

Buhler, Kansas—and indeed all Kansans—and in fact all Americans who value religious freedom and religious liberty.

The citizens of Buhler are under assault. They are the latest victims of an ungodly extortion racket perpetrated by the Freedom from Religion Foundation based in Madison, Wisconsin.

On September 14, 2012, the Freedom from Religion Foundation sent a letter to the mayor of the town of Buhler, Daniel Friesen, alerting him to the foundation's intent to sue the city for its city seal, which contained a cross, and for a billboard that included elements of that city seal that was in a city park. Mr. Speaker, this is an outrage. The seal and sign are harming no one; they are widely embraced by the citizens of Buhler, Kansas.

The seal contains the words “traditional values” and “progressive ideas.” Unfortunately, in this case, progressive ideas are making war on traditional values, and it's high time for that to stop.

Some will claim that the First Amendment to the Constitution requires the cross to be removed from this seal and sign. That's hogwash. The First Amendment begins with the words: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” In this instance, Congress made no law. For that reason alone the First Amendment does not apply.

Furthermore, it cannot be said that this simple seal in any way is an establishment of religion; meaning that there is no officially supported sect or denomination here in the manner that some of the American colonies had. This is not in any way an endorsement of any particular religion or any religious denomination.

In short, the First Amendment, as originally written, has nothing to do with this city's sign. Indeed, for the first 175 years of our constitutional history, no one would have read the First Amendment in any way that would have prevented this seal or this sign.

Mr. Speaker, in this very room in which I stand, this very Chamber, right over my right-hand shoulder is a sign that says “In God We Trust.” Near the rotunda of the Capitol is the Congressional Prayer Room, a chapel that's been in use since 1955 as a place where Members go to pray for divine guidance in debating the issues of the day. A stained glass window there shows President George Washington kneeling in prayer and the words of Psalm 16:1 surround him: “Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust.” And a Holy Bible rests on the altar beneath that window in this very building.

Of course I grant you that the First Amendment has been badly interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court. Indeed, the 10th Circuit's rulings are even more troubling. It could well be that in this case the city would lose this case.

I don't fault the citizens of Buhler, Kansas, for the process that they're

going through in trying to figure out how to proceed. Indeed, the Freedom from Religion Foundation knows this. They know that they've attacked a city, threatened to sue a city with very few resources. We will have a very difficult time battling an extended period of litigation. I do not fault the folks in Buhler at all for trying to figure out a way to move forward without resulting in litigation.

But why didn't the Freedom from Religion Foundation sue the United States Congress for all that I spoke about just a minute ago? The reason is obvious. The reason is they are being bullies. They are seeking to put their secular vision in a place where they believe they can do it without opposition, a place that has fewer resources. Folks will face a very, very difficult decision about how the town and the city should move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that this assault on religion in the public square will end soon. I am very saddened by the recent events in Buhler, Kansas. I am angered by the extortionary tactics of the Freedom from Religion Foundation. And, above all, I am determined to ensure that the religious heritage of our great Nation will not be cast aside.

□ 1030

AMERICA'S FINANCIAL FUTURE

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal of hyperactive rhetoric about the fiscal cliff and the trouble ahead. The fact is that people should just take a deep breath and focus on where we are and where we need to go.

First of all, it's not a fiscal cliff but a slope. There are many opportunities for us in the weeks ahead to be able to change the unsustainable trajectory of America's financial future. There are many efforts already evident and people taking steps to try to cope with it.

The President campaigned very explicitly on raising the top tax rates. It was something that was embraced by Democrats running for the Senate and virtually all of them running for the House. The President won. The Senate actually increased in Democratic numbers. There were more Democrats added to the House. And more Americans voted for the President and his vision, for the Senate Democrats, and for Democrats in the House than my Republican friends on the other side of the aisle.

It's encouraging that the President has decided that he's no longer going to negotiate with himself. He's laid out his positions and has encouraged a response. I, for one, was pleased that there was a proposal offered up by my Republican friends, signed not just by the Speaker but the entire Republican leadership. While it still does not have

the specifics about what those elusive tax loopholes that they want to close are, which will raise sufficient revenue, I find this an encouraging sign that there is an effort, for the first time, to put something back, and I think there are opportunities for people to flesh out the details. There is an opportunity for tax reform; our system now is not efficient. It's chaotic. It's expensive. It's unfair and perplexing. There is an opportunity for us going forward to add a little more rationality to it while it raises more revenue.

There are countless opportunities in the Department of Defense to save money, starting with \$250 billion in the nuclear arsenal for weapons that we will never use and don't need. There are opportunities for agricultural reform. And it's been my pleasure to work on bipartisan reform efforts with Senator-elect JEFF FLAKE of Arizona and my friend from Wisconsin, PAUL RYAN. And there are real opportunities in health care.

Now I hope my Republican friends will stop the charade we went through this last 2 years repealing ObamaCare some 37 times. That train has left the station. The President was reelected. It's not going to be repealed. The Supreme Court has decided that it's constitutional. And most of the major health care players are busy at work implementing health care reform. But we have barely scratched the surface of the ability to squeeze more value out of the health care system.

The United States does not have to spend nearly twice as much as all the other developed countries and actually have health care results that, on average, are worse than our European and Japanese friends.

We have the best health care in the world for some Americans. But too many are denied regular health care, and others are paying too much for results that aren't good enough.

We know what to do: embedded in the health care reform act are elements of reform that used to have bipartisan support, starting with the mandate that was cosponsored by 16 Republican Senators, elements of reform that were implemented by Republican and Democratic Governors alike, including Governor Romney. It's time for us to act on those elements, to accelerate the reform.

I note with no small amount of irony that the \$716 billion that the Republican ticket, Mr. Romney and Mr. RYAN, used to campaign against the President, PAUL RYAN's budget included the same reductions, and it's likely that they will be in his budget that's coming forward.

Let's act on things that we agree. Let's rebuild and renew America and find ways to save money and put us on the path to fiscal responsibility that the American public needs and demands.

WHAT IS THE FISCAL CLIFF?

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

Mr. LANKFORD. Well, in a few days, we're going to have to resolve the fiscal cliff—ironically enough, something that the House of Representatives passed last May. In April, we set out a tax plan. In May, we set out a sequestration plan, passed it through the House, sent it to the Senate who said, We will see you during the lame duck time period.

We are in the lame duck now, and this has to be resolved. We have to solve the problem. But quite frankly, the first thing we need to do is to be able to define what the problem even is. It seems that one group is talking about how the real problem is the fiscal cliff, and the other group is talking about how the real problem is the debt and the deficit. Well, what is the problem? The issue is, we have \$16.3 trillion in debt as a Nation, \$1 trillion or more in overspending each year for the last 4 years.

Let me set the example of what this really means: in 2007, our tax revenue—how much we are bringing into the Treasury—was almost exactly what it is in 2012. From 2007 to 2012, the revenue is almost identical. The difference is, our spending has gone up \$1 trillion a year from 2007 to 2012, so now that's \$1 trillion total over the course of that time that's slowly built up. But each year, we've been over \$1 trillion in spending. While our revenue has stayed consistent, basically, from 2007 to 2012, that dramatic spending increase has happened.

We seem to identify that as the real problem. We're overspending. And until you deal with that issue, you cannot raise taxes enough to be able to keep up with \$1 trillion of accelerated spending.

So what is the cliff? And I have to tell you, I have so many people from my district and other places that catch me, pull me aside quietly and say, We hear about the fiscal cliff. We're not even 100 percent sure of what it is. Well, it's really the combination of three things:

The first of them is, the ObamaCare taxes begin January 1 of next year. Those taxes will hit the middle class and the upper brackets. Those taxes, when they kick in, will raise the rates on people making \$200,000 or more and will also remove deductions from the middle class, things like the flexible spending accounts. For those that have high medical bills, their taxes will now go up. For people that have high medical bills and are able to offset some of the taxes they pay because they pay more than 7.5 percent of their own income in medical bills, they will now have their taxes go up. So people like diabetics, heart patients, stroke patients, people with special needs children, their taxes all go up January 1, as well as people making \$200,000 or more,

their tax rates will also go up on January 1. That's the first part of the fiscal cliff.

The second part of it is the spending decrease that this Congress and the President agreed to last summer. We have dramatically increased spending; we have to reduce that spending. That spending decrease that was agreed to had a deadline by the end of this year. If it didn't, there would be across-the-board cuts. The House passed all of our spending decreases in May. The Senate has yet to pass any. So with that, we're stuck with across-the-board cuts that kick in early January.

The third part of that is the expiration of the tax rates for all Americans. In 2001, in 2003, and then extended during the lame duck of 2010, every American's tax rates were extended out to expire the 31st of December. Every tax rate from the lowest to the highest is set to go up.

Now some people see that the problem is that we're not taxing enough, and so that solves the problem—to just go off the fiscal cliff, and everyone will be taxed more. Some people see that we don't take enough from one group and give to another group, so we can solve that. Some people have even said, Let's go back to the Clinton tax rates; with the Clinton tax rates, we had a booming economy, and we were creating more jobs. Well, to that, I would say, well, if increasing taxes increases economic activity, why don't we go to a 95 percent tax rate, and then we'll really have a booming economy. The reason that no one proposes that is because no one really believes that. That is why the accelerated tax rate that is being recommended by the White House is also being proposed with a stimulus plan, another spending plan to offset the damage that's going to be done with the tax increases.

Here is the example that I can talk about with this: when people talk about, just raise taxes on the upper 2 percent, well, let me give you an example of what's being proposed by the President. Capital gains will go from 15 percent to 23.8 percent next year. Dividends would go from 15 percent to 43.4 percent.

Now I have a lot of people that will say to me, just raise it on the upper brackets. But when I tell them, can I tell you what that means—their taxes go from 15 percent to 43.4 percent—I have yet to have anyone stop me and say, Oh, that sounds fair. It doesn't. It just sounds so much easier to say, raise it on someone else, not on us.

We have to solve the problem. Just raising taxes doesn't solve the problem. We're spending \$1 trillion more than what we did 5 years ago with a tax revenue the same. If we do not focus on spending, we will never solve the problem.

□ 1040

SAVING THE 911TH AIRLIFT WING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from

Pennsylvania (Mr. MURPHY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MURPHY of Pennsylvania. Speaking of saving money, here is an interesting story.

Just 2 weeks after Texans in Randall County voted for Republican Barry Goldwater over their native son, Lyndon Johnson, in the Presidential race in the 1960s, the Pentagon announced Randall County's Air Force base was closing. Folks were "flabbergasted" said an Amarillo newspaper columnist. The Air Force had just made millions in investments at the base, but now airmen and equipment were moving to a nearby county that supported Johnson.

It was this kind of abuse of executive power that led Congress to write a new law ensuring we had proper oversight over base closures. In my Pennsylvania's 18th Congressional District, we're finding out why that law must be strengthened. Last week, I learned the Air Force is again attempting to shut down the 911th Airlift Wing, an Air Force Reserve base, for a reason that has nothing to do with cost or military strategy. In fact, the 911th is one of the most lean and cost-effective bases in the country.

How and why they can do this without congressional approval is interesting. The Air Force claims inaccurately there are fewer than 300 civilian employees authorized to be employed at the 911th, allowing the Pentagon to close the base without congressional review. The Pentagon, however, has invested over \$50 million in improvements in the base, including new buildings in the last 5 years. The 911th, however, has lower overhead costs because emergency responses like fire and safety, air traffic control, security, runway maintenance, and land are provided by Pittsburgh International Airport for free. Hence, if the 911th were forced to in-source those activities, the number of authorized personnel would be hundreds more, and would far exceed the 300-person threshold. Thus, the Pentagon would be prevented from unilaterally closing it. Further, the Air Force Reserve would have to invest millions more in equipment and training if it was not provided for free, but the Air Force did not look at any of these numbers, and they did not review the cost of the space.

The Pentagon is trying to close the base because they can, not because they should. In their haste to come up with a quick cut, it will cost the taxpayers over \$100 million in coming years, and that is why Congress needs to have oversight.

The House has passed a defense bill to prevent a suboptimal decision like this one in the future. The House bill includes language requiring the Pentagon to notify Congress about any base closure or transfer of troops impacting more than 1,000 uniform personnel. Unlike the way the Air Force is operating now, the Defense Department would have to include a justification for the reduction, an evaluation of