THE FAIR TAX AND TAX REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, this year Americans worked almost 100 days, from January 1 to April 9, to pay taxes at the Federal, State, and local levels, which is more than one-fourth of their income. I believe that it is totally unacceptable to require already stressed families to give up such a high share of their income while bloated Federal bureaucracy continues to expand during a severe recession. To reduce this burden, Congress should now focus on reforming the current complicated tax structure which makes it so much more difficult for families and small business owners to experience economic recovery.

As I called for in my last speech on tax reform, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN), needs to schedule hearings on tax reform simplicity as soon as possible. The Fair Tax proposal is one of those ideas that I believe the committee must consider. The Fair Tax is definitely a serious proposal that is backed by many Americans, including so many constituents of my congressional district, and it deserves our full consideration.

The Fair Tax would replace all Federal income and payroll-based taxes with a national retail sales tax and includes a rebate to ensure that no American below the poverty level pays Federal taxes. If enacted, the Fair Tax proposal would provide a dollar-for-dollar Federal revenue neutrality. According to the proposal's advocates, the Fair Tax would reform the current tax code. Today's tax code is unfair, costly, and confusing, and is so complex that many of us pay more in taxes per year than we should. It is estimated that the present system costs taxpayers $265 billion for tax filing, tax record-keeping, tax reduction advice, et cetera, which is $900 for every man, woman and child in America. This is taxation without comprehension.

The current income tax code inhibits economic growth, it inhibits capital formation, and it inhibits job creation. Fair Tax supporters believe tax reform can correct these problems by greatly reducing the high cost of compliance in the present system while lifting the income tax burden on production. I believe that a fair and balanced look at the Fair Tax should begin the conversation on tax reform, and I encourage my colleagues who are serious about having this discussion to join me in contacting the chairman.

Congress needs to remember the sacrifices that are made by each American family by making a real effort at tax reform this year.

As the American economy continues to stagnate with a record 10 percent unemployment rate, Congress needs to respond by taking a close look at tax reform, and yes, the Fair Tax also.

SUPPORTING ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL TEACHER DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KLEIN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H. Res. 403, legislation I introduced calling for the establishment of a National Teacher Day. I believe it is important that we recognize the hard work of our Nation's teachers who prepare our students for a stronger America. The education of our children is critical to the future success of our country and our global competitiveness. And despite limited compensation and increasingly high expectations, our teachers rise to the challenge each and every day.

As the son of an elementary school teacher—my mom taught second grade, I was proud to introduce this resolution. My mother, and so many other teachers across the country, spend their lives working to inspire children and open their minds to new ideas so they can grow up to be successful in whatever path they choose.

I am sure that each and every one of my colleagues in Congress can identify at least one teacher from their past who made a difference in their lives. I know that I wouldn't be where I am today without the motivation and encouragement of teachers who challenged me to pursue my dreams of public service. This legislation also comes at an extremely critical time for our Nation's teachers. In this tough economy, State budgets are suffering, and it is important more than ever that we find solutions to budget challenges that threaten to cut academic programs and lay off good teachers to the detriment of our children and the future workforce of our country.

Rather than slash school budgets, increase classroom sizes, and stretch our teachers even thinner than we already have, we must work to keep good teachers in the classroom and incentivize more people to enter the teacher workforce. We cannot improve our education system in the United States if we don't invest in quality teaching as it is. That is why I have consistently voted to prevent massive statewide layoffs of our education professionals.

I would also like to thank my distinguished colleague, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. ROSKAM) for joining me in introducing this important piece of legislation, and thank the overwhelming number of Members who have joined me in support of the establishment of a National Teacher Day.

Mr. Speaker, when you get a chance, thank teachers for the great work that they do.

STOP IRAN'S NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest threats to peace in the Middle East and possibly the whole world is for the United States and our friends and allies around the world to stop Iran's nuclear development program. We have been working for months and months to come up with a very strong Iran sanctions bill. The bill has finally passed the House and Senate, and because of the differences, we are in a conference committee. We have a very strong bill, one that will put extreme pressure on Iran and possibly avert a war in the Middle East. But now we are hearing that the bill is going to be watered down. It is going to be made weaker. If it is made weaker, that means the pressure will not be put on Iran that should be, and they will continue with their nuclear development program and we could be in a war in the Middle East that will far exceed what we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I want to read to you from a report that was issued just last week. ''Iran has set up new equipment that will allow it to boost its efficiency at enriching uranium at higher levels. Iran's clandestine enrichment activities were discovered 8 years ago and have expanded since to encompass thousands of centrifuges churning out material enriched to 3.5 percent. But despite three sets of Security Council sanctions meant to enforce demands of a freeze, Tehran moved to a new level in February, when it set up a small program to produce material enriched to near 20 percent.'' And 20 percent can be used for a nuclear weapon.

The story continued, ''But the move has increased concerns because it brings the Islamic Republic closer to the ability to produce warhead material. Uranium at 3.5 percent can be used to fuel reactors, which is Iran's avowed purpose for enrichment. If enriched to around 95 percent, however, it can be used in building a nuclear bomb. And at 20 percent, uranium can be turned into weapons-grade material much more quickly than from lower levels.

''The 20-percent uranium is being produced by 'a cascade'—164 centrifuges hooked up in series. The diplomats said that Iranian technicians had in recent weeks assembled another 164-centrifuge cascade, and the throw of a switch appeared ready to activate it to support the machines already turning out small amounts of near 20-percent uranium.''

We don't know how long it is going to be before Iran has nuclear weapons, but we know it is not going to be too long. And every day we wait to put pressure on Iran is a day they are closer to developing nuclear technology that could start a war over there, obliterate our friends in Israel, and cause a major war that we will have to be involved with.

We get about 40 percent of our energy from the Middle East. And if a war

breaks out over there and in the Gulf States, the Persian Gulf could be blocked, and we would lose so much energy we wouldn't even be able to run the lights in this place.

It is extremely important that we have a very strong Iran sanctions bill. I am on the conference committee, and I would say to my colleagues who are conferees, let's make it tough, as tough as possible, because the one thing we want to do is avert a major war with Iran in the Middle East. And I can tell you, I know Bibi Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, is not going to stand by and watch a weapon that could obliterate, destroy Israel, be produced right next door there in Iran. So it is important that the United States take the lead by coming up with a very strong bill that will put sanctions on Iran that they will realize will stop them economically if they don't stop their nuclear development program.

This is probably going to be one of the last chances we will have to stop a nuclear program in Iran that will develop a nuclear weapon and possibly cause a major war and proliferation of nuclear weapons throughout the Middle East. This is a very important time not only for them, in the Middle East, Israel and our allies, but it is a big, important time for the United States and all of our allies in Europe. We can't let a terrorist state like Iran get a nuclear weapon, and that is why we need to pass a very strong Iran sanctions bill, and we need to do it right away.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MORAN of Kansas addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

WELCOMING LOCAL LEADERS FROM DENTON COUNTY, TEXAS, TO THE NATION'S CAPITAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to recognize Denton County, Texas and members of the Denton County leadership delegation who are visiting here in Washington, D.C. this week. These local officials and business leaders understand that what goes on here in Washington affects their local communities. So this trip, this trip they make every 2 years, is a very important one.

Over the next several days, these individuals will meet with members of the leadership here in Congress, Senators and Representatives from Texas and across the country and, in addition, will find time to visit the soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

I'm pleased to welcome members of some of the chambers of commerce and business associations of Denton County, along with several Denton County local officials to the Nation's Capital.

I also want to thank them for helping to make Denton County a place of entrepreneurship and economic opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I will submit the names of the Denton County delegation for the RECORD.

Sandra Kathleen Beahm
Kent Collins
Patrick L. Davis
Andrew Thomas Eads
Ginger Ann Eads
Al Filidoro
Chuck Fremeux
Kelly Leigh Heslep
Cynthia Rae Howard
Claude E. King
Michael Leavitt
Dee Leggett
Tod Mahoney
Matthew McCormick
Tami McCormick
Scott Ran all McDearmont
Shannon McGary
Brandon McGary
William J. Meek
Stan Morton
Jody Smith
Suzene Thompson
Harold Dean Ueckert
Catherine Ann Ueckert
Charlotte Jeanette Wilcox

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GRAYSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GRAYSON addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF PRESIDENT OBAMA AND THE 111TH CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, tonight and beginning each week, we will begin the week talking about the accomplishments of both President Obama, as well as the Democratic leadership in the legislature. The efforts of the Democratic Caucus over the last year and a half, particularly since President Obama was sworn in have truly been remarkable. The efforts have been remarkable, but also the accomplishments.

And I think it's important that we continue to talk to the American people about those accomplishments, particularly when compared to some of the commentary that's out there in the media because, from watching some news programs, one would think that we were all here in the Chamber sitting in our chairs, fast asleep, as opposed to working and keeping our heads down and being very focused and working under the leadership of President Obama to make sure that we can turn the absolute nightmare that we were handed by the former Bush administration into the new direction that we talked about and that the American people elected us to take this country in.

And so tonight my colleagues and I are going to spend some time outlining those accomplishments. But I think it's important and instructive to first look at where we were, and then talk about where we are now. So that's some of what we're going to do this evening.

If you look back to January of 2009, which was the month, Mr. TONKO, that President Obama was sworn in, during that month the economy was yet again bleeding 700,000-plus jobs. And I think we have a chart here that I can use to illustrate that. But I think the most illustrative example of where we were, versus where we are today is this chart.

If you look back, this chart begins in December of '07, and you can see through the end of the Bush administration, Mr. Speaker, that the economy was steadily getting worse. We were bleeding jobs. By the time President Obama took office in January of '09, we literally were at 700,000-plus jobs lost, and that continued all the way up until February of '09 with the passage of the American Economic Recovery Act.

Now, I've heard a lot of malarkey in the news media out there, and particularly quite a lot from our friends on the other side of the aisle, about the supposed absence of job creation that the Recovery Act generated.

Well, the numbers don't lie, Mr. Speaker. If you look at the direction that job creation has gone in, and our economic recovery has begun, you look at the blue line beginning in February of '09 with the passage of the Recovery Act, and you progress all the way up where we were losing month by month fewer and fewer jobs; and we talked about how, obviously, any job losses are unacceptable, until we reached this most recent month in April. And I think actually this chart—it doesn't even, the numbers are even better, Mr. ALTMIRE, than we have on this chart. But this chart shows it up through March where we added 167,000 jobs.

In April, Mrs. DAHLKEMPER, we actually added 290,000 jobs in April. The vast majority of those were private sector jobs. We do know that we have