

who create the engine of our economy. So I hope my words are taken in the manner in which they are offered, because in all of our districts we are finding deep and continuing pain, hurting families, individuals who have lost their jobs with no opportunities for further employment.

Right now we know nearly 6 percent of Americans are unemployed. In the African American community in particular, 17 percent are unemployed. I call that, Mr. Speaker, a crisis.

The Nation's health care system is in need of great reform. Just this last Saturday night I spoke to a group of physicians, private physicians and those who work in our public hospitals. Might I note to one of my colleagues, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE), I would thank him for generating 270 names, bipartisan names, on the question of addressing the Medicare crisis and ensuring that physicians and nurses and others who deal with our health care are provided the amount of payments that will allow them to keep their doors open.

The continuing resolution that we just passed, but more appropriately, the appropriations that we need to pass, has to address the fact that more than malpractice issues, our physicians are closing their doors. They are disenrolling and not enrolling individuals because their payments are not there.

I hope that the very first item that we will deal with as we come back to deal with the 108th Congress will be the idea of freezing or increasing the Medicare payments that are necessary to keep the doors of physicians open. My commitment to our local physicians in Houston, Harris County, is that I will continue to fight for those dollars for physicians, nurses, hospitals, nursing homes, home health services, and other health care providers. That is a key.

One of the other things we need to fight for is full funding of Medicaid, and also the changing of the formula so Texas is not disadvantaged. Right now, our State legislature and the Governor are dealing with a \$10 billion deficit. I hope the President will announce that he has discovered that the dividend discount tax cut helps no one; that he would much rather help the State of Texas, the State of Illinois, Ohio, New York; that he would much rather agree with the Democratic plan to provide block grants of monies to States that will help them in Medicaid funding, that will help them in education funding, and that will help them with special projects, education funding, that will put people to work.

I believe we can always reform. I believe the President can reform his message to address the working people of America.

Let me also say that there has been great concern. I have just filed House Concurrent Resolution 2, which repeals or asks the Congress for a sense of Congress resolution to repeal the October resolution on the Iraqi war.

Mr. Speaker, that vote was a vote of conscience. I challenge no Member in this House as to how they voted. But what I will say is that the Constitution is near and dear to me and many Members of Congress; in fact, all of us. Clearly, we have the right to declare war.

When we debated that resolution, Mr. Speaker, we viewed the words of the President as suggesting that we were under imminent attack, and that there was a nexus between Saddam Hussein, Iraq, and terrorism. Whatever might have occurred, we have more facts now, Mr. Speaker. We do understand, as I close, that there are more indications that we should look for a political resolution. The U.N. inspectors want more time. They need more time to look for nuclear weapons. North Korea is on our very horizon.

Mr. Speaker, people are hurting, and I believe the United States can do better than what we have done. I believe the President can cause us to reach to our higher angels by providing for the working people of America; and saying to the world that we stand on the side of peace; and saying to this Congress, come with me, rise to a new debate, discern and design a better policy about Iraq and North Korea, and then we can spend our dollars on building this Nation again, building jobs, and building peace.

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

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

THE PRESIDENT'S CREDIBILITY GAP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I took to the floor this morning during our morning hour debate to express my concern over what I call the President's credibility problem. I talked about a credibility problem in the context of not only what we expect to be in tonight's State of the Union Address, but also by reference to the State of the Union Address that the President made last year.

What I am talking about essentially when I mention a credibility problem is the fact that the President essentially makes promises about what he is going to do to solve the Nation's problems, particularly the economic downturn; but when we look at what he proposes, the action that he proposes to solve the problem, it does not really solve the problem.

So the promise is made essentially by the President that we are going to turn

around the economic downturn, but when we look at the proposals that he announces to accomplish that goal, there is no way that they could accomplish that goal, because they are not designed to accomplish that goal.

The credibility problem exists in so many areas. It is not only with regard to his economic plan, his so-called stimulus plan, it is also relative to the deficit. The President indicated last year that the deficit would be small, that it would be taken under control. Now we know that the deficit is likely to be at least \$300 billion, and I would venture to say that if the President were able to get his economic stimulus package, his promise to make his tax cuts from last year permanent, to follow through and pay for a potential war in Iraq, that we would probably end up with a deficit that could be upwards of \$2 trillion.

That credibility problem also exists with regard to a number of other issues; for example, health care. The President says that we are going to reform Medicare and we are going to provide a prescription drug benefit for seniors in the context of Medicare. What we find out, and we will hear about tonight, supposedly, is a privatization plan for Medicare that does not guarantee a prescription drug benefit unless you leave traditional Medicare and you join an HMO or some other type of private insurance.

The list goes on. We are told that we are going to do things for veterans, and then we see cuts in money for veterans' health clinics. We are told that we are going to implement a situation where no child is going to be left behind in terms of public education. That is the President's theme. But then we find that there is a huge credibility gap, a huge difference between the rhetoric and the reality, because, in fact, money for education is being cut.

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Affirmative action is another example. The President says he wants diversity, and he appears to give the impression that he is favorable to affirmative action. But then he asks the Justice Department to file a suit against the University of Michigan because of their affirmative action program. And I am not trying to imply the President is purposefully trying to deceive anyone, but I think the reality is that his ideas of what are going to accomplish the goals that he sets out to accomplish are very different from reality. And whether it is an economic plan, whether it is his idea of affirmative action, whether it is his idea of the deficit or his idea on health care, most of these ideas do not actually translate into any action that will accomplish the goals that the President commits himself to.

I guess the worst example in this respect right now and the one that I think is the most injurious is with regard to the economy. We know that the economy has taken a significant down-