

God bless the United States of America.

ROBERT PENNYPACKER, ST. JOHNSBURY
ACADEMY (FINALIST)

This year's Tax Rate for the richest are the lowest this Country has ever seen!

Today's tax rate means that person making \$379,150 pays the same tax as a person making seven million dollars. Thirty years ago this was different. In 1981 there were 16 tax brackets. Today there are six. The highest tax bracket for today's federal income tax is 35% for a person making \$379,150 or more. That means you're taxing a small business owner the same rate as a giant corporation president like General Electric's Chairman and CEO Jeffrey Immelt who has a salary of 3.3 million dollars as of 2011.

If and when the tax rate increases for the rich like many Americans want, it will not hurt the economy like the GOP is stating. Last September, the Congressional Research Service published a report countering Republican claims that lowering top tax rates would lead, or had led, to higher economic growth. "Changes over the past 65 years in the top marginal rate and the top capital gains tax rate do not appear correlated with economic growth," the report concluded. Republican Minority Leader Mitch McConnell responded by having the report suppressed, but its findings were incontrovertible. This shows that, with the rise in taxes for the upper class, it will not affect the economy like many Republicans are stating.

Also, we are at war with the Taliban and yet we still have lower taxes than ever before. How are we paying to support this war? Never before has the United States had lower taxes during a war. In 1943, during WWII, the tax rate for a person making \$2,593,984 (adjusted for inflation) was 88%. In that same year a person making \$155,000 (adjusted for inflation) was 38%. During the Vietnam War, in 1966, the tax rate for a person making \$629,530 (adjusted for inflation) was 70%. Also, in that same year, a person making \$83,104 (adjusted for inflation) was 36%. Today's tax rate, as of 2011, for a person making \$379,150 is 35%. A person making 1.1 million dollars tax rate pay the same 35%.

Should a person making \$379,150 pay the same rate as multi-millionaires? No they shouldn't. Why do we have the lowest taxes ever in the United States and yet be in a war? The United States should have taxes similar to years before. The middle class should pay the same rate. The rates for the middle class have stayed within the same percentage for the last 70 years. Meanwhile the upper class has gone from a 90 percent tax rate in the 1940's and 50's to 70 percent from 1960's through 1981, and 50 percent in 1982 through 1986. Now they have a 35 percent tax rate which is the same as a middle class citizen. The United States should raise the taxes of the rich.

REBECCA POTTER, BRATTLEBORO UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

Congress is dysfunctional because of priority discrepancies. Some in our government seem to believe that holds, filibusters, and less legal tactics of delay and obstruction serve as necessary means to a greater GOP-dominated end. Others argue that while disagreement is key in a true democracy, so is compromise. Certain members of the Senate, where unanimous consent remains relevant in the scheduling and timing of legislation, stand by "holding" the Senate's progress on a bill or committee action. Others point out that this is 2012, where a hold in Senate exists as a euphemism for indefinite or permanent vetoes, often done in secret. In both houses, many forget that the true party holding the majority in Congress is the white, heterosexual, wealthy men.

While Congress' dysfunction directly correlates with the partisan gridlock we've been

witnessing over the past four years, this has more to do with flaws in the system itself rather than the puppets within it. Sure, people are selfish and want the connections voting a certain way or hiring a specific set of hands will bring—but what ingenious economic system provides the impetus for such action? Capitalism, at the root of it all, enables members of Congress and the wealthy holding the strings above them to exist as money-motivated figures of power. The privatization of education, healthcare, and human services creates the legislative standstill we've got in Congress, which dedicates an absurd amount of time to arguing over non-issues in a partisan lock. This allows legislation that matters often gets nixed in committee or shoved through without necessary debate.

Capitalist society has created a dysfunctional Congress, and until we fix the system we will keep getting the same results. The bandage for this infectious situation is compromise in the Senate and House of Representatives—impending compromise, I predict, what with a certain cliff looming over our heads. Antibiotics for a more permanent change would mean a re-evaluation of everything we've grown up being told was "American": federalized elections, spending limits on campaigns, socialized care for humans and our unalienable rights (health, education, safety), and public ownership of the land of the free.

AUSTIN PRICE, MT. ANTHONY UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

My fellow Americans, Our country is evolving and changing in ways it has never before. We can either adjust or get left in the past. America was once the greatest power in the world and I believe we can get back to that, but we must take hold and lead with force. Although we are on the path back, we still need to focus on our military, economy, and civil rights.

Our military is the backbone of our success as a nation. With over nine hundred military bases internationally, we need our military to be strong as ever to protect our trading partners as well as us. The necessary changes that must be made are to increase our presence in the countries that are filled with enemies of the state and looking to do harm to the United States and its citizens. We must increase the spending budget for the military so that we will maintain our internationally renowned army. We as a country have the responsibility to not only protect our rights, but to protect the civil rights of others who don't have the ability themselves.

Further, we are in one of the greatest recessions since the Great Depression; we face unprecedented challenges as a nation to get back on top. If any country can come out of a depression and be even stronger than before, it is America, the home of the brave. Were the spending in any sector to increase, then there would be a huge influx of jobs that were created by all that new money. A higher tax rate for the wealthiest of Americans will help this nation get out of the greatest debt it has ever been in. It is time for everyone to pay their fair share. Although the taxes do need to be increased, increasing the taxes on small business owners will only hurt our economy because they will hire fewer workers.

There is also a great civil rights issue that must be addressed in our country. This is the marriage of homosexuals. I am proud to say that the state I reside in has done what few other states are brave enough to do by creating civil unions. There are a shocking forty-one states that ban same-sex marriage compared to only nine that allow it. I am asking for an immediate legalization of

same-sex marriage in all states, similar to that of the desegregation laws of the sixties and seventies.

If we as a nation are to be prosperous, we must grow and adapt to the world around us. In order to reach our goals their will have to be sacrifices made by every American. We must make changes to the economy, military, and civil rights in order to reach our lofty goals and reap the benefits of our hard work. •

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 11:35 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 267. An act to improve hydropower, and for other purposes.

H.R. 592. An act to amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to clarify that houses of worship are eligible for certain disaster relief and emergency assistance on terms equal to other eligible private nonprofit facilities, and for other purposes.

MEASURES REFERRED

The following bill was read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 267. An act to improve hydropower, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Mr. HARKIN, from the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute:

H.R. 307. A bill to reauthorize certain programs under the Public Health Service Act and the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act with respect to public health security and all-hazards preparedness and response, and for other purposes.

By Mr. MENENDEZ, from the Committee on Foreign Relations, with an amendment and with an amended preamble:

S. Res. 12. A resolution recognizing the third anniversary of the tragic earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010, honoring those who lost their lives in that earthquake, and expressing continued solidarity with the people of Haiti.

By Mr. HARKIN, from the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, without amendment:

S. 252. A bill to reduce preterm labor and delivery and the risk of pregnancy-related deaths and complications due to pregnancy, and to reduce infant mortality caused by prematurity.

By Mr. MENENDEZ, from the Committee on Foreign Relations, with amendments:

S. 298. A bill to prevent nuclear proliferation in North Korea, and for other purposes.

EXECUTIVE REPORTS OF COMMITTEE

The following executive reports of nominations were submitted:

By Mr. LEAHY for the Committee on the Judiciary.

Mark A. Barnett, of Virginia, to be a Judge of the United States Court of International Trade.

Claire R. Kelly, of New York, to be a Judge of the United States Court of International Trade.

Caitlin Joan Halligan, of New York, to be United States Circuit Judge for the District of Columbia Circuit.

Patty Schwartz, of New Jersey, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Third Circuit.

Pamela Ki Mai Chen, of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of New York.

Katherine Polk Failla, of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of New York.

Andrew Patrick Gordon, of Nevada, to be United States District Judge for the District of Nevada.

Ketanji Brown Jackson, of Maryland, to be United States District Judge for the District of Columbia.

Raymond P. Moore, of Colorado, to be United States District Judge for the District of Colorado.

Troy L. Nunley, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of California.

Beverly Reid O'Connell, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

Analisa Torres, of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of New York.

Derrick Kahala Watson, of Hawaii, to be United States District Judge for the District of Hawaii.

(Nominations without an asterisk were reported with the recommendation that they be confirmed.)

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. SCHUMER:

S. 324. A bill to amend part B of the title XVIII of the Social Security Act to apply deemed enrollment to residents of Puerto Rico and to provide a special enrollment period and a reduction in the late enrollment penalties for certain residents of Puerto Rico; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. TESTER (for himself, Mr. HELLER, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. BAUCUS, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. BEGICH, and Mr. ROCKEFELLER):

S. 325. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the maximum age for children eligible for medical care under the CHAMPVA program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Mrs. BOXER (for herself, Ms. MURKOWSKI, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. BEGICH, and Mr. MANCHIN):

S. 326. A bill to reauthorize 21st century community learning centers, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. BARRASSO (for himself, Mr. ENZI, Mr. HATCH, Mr. LEE, Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota, Mr. THUNE, and Mr. UDALL of Colorado):

S. 327. A bill to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with State foresters authorizing State foresters to provide certain forest, rangeland, and watershed restoration and protection services; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. THUNE (for himself, Mr. UDALL of Colorado, Mr. TESTER, and Mr. UDALL of New Mexico):

S. 328. A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to allow certain critical access hospitals and sole community hospitals to use interactive telecommunications systems to satisfy requirements with respect to having a physician available to stabilize an individual with an emergency medical condition under the Medicare program; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. SANDERS:

S. 329. A bill to eliminate certain fuel subsidies and to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend certain energy tax incentives; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mrs. BOXER (for herself, Mr. COBURN, Ms. BALDWIN, and Mr. PAUL):

S. 330. A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to establish safeguards and standards of quality for research and transplantation of organs infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV); to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. BROWN (for himself and Mr. PORTMAN):

S. 331. A bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study to determine the suitability and feasibility of designating the Colonel Charles Young Home in Xenia, Ohio, as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. SANDERS (for himself and Mrs. BOXER):

S. 332. A bill to address climate disruptions, reduce carbon pollution, enhance the use of clean energy, and promote resilience in the infrastructure of the United States, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. LAUTENBERG (for himself, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. BROWN, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. MENENDEZ, and Mrs. GILLIBRAND):

S. 333. A bill to establish certain duties for pharmacies to ensure provision of Food and Drug Administration-approved contraception, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mrs. McCASKILL (for herself and Mr. FLAKE):

S. 334. A bill to terminate agricultural direct payments beginning with the 2013 crop year; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

By Mr. MERKLEY (for himself and Mr. LAUTENBERG):

S. 335. A bill to provide financing assistance for qualified water infrastructure projects, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. ENZI (for himself, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. ALEXANDER, Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota, Mr. BOOZMAN, Mr. REED, Mr. BLUNT, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. CORKER, Mr. PRYOR, Mr. ROCKEFELLER, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. FRANKEN, Ms. HEITKAMP, Mr. CARDIN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Ms. LANDRIEU, Mr. MANCHIN, Mr. LEVIN, and Mr. HAR- KIN):

S. 336. A bill to restore States' sovereign rights to enforce State and local sales and use tax laws, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Ms. STABENOW (for herself, Mr. ROCKEFELLER, Mrs. McCASKILL, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, and Mr. BLUMENTHAL):

S. 337. A bill to provide an incentive for businesses to bring jobs back to America; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. BAUCUS (for himself, Mr. BURR, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. GRAHAM, Mr.

UDALL of Colorado, Mr. TESTER, and Mr. UDALL of New Mexico):

S. 338. A bill to amend the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 to provide consistent and reliable authority for, and for the funding of, the land and water conservation fund to maximize the effectiveness of the fund for future generations, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. MCCAIN (for himself and Mr. FLAKE):

S. 339. A bill to facilitate the efficient extraction of mineral resources in southeast Arizona by authorizing and directing an exchange of Federal and non-Federal land, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Ms. MURKOWSKI (for herself and Mr. BEGICH):

S. 340. A bill to provide for the settlement of certain claims under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. UDALL of Colorado (for himself and Mr. BENNET):

S. 341. A bill to designate certain lands in San Miguel, Ouray, and San Juan Counties, Colorado, as wilderness, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. REID (for himself and Mr. HELLER):

S. 342. A bill to designate the Pine Forest Range Wilderness area in Humboldt County, Nevada; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. REID (for himself and Mr. HELLER):

S. 343. A bill to provide for the conveyance of certain Federal land in Clark County, Nevada, for the environmental remediation and reclamation of the Three Kids Mine Project Site, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. WICKER (for himself and Mr. VITTER):

S. 344. A bill to prohibit the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency from approving the introduction into commerce of gasoline that contains greater than 10-volume-percent ethanol, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself, Mr. KIRK, Mr. TOOMEY, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. PORTMAN, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Mr. CORKER, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Ms. AYOTTE, and Mr. ALEXANDER):

S. 345. A bill to reform the Federal sugar program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

By Mr. TESTER (for himself, Mr. HELLER, and Mr. BAUCUS):

S. 346. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit veterans who have a service-connected, permanent disability rated as total to travel on military aircraft in the same manner and to the same extent as retired members of the Armed Forces entitled to such travel; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Mr. CARPER (for himself and Mr. COONS):

S. 347. A bill to establish the First State National Historical Park in the State of Delaware, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. ROCKEFELLER (for himself, Mr. MANCHIN, and Mrs. GILLIBRAND):

S. 348. A bill to provide for increased Federal oversight of prescription opioid treatment and assistance to States in reducing opioid abuse, diversion, and deaths; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.