

THE BUDGET AGREEMENT PROTECTS SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE

The budget agreement blocks a scheduled 23.7 percent reduction in the Medicare reimbursement rate for physician services set to occur January 1, in order to meet the sustainable growth rate. Instead, the measure's so-called "doc fix" provides a 0.5 percent increase for the first three months of 2014, and it also extends more than a dozen Medicare-related programs.

The budget deal makes sure that doctors who treat seniors have a guarantee of payment for the medical services they provide.

The budget agreement also addresses the issue of payments to hospitals that treat large numbers of uninsured patients.

The budget also makes changes to payment rates for inpatient services in long-term care hospitals.

Congressional Budget Office estimates that the three-month doc fix would cost \$7.3 billion and that the efforts to reduce the burden to taxpayers would reduce spending by \$9 billion.

The net direct spending for health care related programs, after factoring expansion of health care programs, would be an overall budget reduction of \$300 million over 10 years.

The agreement scales back the proposed cuts to federal employees sought by Republicans and exempts current federal employees.

Federal employees under the budget agreement would receive a pay increase—the first in three years.

Sequestration cuts would be diminished under this budget agreement, which opens the Federal government up for new hires in the coming year.

Federal employees are making contributions toward budget reduction considering the three years of no cost of living increases and the increased contributions toward retirement plans for new government hires and military retirees.

ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE:

Mr. Speaker, it is outrageous—it is scandalous—that the budget agreement does not include an extension of unemployment insurance for the 1.3 million jobless workers will have their benefits cut off on December 28, and nearly another 1.9 million will lose their unemployment benefits over the first half of next year.

If Congress does not extend unemployment insurance, an additional 3.6 million workers will lose access to benefits in 2014.

In Texas, 68,900 jobless workers will lose their unemployment benefits on December 28th.

An additional 106,900 Texas workers will lose access to benefits in 2014.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

The national unemployment rate remains at 7 percent and the unemployment rate in Texas sits at 6.4 percent.

This is no time to reduce unemployment insurance.

Unemployment Insurance was not designed to be a lifelong program, but a means of addressing short-term unemployment that most Americans experience over the course of their work lives.

The unusual circumstances of a global recession that began in the United States with the access and abuse of our nation's financial and mortgage insurance systems that trapped homeowners with mortgages that were much higher than the value of their homes.

This fiscal situation strained our nation's economic system then to add the cost of two wars fought at the same time for nearly a decade the nation's economy could not take the strain and by the end of 2008 the Great Recession could not be ignored.

It took time to create the economic down turn and it will take time for communities, families and workers to recover. The unemployment insurance program should reflect that reality by providing support to workers until the economy is fully recovered.

If Congress does not act immediately to extend these benefits, a devastating blow will be dealt not only to the millions of Americans who are already struggling, but to our economy.

That is why yesterday I joined more than 170 of Democratic colleagues in calling upon Speaker BOEHNER not to adjourn this House for the year without extending the vital unemployment insurance desperately needed by millions of our fellow citizens.

To let their benefits expire in the middle of the holiday season is cruel and heartless and unworthy of a great and generous nation.

Cutting off unemployment benefits at the end of the year will only further hurt an economy already injured by sequestration and the Republican government shutdown.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that 750,000 fewer jobs will be created or retained in calendar year 2013 because of the budget cuts under sequestration.

The government shutdown cost our economy an additional 120,000 jobs and \$24 billion in tax dollars in the first two weeks of October alone, according to the Council of Economic Advisors.

The Economic Policy Institute estimates that cutting off extended unemployment benefits would cost our economy 310,000 jobs next year because of reduced consumer demand.

Other experts, like Michael Feroli, the chief economist at JPMorgan Chase, indicate that allowing the federal unemployment insurance (UI) program to expire could shave as much as 0.4 percentage point off our economy's growth in the first quarter of 2014.

Letting unemployment benefits expire will deprive our economy of the positive impact unemployment insurance provides since financially stressed unemployed workers spend any benefits they receive quickly.

CBO also concluded in a 2012 report that assistance for the unemployed has one of the "largest effects on employment per dollar of budgetary cost."

This is why I will be introducing a bill to extend the emergency Unemployment compensation program by an additional 12 months.

A colleague recounted what happened when Wal-Mart sought to fill 600 positions—23,000 people came to apply for positions.

Although employment rates have improved the numbers of unemployed persons still has the nation at a 7 percent unemployment rate.

The length of time people are unemployed is a serious indication that this recovery is not vigorous enough or strong enough to take away money that is needed to keep people in housing and allow them more time to find employment.

It is estimated that there are approximately 4 million jobs available and 12 million persons unemployed.

There is speculation that businesses are reluctant to hire because of the uncertainty cre-

ated by the dysfunction exhibited by Congress especially during 2013.

This is yet another reason why the budget agreement is important to pass, although it does not have everything I would want. It may signal to business that Congress is ready to get down to work on our nation's problems and not threaten economic calamity by not raising the debt ceiling and thereby threatening not to meet our fiscal obligations.

Congress cannot close its eyes and hope that businesses will start hiring—the purpose of unemployment insurance is the same purpose of any insurance—when it is needed for as long as it is needed it must be available.

I am not closing my eyes, Mr. Speaker; I will be introducing a bill to extend unemployment insurance for the 12 million Americans who are still in need of support until the economy is healthy again.

CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS
RESOLUTION, 2014

SPEECH OF

HON. RUSH HOLT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 12, 2013

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to this new Ryan-Murray budget agreement because it is a strong continuation of an anti-government, pessimistic policy that has been plaguing Washington in recent years.

Make no mistake about it; this budget agreement is the direct result of the Budget Control Act, which I strongly opposed when it was being debated 2011, and this agreement takes us backwards. I knew then sequester would wreak havoc on our economy, threaten our quality of life, and squeeze the most vulnerable among us.

Here we are, over two years later, and the worst of it is coming true. The sequester has cut research, education, infrastructure, Medicare, and a number of other critical investments that are vital to a growing economy. It is robbing America of the opportunity to rise from the Great Recession as a stronger, more vibrant nation. Instead, the sequester is continuing to weaken our country with a shrunken government that is hampered by deep cuts to the safety net and hobbled by a refusal to invest in our future. This budget agreement from Congressman RYAN and Senator MURRAY is a way to partially and minimally reverse cuts that should never have happened in the first place.

It is a compromise in a narrow, Washington kind of sense: It will gain some votes from Democrats and some votes from Republicans. But let's remember how the BCA came to be enacted: In 2011, Republicans held hostage America's credit rating by threatening to default on our debts if they didn't get what they wanted. No true compromise was possible then because the negotiations were conducted in the midst of a hostage crisis. No compromise is possible now because we are still operating within the framework created by that hostage crisis.

The question we should ask ourselves is, "Where are we trying to go as a country?" We should be striving toward an optimistic future—one where we invest in research, education, infrastructure, and more. By that measure, this is a bad deal.

The agreement—not really a compromise—slashes discretionary spending and tinkers with a few other things like raising fees on airline tickets, decreasing reimbursement to Medicare providers, and lowering military retirement pensions. How could we actually think this is the kind of path forward for our country?

There is no attempt to close tax loopholes on corporate jet or on expenses of oil and gas companies, and makes no effort in asking the wealthiest among us to pay their fair share to live in an orderly, humane, equitable society. Favored corporate interests, millionaires, and billionaires will continue to receive special tax breaks as far as the eye can see while unemployment insurance expires, leaving millions struggling to find work out in the cold just weeks after Christmas. That is not the sort of fair, balanced deal that Americans have asked for and expect from their leaders.

IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 16, 2013

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, it's the most wonderful time of the year. Families across the fruited plain decorate their houses with red and green lights, hang ornaments on their trees, and think about new recipes to spice up this year's menu. Holiday party invitations flow in, carolers line the neighborhood streets at night, everybody is in the holiday spirit. In the midst of all the cheer, we are reminded that many families are sitting down this year to a table with an empty chair. They are not together because their loved ones (our American warriors) are oceans away from their families, fighting for the rest of us.

They say the worst casualty of war is to be forgotten. In our community we have a tradition to make sure that our men and women overseas know that we will never forget them. For seven straight years, Texans from the Second Congressional District and beyond have joined forces and collected handmade Christmas cards from the community to send overseas to our military. People from young school children to community leaders contribute, and this joint effort makes my annual Christmas Cards for Troops drive a success. Whether they are students, teachers, area Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, churches, and non-profits, they have been relentless in their efforts to express how grateful they are for our men and women on the front lines of battle by decorating and personalizing holiday cards for the troops. In my opinion, there's no better way than spreading the joy of the holidays overseas to the ones that can't be with their families for Christmas dinner and unwrapping gifts from under the tree. Each year is better than the last.

There is no greater sight than watching our troops open up the colorful, heartwarming cards. It wasn't until a few years ago that I witnessed firsthand what it means to them. One year, I decided to pack my bags and visit the Landstuhl Military Base in Germany, a hub for wounded Americans who come from Afghanistan and Iraq. With me, I carried two suitcases full of 6,000 handmade cards piled high from

third, fourth, and fifth graders of the Second Congressional District.

I checked one of my suitcases but decided to carry on the smaller of the two. The temptation to read the cards overtook me. I couldn't hold back so about half way through the flight, I opened the bag and began reading some of the cards. Curiosity sparked the person in the seat next to me so I shared a few of the cards with him. Then the person next to him wanted to see the cards, too. Before I knew it, the whole plane was reading them. The cards were being passed up and down the aisles, and some tears were shed. You wouldn't believe the kind words written in those cards by these Texas school children.

When I arrived at the base and hand-delivered these cards, I was amazed to see what they meant to our troops. They didn't personally know the child who the card was from but every one of them read it and smiled proudly at the words of support. Soon, nurses were scrambling to tape as many cards as they could to the hospital walls above their beds. Red, green, yellow, and blue cards were decorated with snowmen, gingerbread men, candy canes, menorahs, or even their favorite football team. There is something about a homemade card that doesn't compare to anything else, especially when it's from a child.

This year was our most successful card drive yet with a record-breaking collection of 113,000 cards. A special thank you City of Baytown, Goose Creek CISD, Humble ISD, Spring ISD, Huffman ISD, Klein ISD, Cy Fair ISD, Spring Branch ISD, as well as area Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, local churches and non-profits. It could not have been done without them.

In a few weeks, hundreds of thousands of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines will open up their packages from Operation Interdependence, along with their holiday card from a fellow Texan. Although the military member has never met the child or person on the other side of the world who took the time to create the card, there is nothing like receiving the holiday cheer from the land of the free and home of the brave.

And that's just the way it is.

ANNOUNCING RECIPIENTS OF THE 2013 CONGRESSIONAL VETERAN COMMENDATION FOR THE THIRD DISTRICT OF TEXAS

HON. SAM JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 16, 2013

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to honor fourteen distinguished military veterans, community servants, and American patriots who call the Third District of Texas home. All faithfully answered the call of duty and placed service above self for the sake of our great nation. Each one leaves a legacy to be remembered, for future generations to follow, a legacy of bravery, loyalty, dedication, and sacrifice. For their selfless service, bold leadership, and undying commitment for their neighbor and nation, the following individual has been selected as a recipient of the third annual Congressional Veteran Commendation:

Serving in the United States Navy for ten years, Commander Jeff Hensley began his

military career after graduating from the University of Texas in August 1988. After finishing top of his class in flight school, he was assigned to fly an F-14 and deployed with Fighter Squadron 2 and 211. He later moved to Dallas where he served with the Navy Recruiting Office, which led him to Baghdad in 2005. From deployment to civilian services, Mr. Hensley has seen the whole spectrum of military service. Due to his exemplary leadership and patriotism, Hensley was awarded the Bronze Star, an Air Medal, and three Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals.

Having retired from active duty in 2008, his service to his country and the military continue to this day. He used the benefits of the new GI Bill to earn a master's degree in counseling to help other veterans make the transition from military life to civilian life. With his degree, Mr. Hensley worked with Rocky Top Equine therapy program and Equest's Hooves for Heroes program, where he serves as Program Coordinator. Furthermore, he now serves as the Texas head of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Association, IAVA, which serves over 10,000 IAVA members in Texas alone. Daily, he seeks the betterment of his fellow veterans and their families. His life work leaves a legacy to be honored, setting an example for future generations of a man whose commitment to serve never faded. IAVA's motto, "building the next greatest generation" couldn't be more fitting.

Commander Jeff Hensley, let me both thank and congratulate you on your exceptional service to our country and community both past and present. It is my pleasure to award you the 2013 Congressional Veteran Commendation for the Third District of Texas.

RECOGNIZING THE WEYER- HAEUSER COMPANY, RECENTLY NAMED ONE OF THE MOST COM- MUNITY-MINDED COMPANIES IN THE NATION

HON. ADAM SMITH

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 16, 2013

Mr. SMITH of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor and congratulate the Weyerhaeuser Company for being recognized as one of the most community-minded companies in the United States. The National Conference on Citizenship and Points of Light, in partnership with Bloomberg named Weyerhaeuser to The Civic 50 list as one of 50 companies that have demonstrated socially responsible practices and substantial civic involvement in their communities.

The Weyerhaeuser Company, based in Federal Way, Washington, began more than a century ago in the forest industry. The company currently owns and operates nearly 21 million acres of timberland with offices throughout North America and produces wood and fiber products for a variety of applications.

Weyerhaeuser also makes giving back to the community a company priority. Through the Weyerhaeuser Active Volunteer Employees (WAVES) Program, the company recognizes employee volunteers who contribute their time. The organizations where employees volunteer are also eligible to apply for WAVES grants, ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000. Last