INTRODUCTION OF THE AMERICAN WORKER TEMPORARY RELIEF ACT

HON. TODD TIAHRT

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 7, 2003

Mr. TIAHRT. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing the American Worker Temporary Relief Act, legislation which will extend for 13 weeks unemployment compensation for those Americans whose benefits expired on December 28. If enacted, this bill will enable approximately 800,000 Americans—including 6,000 laid-off workers in my state of Kansas—to begin receiving benefits again.

The American Worker Temporary Relief Act is an important step in helping our workers through these tough economic times. Many have been severely affected by a lingering recession and the economic effects of the September 11, and we, as elected representatives of the people, cannot turn our backs on them.

While this measure is important for immediate relief, I must emphasize its title, ''The American Worker Temporary Relief Act.'' Make no mistake: This is short term aid. I believe the best and most responsible approach Congress can take is to adopt policies designed to get our economy growing again. We should work to create a climate in which businesses, especially small businesses, can grow and create jobs that America needs. We should work to guarantee that hard-working Americans are able to keep more of their money to spend in our economy.

I represent the Fourth District of Kansas, which includes Wichita, the Aviation Capital of the World. In the greater Wichita area, we have had in excess of 10,000 layoffs in the aircraft manufacturing industry as a result of the downturn following the attacks on September 11, and have, by far, the highest unemployment rate of any area in the state. And while many of these laid-off workers will benefit from the bill I am introducing today, they have been unable to qualify for additional unemployment benefits available to other high unemployment states due to the relative economic health of other areas in our state.

While I am truly grateful that other parts of my state have been spared the high unemployment which is prevalent in the Wichita-area, I believe we must review the formula for determining the qualifications for more benefits when a particular area has been hard hit. In the coming weeks, I will be introducing legislation to fundamentally change the procedure for dispersing, unemployment benefits.

Under the current formula, hard-hit areas of a particular state often do not meet the ''trigger'' for unemployment benefits due to the more robust economic health of the rest of the state. This policy change, if enacted, will guarantee that unemployment assistance will not be contingent on an overall state unemployment rate, but a more localized approach designed to assist areas of greatest need.

Mr. Speaker, this change will undoubtedly take time. I look forward to working with my colleagues to correct this unjust method of measuring econonmic hardship and I will seek their support as we work to provide assistance for those areas most in need.

In the meantime, I urge my colleagues to support legislation to extend the unemployment benefits of all Americans whose assistance lapsed on December 28. Support the American Worker Temporary Relief Act.

FLAG PROTECTION AMENDMENT

HON. RANDY ''DUKE'' CUNNINGHAM

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 7, 2003

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to reintroduce legislation which would amend the Constitution to prevent desecration of the American flag. This measure is identical to H.J. Res. 36, which I sponsored in the last session of Congress, and language adopted by the House four times. It is necessary to restore protections for the symbol of our nation and all its honored traditions, which were sadly wiped away in the 1989 Supreme Court ruling on Texas v. Johnson.

In that fateful 5–4 ruling, the Court cast aside longstanding national laws and 48 state laws recognizing the flag's special status and honoring its place in American society—ruling that its desecration is protected under the First Amendment. For those who see our flag as a revered symbol of freedom and the great sacrifices that were made to sustain it at home and abroad, that decision was a horrible affront—and the call to action was immediate.

Inspired to preserve our national trademark and unalloyed symbol of unity, Congress quickly moved to pass a law restoring flag protections. But in its 5–4 ruling on United States v. Eichman in 1990, the Supreme Court once again found that flag protections were inconsistent with free expression rights accorded under the First Amendment. That ruling made it clear that restoration of flag protections would require a Constitutional Amendment.

Since that ruling, the House has four times passed a Flag Protection Constitutional Amendment with well over the two-thirds majority required. The Senate has also acted, failing to achieve the two-thirds votes necessary to move the amendment forward to the states for ratification by a mere handful of votes. Since that time, our nation has endured some of its most difficult challenges and we have been reminded once again how important the flag is in unifying our nation, demonstrating our resolve and honoring those who have sacrificed to protect the lives and liberties of the American people.

Each color on the flag, each star and each stripe evokes emotion in me, and together they stand as a symbol of everything I believed in about this country when I fought to defend it. When I heard that some in my country were opposing my military's involvement in Vietnam, that flag reminded me of our tolerance for differences and our endurance through unity. It was a steady symbol of the liberties we enjoy—a way of life that should be protected for future generations and defended for others who aspire to it. From the soldier deployed or detained abroad to the policemen and firefighters protecting citizens in communities, it has stood as a symbol of the country we love, the reason we serve and most important, the sacrifices that have been made.

There have been several major incidents of flag burning since the Court ruling in 1990. These incidents tear at me, and represent a direct attack on all I hold dear about this country. The Constitution was not designed to protect actions which jeopardize others' rights, and the government has long acted to restrict speech and conduct that could cause harm to others. Those who want to express their anger against this country have options that don't involve destroying the sacred symbol that belongs to all citizens.

At a time when we are faced with increasing youth violence and cultural breakdown, restoring our most recognized sign of unity would be a positive step in the right direction—providing a steady reminder that living free comes with responsibility to respect others. Since 9–11, the flag has come to represent even more for all Americans and a reminder of those who were lost protecting us. Allowing its desecration is an insult to all those who perished.

Mr. Speaker, the state of Israel has laws protecting not only its flag, but the flags of its allies as well. It is inexplicable to me that the United States is being told by its courts to tolerate such acts of hatred and violence against its flag when our allies go to such great lengths to protect it. Over seventy-five percent of Americans consistently agree: the time to restore protections for our flag is long overdue. I ask my colleagues to join me in support of this Constitutional Amendment, and to move it back to the American people for speedy ratification.

TRIBUTE TO PUNCH WOODS, RETIRING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE TUCSON COMMUNITY FOOD BANK

HON. JIM KOLBE

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 7, 2003

Mr. KOLBE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Punch Woods, the retiring Executive Director of the Tucson Community Food Bank who has served his community in this important role for the past 25 years.

Mr. Speaker, it is hard to imagine what Tucson would be like without the contributions Punch has made to helping people who are hungry and needy. Just as important, however, has been his work to raise the awareness of the rest of the community, who do not suffer from hunger, of what it means to those who do. An entire generation of school children has grown up in southern Arizona bringing cans of food to school, to their Girl Scout meetings and even to birthday parties because of Punch's efforts. Now, many of them are parents themselves and are raising their kids to do the same.

I've had the privilege of serving on the Community Food Bank Board for some 20 years now. I don't know if I have contributed much to the work of the Food Bank over the years, but I know how much it has personally benefited to me. It has been so rewarding to be associated with an organization that is both compassionate and practical and to understand these are not mutually exclusive terms. We always say that we wish the Community Food Bank didn't have to be in business, and that is true. But hunger and poverty are—sadly—facts of life in our community today, and it is heartening to know that the Community Food Bank has been there to serve our families and neighbors in need with an ever-increasing array of services. The very fact that Punch