aides, and lab techs of many different beliefs—some of no beliefs. So I would hope that we would not try to use religious bullying to deprive millions of women of critical, vital health care.

ASSAULT ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, President Obama stood in this very Chamber and spoke about the need for fairness. Fairness, he said, is an American value. Yet the President and his administration are blatantly ignoring one of the most basic of American values—the freedom of religion. I'm referring to the decision by the Obama administration to force Catholic employers to provide insurance that includes coverage for sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception.

Catholic employers who fail to provide that insurance coverage could be fined \$2,000 per employee per year. And the Obama administration will force Catholics to buy insurance coverage that includes coverage for services that many of them find morally wrong. For many Catholics, this requirement violates their core beliefs about the sanctity of life of the unborn.

The health care law that is forcing Catholics to put their government ahead of their God includes a "religious conscience" exemption. It allows people with certain religious objections to opt out, and some religious groups have been allowed to opt out. But Catholics have been denied an opt-out. Instead, the Obama administration is forcing Catholics to violate their religious conscience.

This is not the United States of America that I know. Religious tolerance has been a bedrock principle of the American Government for almost 240 years. It's one of the reasons why the United States came to exist in the first place. The First Amendment states that Americans have the right to religious freedom. Religious freedom isn't just the ability to believe and worship as we see fit. It's also our right to keep other beliefs from being imposed on us. The Federal Government has respected those rights by being sensitive, by creating tolerant policies regarding our military service, our tax policies and even our airport screenings.

American Catholics are not asking for special rights. We're asking for equal rights. I am proudly pro-life, and I will stand here to defend the rights of