

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

the unborn. But this isn't about abortion. This isn't a question of when life begins. This is about the fundamental rights of all Americans, as spelled out in our founding documents. And this decision by the Obama administration is a devastating blow against the freedom of religion.

It's one thing for the Federal Government to try to take over our health care system, and we can all debate the merits of such legislation. But I think we can all agree, no matter on what side of the aisle we stand, that the right to freely express our religious beliefs—and, more importantly, not have other beliefs forced upon us—is a core value of this country. It is nonnegotiable.

Good people of all faiths should be outraged by this decision. If this administration can trample on the beliefs and rights of the American Catholics, those of other religions should ask, are we next?

Yesterday, I read in The New York Times that legal scholars say the American Constitution is old and outdated, that it isn't relevant in the modern world. Now, as this administration ignores our most treasured values—not religious values, but American values—our Constitution could not be more relevant. The first words of the American Bill of Rights are: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

They're first, and they're first for a reason. The United States of America has long been a place of religious freedom. It's one of the things that separates us from foreign countries. Just as the Federal Government should not endorse a religion, it should not punish a religion, either. All religions must be treated equally. They must be respected. That's the American way. Today, Catholics all across the United States feel like outsiders. They feel as if their government has betrayed them.

Catholic leaders, including three bishops that lead Catholics in my district, have clearly said they cannot and will not comply with this unjust decision by the Obama administration. No one should have to choose between their God and their government. And no one, especially a government founded on religious freedom, should force them to.

The decision by this administration to make Catholics violate their most basic principles is a violation of the most basic American principle. I strongly condemn the Obama administration for this outrageous overreach of Federal authority; and I strongly encourage the administration to rescind this unfair, un-American policy. If the Obama administration can take away this most basic American value for 80 million Catholics, who's next?

H.R. 3548, THE NORTH AMERICAN ENERGY ACCESS ACT

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

Mr. HARPER. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in an effort to create American jobs and move energy supply from a friendly trading partner to the United States gulf coast, the House Energy and Commerce Committee favorably reported H.R. 3548 to the full House. H.R. 3548, the North American Energy Access Act, would end a waiting game that has lasted for over 3 years by pushing forward approval of the Keystone XL pipeline.

In his State of the Union speech 2 weeks ago, the President promised to significantly expand production of oil and natural gas from offshore and onshore public lands.

□ 1120

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, he never mentioned his decision to reject the Keystone XL pipeline.

While the President's comments about expanding oil and gas production in the U.S. were welcome news to many, I'm not sure how many people took his pledge seriously given his decision on Keystone XL. I am hopeful that the President will follow through on expanding production. I just wish he would have helped our country reduce our dependence on Middle Eastern oil while creating tens of thousands of jobs here in America by approving the pipeline application.

The President's excuse for not approving the pipeline application was that he didn't have enough time. Radical environmentalists say that tar sands crude is the dirtiest of all, and they talk as if that's something foreign, something new. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point your attention to a Friday, February 3, 2012 article on the front page of the National Journal, an article that I believe shows the fallacies in the arguments against the pipeline. The article states that "despite environmental opposition, the Obama administration has approved a controversial oil-sands pipeline."

The article refers to an oil-sands pipeline approved by the administration over 2 years ago. On August 20, 2009, Secretary of State Clinton approved a 1,000-mile pipeline with the capacity to carry 800,000 barrels of oil from Canada's oil sands to Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, if a pipeline that closely mirrors that of the proposed Keystone XL was good enough for the President in August of 2009, why is the Keystone XL pipeline not good enough for him in an election year? If time and the environment were reasons to deny Keystone XL in January 2012, they should have had the same reasons to deny the Canada-Wisconsin pipeline in 2009.

Keystone XL is a shovel-ready construction project that doesn't need a stimulus bill to get it started. Estimates show that the project could create 20,000 construction jobs imme-

diately and could transport more than 1 million barrels of oil per day from Canada and the Bakken shale formation in North Dakota and Montana to gulf coast refineries.

With the ability to transport that amount of friendly oil from our largest trading partner and neighbor to the north, Canada, as well as domestic oil, and with the ability to create an additional estimated 100,000 jobs over the lifetime of the pipeline, it's no wonder why the American public supports Keystone XL. At a time when unemployment and prices at the pump are high and new predictions say gasoline could top \$4 this year, it's no wonder that the American public was disappointed in the President's decision.

In a recent installment of the United Technologies/National Journal Congressional Connection poll, Americans surveyed were asked: Supporters of the pipeline say it will ease America's dependence on Mideast oil and create jobs. Opponents fear the environmental impact of building a pipeline. What about you—do you support or oppose building the Keystone XL pipeline? Sixty-four percent of the respondents favored the construction of Keystone XL and only 22 percent were opposed.

Mr. Speaker, Keystone XL makes sense. It means jobs, energy security, and satisfaction for the American public. The President made a political decision to pander to his extreme environmentalist supporters in a campaign year instead of listening to the majority of the American public, and that was unfortunate.

I think that House Republicans are making it well known that the fight for Keystone XL is not over. Support in the House to move the pipeline forward has been bipartisan, very public, and very well received by the American people. As of yesterday, that support has produced a bill to push Keystone XL forward. I look forward to continuing my commitment to jobs, energy security, and the building of the Keystone XL pipeline.

WE ARE OUR BROTHERS' AND SISTERS' KEEPER

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

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving us an opportunity to share some crucial human catastrophes that are occurring around the world.

I'm challenging all of my colleagues and those who would listen that sometimes we are, in fact, through peaceful means, our brothers' and sisters' keeper. First, as we have seen the ascending violence occur in Syria, a nation-state that I have visited, bloodshed that has included the loss of women and children, hearing news reports where citizens of Syria are begging for someone to do something, it is almost as if you came out of your house and stood by as your neighbor's house burned. We know