

Members may contact the Foreign Affairs Committee to join this important anti-traffic initiative. I encourage you all to sign on to my legislation.

As people of goodwill around the world observe Human Trafficking Awareness Day this weekend, let us move beyond mere awareness, let us abolish this injustice, and protect and restore the dignity of those who have survived such exploitation.

INTERIM AGREEMENT WITH IRAN

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, our interim agreement with Iran gives us an opportunity to unwind seemingly intractable, interrelated conflicts throughout the Middle East.

There is no reason for Congress to complicate by further enhancing sanctions now that are already working. We have this 6 months to a year window to fashion a longer-term agreement. The fact that we are even talking with Iran is the most encouraging signal that we have seen in 34 years. Let's use this diplomatic window. There are hard-liners in both countries, highly suspicious, very negative, who would like to blow this agreement up.

Unless we are willing to invade and occupy Iran, even repeated bombing will delay the Iranian nuclear effort by, at best, 4 or 5 years, maybe less.

Americans have spent a trillion dollars, lost 4,000 American lives, with tens of thousands of wounded, in more than a decade in Iraq, and the country is still falling apart. Iran is bigger, stronger, and more sophisticated. I don't think you can sell that war to the American people.

Congress should calm down and give diplomacy a chance. Let's learn about this important country, its 4,000-year history, and our past mistakes with Iran, and most important, our common interest.

The Middle East has long been a simmering cauldron, with a conflict suppressed by a lid of repression held down by empire and colonial powers. That started to change a century ago with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and colonial powers trying from afar to influence human behavior by drawing lines on maps from European capitals, irrespective of religious, tribal, or ethnic realities. It set in motion a series of forces that are playing out today with tragic consequences.

Iran as the dominant Shi'a force in the region could play a huge role where we share common interest, in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan for instance.

The current situation is a result of partnerships between Congress and the Obama administration that got us to this point where Iran is willing to negotiate. Strong, effective sanctions would never have worked without careful, artful diplomacy that involved other countries like India to help us

squeeze Iran. It has worked. Let's claim credit and move on to the next steps.

We could start by trying to learn about each other. Let's promote an exchange between Iran and the United States with students, religious leaders, maybe even parliamentary members and Members of Congress. Let's focus on our shared interest, like Afghanistan, where we had earlier cooperation with Iran to help overthrow the Taliban. Let's work to make progress with the agreement and beyond.

The Congress can do this most importantly by leaving it alone. Congress shouldn't meddle, Congress shouldn't muddle, Congress shouldn't give the Iranian hard-liners who don't want any agreement at all an excuse to scuttle it.

We have an opportunity to improve the most volatile region in the world and Congress shouldn't blow that opportunity.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS

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

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, 48 hours, a million-plus Americans received letters in their mailboxes. They weren't overdue tax letters. They were not letters suggesting that you are at fault. It was not a notice to say that you are no longer an American citizen. It was not a letter to say you are now relieved of any responsibility to pay any bills or to provide for your family.

It was a letter denying, or extinguishing, taking away the unemployment insurance that most Americans have come to understand that, as working Americans, having worked in their life, that they would be the recipient of these benefits during a brief lapse or an extended lapse of not being able to find work. The chronically unemployed percentage is the highest that it has been in decades, and therefore, this is not the time to delay.

I hold in my hand as well a resume of a competent worker, a college graduate who has the responsibility to support his family and who has been looking for work for 2 years, earnestly, energetically, and intensely, and cannot find work.

The clock is ticking on the 30 hours in the United States Senate, but the real concern is my friends in this body. Recognizing that these letters deal with people's lives, and to make a representation that all is well, unemployment generally is 7 percent. However, it was lower than that when President Bush signed the unemployment insurance benefits in 2008. These guys, these distinguished Americans, misfits, why can't they find work? Twenty thousand-plus are veterans looking for work, men and women who served in the United States military, or, as we met in the White House on Tuesday, a mother of two distinguished men who are serving in Afghanistan.

So the 1.3 million languish while we are trying to make a determination that may not be able to be made. Frankly, I would ask that we all be reasonable. I would simply make the point that it is an emergency.

I want to pause for a moment and thank the Houston Apartment Association that has worked with me and has sent a letter to all of their members asking for those 12,000, some of whom are residents of apartments in Harris County, to be sensitive and tolerant of those individuals who can document that they were the beneficiaries or the recipients of unemployment insurance that was cut off on December 28. I want to applaud them for their sensitivity in dealing with those particular individuals. I ask mortgage companies and utility companies and city water bill companies to be tolerant as well, to be working with families who are basically without a lifeline.

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But the issue before us is the fact that these letters have gone to people such as this woman, who has looked for work every day. She liked her job and was laid off for no fault of her own.

Right now, we have the opportunity to pass a 3-month emergency relief—some of us have introduced bills for 1 year—and then contemplate, discuss, and work with what might be the appropriate way of funding the continuation.

No person unemployed, chronically or not, is happy with an unemployment benefit check. What they are happy with, Mr. Speaker, is the ability to work and to provide for their family.

So I would make the argument that as we discuss privacy issues on the Affordable Care Act, which are already taken care of by CMS, today and tomorrow on the floor we should be passing unemployment insurance. I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me, recognizing that Americans want to work. Let's help them transition with a bridge of unemployment insurance.

OPPOSITION TO UNESCO FUNDING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, last November, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, came to meet with my colleagues and me who serve on the Foreign Affairs Committee. In that meeting, Ambassador Power told us that despite U.S. law that prohibits any funding to UNESCO because of its decision to admit a nonexistent state of Palestine to its membership, the administration was going to make it a priority to seek waiver authority to continue U.S. taxpayer funding to UNESCO.

Indeed, this is coming to fruition. There is a congressional push by some to grant the administration this waiver

or to seek other ways to get around this prohibition.

I am here today to voice my unconditional and unyielding opposition to this push, and I urge my colleagues to join me in removing that in the budget that will be before us soon and not allow the administration to yet again circumvent U.S. law and to throw away hundreds of millions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer money.

The administration is seeking to not only restore \$80 million in taxpayer funds to UNESCO for this fiscal year, but it is also seeking to pay nearly \$250 million more in arrears—dues—that we owed to UNESCO, an agency that has an anti-U.S. and an anti-Israel agenda.

If we restore funding to UNESCO, we are tacitly agreeing with their support for Abbas, the PA, the PLO, the non-existent state of Palestine, and the U.N. scheme to undermine the peace process by granting de facto recognition to a Palestinian state without it first coming to an agreement with Israel to resolve this long conflict.

A vote to restore any U.S. funding to UNESCO or to give the administration any waiver authority to circumvent the existing laws that prohibit U.S. funding to UNESCO would not only undermine our credibility and set a dangerous precedent; it would further embolden an already intransigent Abu Mazen and Palestinian Authority.

Why do I say “intransigent”? Because even as we sit here, Mr. Speaker, reports indicate that a major holdup in the peace negotiations between Secretary Kerry, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority is the refusal by Abbas and the PA to recognize Israel as the Jewish State of Israel. Is that the kind of member that we want to be associated with in UNESCO—one that doesn't even recognize the identity of another state? And not just another state, but our closest ally.

I know that UNESCO is riddled with rogue regimes amongst its ranks, including the likes of Cuba, where the callous, brutal, and murderous Castro regime has been repressing the rights of 11 million Cubans for over half a century; and Syria, where the tyrant Assad has caused the deaths of over 130,000 people and brought the Middle East to the very brink.

But if we restore U.S. funding to UNESCO, we are essentially saying that this is okay, and, oh, by the way, why not add one more in Abbas? There has been a recent spate of terrorist activity against Israel; and rather than act like a true leader that seeks peace and a partner in a negotiated peace settlement, Abbas was definitely silent when it came time to denounce these acts of terror.

The powers that be at UNESCO don't seem to mind this at all. But not us, Mr. Speaker. We are better than that. We aren't about to trade in our credibility and our principles as a country for a plaque and platitudes for this circumvention. We know that if we concede to UNESCO and restore any fund-

ing, we would be making a grave mistake, and also wasting hundreds of millions of our constituents' dollars on this anti-U.S. agenda.

I will continue to fight this push to restore funding to UNESCO in any way, and I will continue to rally my colleagues to join me in this fight.

STRONG START FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, study after study has shown us that investment in quality early education leads to better educational outcomes, stronger job earnings, and lower crime rates. Decades of research confirm that quality preschool helps prevent achievement gaps for low-income children, with long-term benefits for our Nation.

But we don't need research to confirm the importance of quality early childhood education. Ask any parent in America if it matters to them. The problem is that not enough children have access to it. That is why I have introduced the bipartisan bill, Strong Start for America's Children Act.

When Congressman HANNA, Senator HARKIN, and I introduced the bill in November, we were joined by the sheriff of Minneapolis, a top private-sector CEO, a retired Air Force General, a parent, and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. These leaders from so many segments of our country understand the need for greater Federal investment in high-quality preschool.

My legislation proposes an innovative Federal-State partnership to increase resources for local school districts and community-based programs that provide quality pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds. It also allows funding for educating 3-year-olds. It also allows States to spend some of the money on good quality infant and toddler care. The bill improves child care quality for infants and toddlers by supporting partnerships between child care and Early Head Start.

Millions of young children from low-income families lack access to high-quality preschool programs and child care services. They are on waiting lists because of limited public funding. This deepens achievement gaps and impedes the Nation's economic workforce success.

For example, Early Head Start has shown to be an effective, high-quality program; yet the sad truth is that only 3 percent of the eligible children have access to it. Additionally, one in six low-income families eligible for Federal child care services has access.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a Democratic issue nor a Republican issue. Babies, toddlers, and preschoolers don't know that political parties exist. In fact, we are seeing that Republican and Democratic Governors from all regions of

the country are pushing for more funding for early learning in their States. They want to be partners with the Federal Government.

State legislators from both parties in a wide range of States have led efforts to support quality preschool. Just recently, we received a letter signed by more than 500 State legislators from both parties in support of this issue.

I am also very proud of our partnership with the fellow Republican Members of the House, such as Mr. HANNA and Mr. GRIMM. We all know that the policy makes sense for America's future. We all know what is possible in our communities and in our Nation if kids are given a fair shot at success.

The public understands and believes in early childhood education. A bipartisan poll released in July found an overwhelming majority of Americans supports quality early childhood education and rate it a national priority, second to only increasing jobs and economic growth. Seven in 10 support the Federal plan to help States and local communities provide better early childhood education.

Members of Congress and other policymakers are also getting on board. The bipartisan budget agreement reached last month includes a reserve fund for early childhood education, child care, and voluntary home visitation. That is yet another acknowledgment by another bipartisan group of Members—in this case, budget leaders—that early childhood education should be a top priority for the Federal Government. That acknowledgment is clearly a step forward, but it isn't enough. Our next step must be the enactment of the Strong Start Act.

With the fiscal year 2014 spending deadline less than a week away, I understand that appropriators from both Houses are considering increased funding for preschool, as outlined in our bipartisan bill. I heartily encourage this course.

Despite the language used whenever we in Congress talk about budgets, funding early childhood education isn't spending. It is an investment, and it is an investment that is critical for our Nation's long-term economic strength.

From a better-educated workforce to a reduced need for social services, study after study has documented the enormous return on investment of early childhood education. We can save between \$7 and \$12 for every dollar invested. These are real savings resulting from less grade repetition, lower dropout rates, less spending on welfare and social services, more tax revenue, and lower incarceration rates.

As Sheriff Rich Stanek said when we launched the Strong Start for America's Children Act:

I'm the guy you pay later.

Let's stop spending on the back end what we should be investing in the beginning in a child's life.

For all of these reasons, our bill has the support of more than 60 national organizations representing pediatricians, law enforcement, religious