

As the veterans population of Florida and the Tampa Bay area continues to grow, the staff at Bay Pines seeks to respond quickly to meet the increased demand for veterans medical care.

Madam Speaker, representing Bay Pines and the veterans its serves is a great honor but also a great responsibility. It is reassuring to know that with receipt of the Carey Award for Excellence that Bay Pines continues to provide the highest level of care and that they never rest on their laurels as the staff and volunteers continue to search for new ways to improve the services they provide to our nation's heroes and their families. It is my hope that my colleagues will join me today in expressing to the staff and volunteers at Bay Pines our thanks and appreciation for a job well done.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. CONYERS. Madam Speaker, on January 9, 2009, I inadvertently cast a "yea" vote for H. Res. 34. I intended to vote "present."

PAYCHECK FAIRNESS ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. CHET EDWARDS

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 9, 2009

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Speaker, the Paycheck Fairness Act is about far more than the size of a paycheck. It is about our commitment to the American values of hard work and equality of opportunity.

The story of America is our never-ending march toward the highest ideals of equal opportunity for all our citizens.

Today, we write a new chapter in that great American story. Today, we say to women and young girls all across our land, that if you work hard and play by the rules, you will be rewarded fairly. You will reap what you sow.

From our founding days, that promise has motivated parents to work hard to improve the lives of their families and the future for their children. It has inspired generations of immigrants to leave their homelands to make America their home.

Fulfilling the promise of equal opportunity for American women will lift millions of our families and children out of poverty. That's not just progress for their families; it is real progress for the American family. And, by fairly rewarding the hard work of America's women, we make our Nation more competitive in the world economy.

Some will say this step forward will be inconvenient. I say that knocking down barriers to equality of opportunity has never been the convenient thing to do, but it has always been the right thing to do.

My wife and I try to teach our two young sons every day that if they will work hard, they will do well in life—that their work will be rewarded fairly.

I am supporting this bill, because I want the parents of every little girl in America to be able

to teach that value, to make that promise to their daughters. It is the promise of America.

INTRODUCTION OF WORKER RELIEF LEGISLATION

HON. JOHN M. McHUGH

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. McHUGH. Madam Speaker, on January 6, 2009, I introduced three measures that are designed to provide relief to millions of unemployed American workers. These proposals are H.R. 155, the Suspension of Federal Income Tax on Unemployment Benefits Act of 2009; H.R. 154, the Workers Severance Tax Reduction Act of 2009; and H.R. 153, the Worker Savings Account Act of 2009.

From December 2007 to December 2008, the national unemployment rate has risen from 4.9 percent to 7.2 percent and 2.6 million jobs have been lost. In fact, from November 2007 to November 2008, the number of those seeking work has risen in 49 States and the District of Columbia, including New York, which has seen its rate increase from 4.6 percent to 6.1 percent during that time. As of November 2008, in New York's 23rd Congressional District, which I have the privilege of representing, 9 of my 11 constituent counties had unemployment rates that significantly exceed the national rate. With my support, the 110th Congress enacted legislation (P.L. 110-252 and P.L. 110-449) to provide up to an additional 20 weeks of unemployment benefits to workers who have exhausted their 26 weeks of regular benefits. However, there is more we can and should do to help those without a job.

In the first instance, we should enact H.R. 155, the Suspension of Federal Income Tax on Unemployment Benefits Act of 2009. Many Americans are unaware that they must pay Federal income taxes on any unemployment compensation benefits they might receive. This has not always been the case; between 1979 and 1986, those payments were excluded from Federal income taxes. It is time to once more provide this relief to unemployed Americans, which could provide up to \$117 in additional income to the average beneficiary. In this manner, Congress can both help those individuals who are most in need and inject billions of dollars into the economy through paid rents, mortgages, utilities, groceries, and other necessities.

We should also enact H.R. 154, the Workers Severance Tax Reduction Act of 2009, which would allow laid-off workers to exclude up to \$40,000 from any severance pay, provided that it is less than \$150,000 and is received between December 31, 2007, and December 31, 2010. Studies have indicated that roughly 60 percent of businesses offer their employees some kind of severance pay. While these totals can vary from business to business, in many cases it is remitted as a lump sum. Unfortunately for many workers, the IRS takes a substantial bite out of these benefits. Specifically, under current law, severance pay is treated as regular income, thus often driving people into higher tax brackets at the very time they are losing their jobs.

From the start of the current economic slump in December 2007 through November 2008, there have been 20,712 mass layoffs in-

volving nearly a quarter of a million Americans. While not all of them received severance pay, those who did needed all those monies to better support their families, go back to school, or otherwise find a new job or career. Congress can and should help these citizens during this difficult time by allowing them to retain more of these much-needed monies.

Finally, to help Americans enhance their personal safety nets, Congress should enact H.R. 153, the Worker Savings Account Act of 2009. This measure would allow people to establish Worker Savings Accounts (WSAs) to supplement the benefits they might otherwise receive while unemployed.

Like traditional Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs), WSAs would have an annual contribution limit of \$5,000, indexed to inflation. However, employers would be able to provide matching contributions of up to \$5,000 annually. Contributions to WSAs would be permitted until the account owner actually elects to take Social Security retirement benefits. At that time, WSA account holders could choose to rollover their WSA funds into a 401(k) or IRA; alternatively, the WSA funds could be withdrawn without penalty but subject to taxation. Prior to a WSA account owner's decision to take Social Security payments, WSA funds could be withdrawn without penalty and tax-free as long as employment was lost through no fault of the worker or they had become disabled.

To encourage lower-income Americans to take advantage of the opportunity to contribute to this benefit, the Worker Savings Account Act would provide a refundable tax credit of up to \$1,000 for eligible individuals. This tax credit would be indexed to inflation and recipients could receive up to \$5,000 over the course of their career.

Madam Speaker, by enacting the three bills described above, the 111th Congress can help millions of unemployed Americans. Accordingly, I ask my colleagues to work with me to enact these important measures.

HONORING CADET COLONEL ROBERT J. WILSON

HON. FRANK R. WOLF

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Mr. WOLF. Madam Speaker, it is my privilege to honor my constituent, Cadet Colonel Robert Wilson of Chantilly, Virginia, for his remarkable achievements as a member of the Civil Air Patrol. At a Pentagon presentation and award ceremony on January 5, Cadet Wilson was presented with the General Carl A. Spaatz Award. The Spaatz Award is the Civil Air Patrol's highest cadet honor, presented to cadets who demonstrate extraordinary leadership, character, fitness, and aerospace knowledge.

For every 1,000 cadets, only 2 achieve this distinct honor. Robert first joined the Civil Air Patrol in January 2004 where he served with distinction in the Fairfax Composite Squadron of the National Capital Wing. Upon graduation from high school, he chose to attend Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona, to obtain his bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering.