

family vacation or fewer presents under the Christmas tree. Homes across the fruited plain are feeling the pain of the economic squeeze in their wallets, and they adjust accordingly, because that's what happens when times are tough. American families don't have a limited credit card like Congress does.

The people are angry because they wonder why reckless Washington can't do the same. I hear that message every day from southeast Texans. These citizens are wiser than the tax-and-spendocrats here in Washington, D.C. Let me share a few of those straight-talking Texans' words with you.

Michael says this:

You can't have the cookies without the milk. Tax reform and spending cuts, not one without the other.

Hubert from Baytown, Texas, says this:

Our children and grandchildren will have to recover from reckless spending. Washington has a spending problem, not a taxing problem.

Jeff says:

You don't become fiscally responsible by continued increases in your credit card spending limit. Folks in Congress need to quit running from the hard choices and stop burying our children and grandchildren in debt.

David from Humble, Texas, said this:

This isn't really rocket science. Stop spending money we don't have, cut back on what we do spend, and stop sending money to our enemies.

Now there's a novel idea.

Paul from Beaumont said this:

We do not have a revenue problem; instead, we have a spending problem.

And it's been a spending problem for a long time.

Larry said:

If I'm out of cash, I stop spending. Perhaps Congress should do the same thing that I do in my house. When I don't have enough money, I quit spending. But Congress has its own printing press backed by the Chinese.

Ashley says:

Spending must be stopped. Just taking more from Americans will not fix this problem. Even if my direct taxes are not affected here, my employer's are. So what will that mean for me in the long run? I'm afraid I'm going to find out.

Yes, Ashley, you're going to find out here on New Year's Eve.

Jimmy from Crosby, Texas, says:

I'm fed up with them never agreeing to a budget and spending like there is no tomorrow. This out-of-control action has got to stop.

And, finally, Renee from Crosby, Texas, said:

Please demand that spending be cut; fraud, waste, and abuse in government spending be addressed before any new taxes be forced upon hardworking Americans.

Mr. Speaker, the American people, they actually do get it—at least those people who work and pay taxes. The backbone of America—the workers of America—say stop the spending obsession.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is spending. We got here by spending too much,

not by taxing too little. We're going off the cliff with our pockets full of somebody else's money.

And that's just the way it is.

□ 0910

MIDNIGHT MAGIC

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

Mr. DEFAZIO. All but those in total denial—and there is a lot of that inside the D.C. Beltway—would admit that we need a combination of increased revenues, taxes—the gentleman before me disagrees—and spending cuts to restore fiscal stability. Especially with a still-weak economy, we don't need blanket tax increases that would hit the hard-working families of the middle class, and we don't need brain-dead, across-the-board spending cuts that mete out the same percentage cuts to wasteful and unneeded programs and high-functioning essential programs. We can do better, and the American people deserve better.

In that spirit, I offer the following ideas. Pick one of the numbers floating out there. Let's restore the Clinton-era tax rates on income over \$250,000, \$400,000, \$450,000. They are bargaining out there. Whatever. We are restoring the Clinton-era tax rates. We're not going back to Eisenhower. We're talking about Clinton-era tax rates for income above that level.

Restore the same Clinton-era tax rates on unearned income when there were a lot more productive investments out there, delay the across-the-board cuts for 30 days, give the new Congress a chance to make smarter, targeted cuts of equal value, and fix the Medicare reimbursement so that seniors aren't threatened in the middle of the month from not being able to get medical care, and extend unemployment. Come on, don't be cruel to people who can't find jobs and want to find them, although some on that side deny they're looking for work.

It's not the specifics really that I want to talk about here. It's the procedure. That's what will solve this because this is Washington. It's not about reality.

Now, here it is: the midnight magic plan. We begin debate at 10 p.m. For the first 2 hours, everybody can go to their usual corners. The Republicans could decry the increased taxes on job creators, on income over \$250,000 or \$400,000 or \$450,000. The Republicans could stay true to their pledge to Grover Norquist to never, ever raise taxes for any purpose, never. Democrats could say it's not enough; it doesn't restore tax fairness. We could have the usual debate for 2 hours. At midnight we stop, sing "Auld Lang Syne," come together a little bit, and then the midnight magic.

Now, the same bill is cutting taxes for 98 percent of the working people in the United States of America, the

Democrats would have protected Social Security and Medicare, and both sides get a chance over 30 days to legislate—God forbid we should legislate around here—targeted cuts instead of the meat-axe approach to cutting spending. I think that's the best we can do for the American people. We transmogrify this bill with the magic of midnight from one that increases taxes on the job creators—income over \$250,000 or \$450,000—to one that actually gives tax cuts to 98 percent of America, something both sides can go home and brag about.

No cliff.

THE SGR NEEDS TO BE PATCHED NOW

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

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, in the late 1990s, Congress came up with a new formula to determine how much to pay doctors for taking care of seniors in the Medicare program. It's called the "sustainable growth rate," or the SGR. And like so many Washington solutions, it doesn't work.

Before coming to Congress, I was a doctor. I took care of patients for over 20 years. I remember thinking at the time that the SGR program was put into place. Well, that won't work. It's a house of cards. It's destined to fail.

Mr. Speaker, here we are. America's seniors are on the verge of losing access to health care. Let me repeat that, Mr. Speaker. America's seniors are on the verge of losing access to health care. How? If Congress and President Obama don't act by January 1, tomorrow, Medicare payments to physicians will be reduced, will be cut by nearly 27 percent. You see, Mr. Speaker, the fiscal cliff is more than just the tax increases that President Obama so dearly wants.

The effect of the SGR formula means that physicians who treat Medicare patients will be forced to limit the number of seniors that they see, fewer patients being seen, doctors forced not to see patients because of foolish Washington policy. This jeopardizes health care for millions of folks. The sustainable growth rate, the formula used by Medicare to determine physician reimbursement, needs to be repealed. It doesn't work for patients, and it doesn't work for doctors. It's destructive to the very principles that we hold dear about health care. It violates accessibility, it violates quality, and it limits choices. It harms real people.

There are positive solutions that we're working on so that we may responsibly reform this broken system. But while we work to put in place a system that actually does make sense, we must provide certainty for patients and their doctors for the new year.

Mr. Speaker, slashing payments to doctors is a terrible idea, and it must be stopped. The SGR needs to be patched now so that seniors may continue to see their doctors, and then we

should move forward with real solutions that work for real people, not just for Washington bureaucrats.

The sad thing about our current dysfunction in this town is that people all across this country get harmed. It's not because of something that they did, but because of something that government did to them or forced them to do. It's time to let Americans be Americans, and in health care that means caring for each other and allowing patients and families and doctors to make medical decisions, not Washington.

IN RECOGNITION OF DEDICATED STAFF

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

Mr. ALTMIRE. Mr. Speaker, on this last day of 2012, I want to take a moment to highlight the work of a number of hardworking Federal employees, people who serve with distinction, but often without the credit they deserve. All of us in the House have dedicated staff who, though unheralded, are committed to their country and the constituents they serve. Without them, we could never do our jobs, and I want to thank those who have worked for me over the past 6 years:

Susan and Ed Anfinson, Lin Banks, Mark Perkins, Noel Warren, and the great George Greenfield. They were all shared employees that we shared with other offices. Then we have our full-time employees: Ben Barasky, Olivia Benson, Evan Brennan, Mike Butler, Julie Cain, Richard Carbo, Jennifer Dale, Nick Demicheli, Michelle Dorothy, Serronn Emerson, Jim Ferruchie, Dori Friedberg, Jesse Haladay, Angela Hayden, Kathleen Janoski, Carolyn Kahler, Rachel Kaufman, Erik Komendant, Jennifer Kraus, Chris Lombardi, Cody Lundquist, Greg Malinak, Caitlin Mathis, Stephanie Bone, Tess Mullen, Beth Newman, Bennett Reed, Nathan Robinson, Emily Schmitt, Mariel Schwartz, Abby Silverman, Lee Slater, Shannon Smith, Christina Stacey, P.J. Tabit, Alexandra Taylor, Nikki Tesla, Randy Stapleford and John Galanski—the two best veteran constituent service reps you could ever want—Sharon Werner, Rachael Heisler, and Cara Toman.

Mr. Speaker, all of them were loyal to the district, and I read their names into the RECORD to thank them for their service and loyalty to me, but especially for their service to the district.

□ 0920

FISCAL CLIFF AND BUSH TAX CUT HISTORY

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

Mr. BROOKS. Mr. Speaker, the Bush tax cuts' history illuminates why

American families face huge tax increases on January 1. The Bush tax cuts had two purposes. First, stimulate the economy, create jobs, cut unemployment, and cut the deficit. Second, cut taxes to help American families take care of their own needs.

In just 3 years, thanks to the Bush tax cuts, unemployment dropped from a high of 6.3 percent in 2003 to a low of 4.4 percent in 2006; 7 million American jobs were created between 2003 and 2006.

Most importantly and paradoxically to those who do not understand economics, this robust economic growth cut America's deficit 60 percent—from \$413 billion in FY 2003–2004 to \$161 billion in FY 2006–2007. By every economic measure, the Bush tax cuts were a spectacular success.

The Bush tax cuts, part 1, became law in 2001. Republican Congressmen and Senators voted 258–2—99 percent—to cut taxes and protect family incomes. In contrast, Democrat Congressmen and Senators who now say they are for protecting family incomes voted 184–40—a whopping 81 percent—against American families and for higher taxes.

The Bush tax cuts, part 2, became law in 2003. Republican Congressmen and Senators voted 272–3—that's 99 percent—to cut taxes and protect family incomes. In contrast, Democrat Congressmen and Senators who now say they are for protecting family incomes voted 245–9—an eye-popping 96 percent—against American families and for higher taxes. Unfortunately, Senate Democrats had enough votes to prevent the Bush tax cuts from being permanent. But for these Senate Democrats, America would not be facing a fiscal cliff today.

President Obama and a radically different Congress, controlled by House Speaker NANCY PELOSI and Senate Majority Leader HARRY REID, revisited the Bush tax cuts. In two separate votes in February 2009 and December 2010, Democrats could have increased taxes on the wealthy if they'd really believed what they now say.

Did they raise taxes on the wealthy? No. Why not?

Democrats could have permanently protected lower- and middle-income families from higher taxes if Democrats had really believed what they now say.

Did they? No. Why not?

Mr. Speaker, why would a Democrat Congress and White House say they want to tax the wealthy but not do it?

Why would a Democrat Congress and White House say they want permanent tax relief for lower- and middle-income taxpayers yet not give it?

The answer is simple: Washington Democrats voted twice against tax increases on the wealthy and twice voted against giving permanent tax relief to lower- and middle-income families so that they could run campaigns on base human emotions like greed, envy, and class warfare, and campaign against

the very tax policies Democrats kept in place, thus deflecting attention from the Democrats' abysmal record on the economy—trillion-dollar deficits and a \$16 trillion national debt.

To their credit, in 2012, their strategy worked. Democrats won the White House and the Senate. Ultimately, however, American voters will learn from history and truth will prevail. Ultimately, the American people will look at their property taxes, income taxes, estate taxes, sales taxes, and every other tax that they are being forced to pay, and they will ask: Who taxes and undermines my ability to take care of my family?

History proves Democrats raise taxes whenever they believe they can get away with it. Conversely, history proves that Republicans protect as many American families as possible from Democrat tax increases.

Mr. Speaker, that is the fight the Republican House fights today. Republicans will fight today and Republicans will fight tomorrow to protect as many American families as possible from the tax increases Democrats passed when they controlled Congress and the White House, and it is that difference, Mr. Speaker, that caused American voters to give Republicans in the 2010 and 2012 elections their largest number of House of Representative victories in more than six decades.

Fighting Democrat tax increases: now that's a mandate.

A TIME OF PERSONAL REFLECTION

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

Mr. CARNAHAN. On this last day of the year and on one of the last days of this 112th Congress, we are awaiting a fiscal deal that will strengthen the fiscal health of this country. I want to take a few moments to reflect on my service here in the House of Representatives and to personally thank many who helped me get here and to do the work of the people whom I represent and love in the State of Missouri.

First, Mr. Speaker, Debra Carnahan, my wife but also an accomplished attorney, a former State and Federal prosecutor. She's really been the rock of our family and has been with me through the great highs and tough lows of this job. So I want to thank her.

Also, our two great sons—Austin and Andrew—who have shared me with thousands of constituents for several years. They have grown into amazing young men, young men who I think will, in their own rights, make a difference as they work their way through their lives.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also thank some of my amazing staff who are too numerous to name—dozens over many years—but there are four in particular who worked with me through the entire 8 years that I served in this Congress: Jeremy Haldeman, who has