

reemployed. That is an absolute necessity for many of the unemployed because if they cannot continue that plan and they have a preexisting health condition, or their child has a preexisting health condition or spouse does, that individual's break in employment, break in health insurance means very likely that condition will not be covered when reemployed. That is why the COBRA benefit is so terribly important. Yet for those 2 million people, Congress has done nothing.

The tax credit that the President offers does not solve that problem for hundreds of thousands of families that are in that situation. Or for those people's whose spouses may have had a bout with cancer, or whose children who may have a childhood illness, that would not be covered.

Yet Congress insists it is going to take leave of this town, go home for 13 or 14 days, and we are going to fail to address the needs of these families. We must understand that these families are in dire financial straits. In dire financial straits. They are either adding up their debt because they are living off of what credit card debt they have available to them, they are borrowing from family members, or they are invading their retirement funds. Why in America should a working family that finds itself unemployed through no fault of their own, because of a terrorist activity or because of a downturn in the economy, they showed up and went to work every day, why should they lose all of their assets before we help them with health care or extend them some benefits?

Mr. Speaker, we ought to extend the 13 weeks immediately. If there is a break, and a worker has been working in the hospitality industry or low-paying jobs in this country, 2 weeks, 4 weeks without a check is a devastating event. Maybe Members of Congress cannot understand that, but when Members go home for the district work period, Members need to talk to these people. Then Members will begin to understand the desperate straits that millions of Americans find themselves in because of this Congress' failure to extend the unemployment benefits.

#### CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on campaign finance reform, legislation once again before this Chamber. I, like most of my colleagues, support some type of campaign reform. I know that reasonable and balanced reforms to our current campaign finance system is necessary. Unfortunately, the Democrat bill, the Shays-Meehan bill, does not strengthen or improve our campaign finance system as well as I think the Ney-Wynn bill does, which is a Republican alternative.

In fact, I think the Democrat bill does more to harm than help both the political process and the Constitution by hurting the ability of political parties to increase citizen involvement and participation, unconstitutionally limits free speech, and tilts the playing field towards one party or another. For this reason, I applaud the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. NEY) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. WYNN) in their bipartisan bill for their efforts at sensible reform for our current system.

Proponents of the Shays-Meehan bill, which is support by the minority leader, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT), claim their legislation puts an end to soft money. That is false. None of the proposals before this body ban a complete ban of soft money. Even the most cursory of glances indicates there is no soft money ban in the Shays-Meehan campaign finance legislation.

In reality, this bill bans the national parties from raising or spending soft money, but it does nothing to prevent unions, corporations, and other special interests from spending as much soft money as they want on election activity. As a result, corporations or unions are allowed to give tens of thousands of dollars to each State and local party committee. With over 3,000 counties in the United States, this means corporations and unions will still be permitted to inject millions of dollars of soft money into the political process. As such, the soft money debate amounts to nothing more than a shell game with dollars being shuffled and moved from one part of the table to another, and the American people losing out.

Furthermore, the Democrat plan does not ban soft money advocacy, it only bans it on the eve of an election. Through such rulings as Buckley v. Valeo in 1976 and other cases, the Supreme Court has declared that the government may not regulate political commentaries "to promote a candidate and his views." Since the 1976 Buckley v. Valeo decision, strong majorities have supported protections for the expenditure of money for political communications. The first amendment cannot be sacrificed by government restrictions on issue ads and free speech. No matter how they are dressed up, such restrictions still involve government regulation of political speech.

Mr. Speaker, the proposal to be offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. NEY) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. WYNN), supported by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT), is aimed at reforming our current system of laws, but does so in a manner that is rational, balanced, and, most importantly, constitutional. Their legislation bans the use of soft money by national parties for Federal election activities. It does not, however, impose new burdensome Federal laws and rules on State parties. It restores and enhances grassroots politics by allowing State and local parties to continue to assist State and local candidates with

funds permissible under applicable State law.

Most importantly, their proposal does not violate constitutional rights to free speech, nor destroy the ability to participate in the political process. So I support fair and balanced solutions to improving our campaign finance system. As such, I have voted accordingly and supported the Hutchinson-Allen bill, which was patterned after the Ney-Wynn bill when it was considered on the House floor in the last Congress. Unfortunately, it failed.

Mr. Speaker, had the rules governing the amendment process not been limited for this upcoming debate, I would have also supported amendments to allow tax credits for up to \$200 for individuals for Federal political contributions, thereby creating an incentive for persons of all financial means to participate in the political process.

Additionally, I support allowing permanent resident aliens serving in the Armed Forces to make campaign contributions. And if we really want to clean up the current system, I support prohibiting labor organizations from fund-raising on Federal property through the use of payroll deductions.

If advocates of misguided campaign finance reform are successful in passing this legislation, they will have done nothing to prevent future campaign abuses. Instead, they will be successful in eroding and handicapping Americans' right to free speech and the right to political expression. Therefore, I urge all of my colleagues to support the Ney-Wynn bill.

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#### WHY COMMUNITY SERVICE IS IMPORTANT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CULBERSON). Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make some comments today on how everybody in America probably should do a little more in helping their fellow man in contributing some community service, either at the community or national level.

I was this past week deciding on the essay topic that I ask seniors to write to apply for what I have called the LeGrand Smith Scholarship. It is named after my dad. I simply take all of the pay increases that I have had since I first ran in the Michigan Senate back in 1983; I have put these pay increases into an irrevocable trust for scholarships for graduating seniors. It is designed to reward and acknowledge those individuals in high school that are not only academically capable but also are willing to contribute to others in community service or in leadership positions in high school. Part of that decision in scoring of the committee that decides who the winners are is