

AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, when I am back home in my district in Tennessee talking with a lot of small-business owners, which are the primary mode of employment in my district, there are a lot of things that always come up. I can always count on hearing about taxation, the need for deregulation, the effects of illegal immigration, and health care.

Increasingly I am hearing from these owners that they want Congress to open the way for more affordable health care choices. Last week in Roll Call there was a great article talking about association health plans, and I am glad to see some attention is on that idea, and that legislation is going to come before the House.

The gentleman from Texas (Mr. SAM JOHNSON) really should be applauded for introducing the Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2005, which will help our small businesses purchase association health plans through national trade groups. I have joined him as a cosponsor of this important legislation because I believe we have a wonderful opportunity to extend affordable quality health care to millions of Americans.

Mr. Speaker, Republicans and this leadership are fighting to help the engine of economic growth in this country, our small businesses, helping them gain access to the sort of health care typically we only see provided by large corporations.

Small businesses feel like their employees are family members. They want the best for them. Every small-business owner knows that providing those employees with health care can be costly, and it can be a difficult part of running a business. Costs are rising, the paperwork never seems to end, and we have the power to help in this situation. We have the power to provide a vehicle for extending health care to millions of Americans. This does not require a big government program. It will not require spending billions of taxpayer dollars. It is common sense. It is providing an opportunity.

The Small Business Health Fairness Act has the potential to be very effective, to be pro-health care, to be a great effort for our communities across the Nation. The bill is going to reduce costs for entrepreneurs and their employees by letting small businesses band together to pool their purchase power, to work cooperatively and to dilute the risk to the insurers. It will lower premiums, and we believe it will give millions of uninsured Americans the access they want to quality health care.

We have debated this issue for years on end, and it is time for action. It is time to listen to America's small businesses and to their employees. I want

to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SAM JOHNSON) for his work on this. I want to thank the leadership for their efforts, and I ask all of my colleagues to strongly support this important effort.

PASS DR-CAFTA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BRADY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. BRADY of Texas. Mr. Speaker, for the United States to remain the greatest economic power in the world, it is no longer enough to simply buy American, we have to sell American. We have to sell our American products throughout the world, our products and services created by the most productive workforce on this planet.

But when our businesses and farmers try to compete, they discover that Europe and Asia have aggressively negotiated trade agreements with other countries that tilt much of the world in their direction, leaving the U.S. and our companies and businesses and farmers at a severe disadvantage.

That is unfair to American farmers, it is unfair to American businesses, and it is especially unfair to American workers who can compete if given a level playing field and other countries are held accountable to the same trade rules.

Rather than build economic rules around our Nation that only harm American jobs, restrict what we can buy, and raise prices on our families, we must use American muscle to secure favorable trade agreements that tear down the "American need not apply" signs that close off potential customers from our products.

In the coming days, the House of Representatives will give final consideration to the Dominican Republic Central American Free Trade Agreement, the most significant trade agreement in a decade. It will open 44 million new customers to American products, help America win the textile war against China, and honor America's commitment to democracy, freedom and human rights in our hemisphere.

With me tonight are a number of Members of Congress who have examined this trade agreement and feel strongly about it from the standpoint of national security and jobs and agriculture. Joining us tonight is the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MCCAUL), the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BEAUPREZ), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CARTER), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CONAWAY) and the gentleman from California (Mr. HERGER), chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MCCAUL), who spent a decade with the Department of Justice, the last 4 years as the deputy attorney

general in Texas, and understands the national security implications of this trade agreement.

Mr. MCCAUL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BRADY) for his leadership on this issue. He has been the point man on this in Congress, and he has done a great job. I am proud to work with him on this, and proud to call him my friend as well.

Since September 11, we have made this Nation's security and prosperity our number one priority. Halfway around the world, we fight terrorism and promote freedom with the strength of our military. In our own hemisphere, we have several different weapons in the strength of our economy, our business and our trade that will help to guarantee our safety. We must utilize these tools to prevent tyranny and evil from gaining power in our own backyard.

For years, our Central American neighbors were torn apart by civil wars that epitomized the global battle between good and evil. With our help they have created stable and free governments. However, that battle is far from won. There are those who would like to reverse the progress that we have made, and those who wish to use the fragile state of our friends' democracies to attack our very existence.

In order to win the war on terror, we must continue to guarantee the stability of democracy in our own hemisphere. The citizens of this country have entrusted us with their safety and their well-being. They have asked us to represent their interests and to help increase their standard of living. Job creation should not fall prey to politics. We need to rise above partisan politics to work for the good of our country.

That is why this week my colleagues and I in the United States Congress will vote for legislation that will strengthen our economy, our security, and our way of life. The Dominican Republic and Central American Free Trade Agreement will help reinforce freedom and democracy throughout our entire region.

When considering the benefits of CAFTA, we must consider the pitfalls of not passing it. With the improvement of our economic relationship with Central America, we will see an improvement in our security relationship.

Recently I met with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon, and he made it clear to me that this trade agreement is crucial to our national security. We are currently engaged in a war on terror on the other side of the world, while there are already terrorists who are using Central America as a base of operations against the United States. This trade agreement is not only good for our economy, it is also vital to our national security by stabilizing Central American democracies.

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In addition to international terrorism, we must also mind the rising