And then there are the other two proposed agreements with Panama and Colombia, the latest NAFTA expansion. What are the major commercial interests there?

The Government Accountability Office has identified Panama as a major haven for, guess what, tax avoidance. Panama is a popular destination for the very same multinational corporations that want to avoid paying their fair share of U.S. taxes by creating offshore subsidiaries.

And how about Colombia, which is the most dangerous country in the world if you care about labor rights, and no free country in the world does not have labor rights. Over 2,000 trade unionists, 2,000 have been assassinated there since 1990. What a pleasant place to do business. And there has been no justice for their victims and their families in the majority of those murder cases.

And what is the largest economic interest we have with Colombia? It has three letters. It isn't a place to export U.S.-made goods. Rather, it's more oil imports.

How can those that support these failed trade agreements want more?

We need to create jobs in this country again because, in order to balance the budget, you have to put the American people back to work, and you can't do that when you're outsourcing more of their jobs and importing more into our nation than we export.

PASS E-VERIFY TO CREATE AMERICAN JOBS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SMITH) for 1 minute.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, for 2 years, 14 million Americans have been out of work. Yet illegal workers hold 7 million jobs. It is inexcusable that American workers have to compete with illegal immigrants for scarce jobs.

Congress has the opportunity to open up millions of jobs for unemployed Americans by requiring all U.S. employers to use E-Verify. This program checks the Social Security numbers of new hires. E-Verify is free, quick and easy to use. Individuals eligible to work in the U.S. are confirmed 99.5 percent of the time.

The public also supports E-Verify. According to a recent Rasmussen poll, 82 percent of likely voters think businesses should be required to use E-Verify to determine if a new employee is in the country legally. This is one of the most important job creation bills Congress should pass and the President should sign.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON DEFICIT REDUCTION

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

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, this week the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction began work on a roadmap to bring down our Nation's deficit and restore our fiscal health. They heard from Doug Elmendorf, Director of the Congressional Budget Office, who reiterated once again what we already know, our Nation's current fiscal position is not sustainable.

We also know that the problem we're facing stems, in part, from buying things without paying for them, including two wars, tax cuts for the wealthiest in America, and a prescription drug program. But what matters now is taking action.

□ 1010

Over the month of August, we heard very clearly from the American public that they want us to work together on the issues they are most concerned about: jobs and the deficit. Action on one issue will directly impact on the other.

Creating jobs and growing the economy is one of the most important things we can do to bring down the deficit. And getting a handle on our fiscal situation will give confidence to encourage economic growth and job creation. Both the Bowles-Simpson and Domenici-Rivlin fiscal commissions supported this tenet by calling for immediate action to boost the economy while laying out a plan to reduce the deficit over the long term. This is why the joint select committee must succeed.

We have a responsibility to show Americans and the international community that we can meet the challenges we face, that we can join together and make the tough decisions necessary to spur growth and to bring our debt under control.

I believe the committee must go beyond the $1.5 trillion target in the deficit reduction bill if we hope to strengthen our economy and seriously change our Nation's fiscal outlook.

Over 60 economists and former Members of Congress signed a letter encouraging the joint select committee to reach the biggest agreement possible, and I want to join with them in that request. In their letter, signed by co-chairs of both the Bowles-Simpson and Domenici-Rivlin fiscal commissions, among others, they state, ''We believe that a 'go big' approach that goes well beyond the $1.5 trillion deficit reduction goal that the committee has been charged with and includes major reforms of entitlement programs and the Tax Code is necessary to bring the debt down to a manageable and sustainable level, improve the long-term fiscal imbalance, reassure markets, and restore Americans' faith in the political system.''

I am in absolute agreement with that proposition. As the letter I just quoted indicates, the committee must also put all options on the table. That's a challenge on the Republican side; that's a challenge on the Democratic side. But it must be done because we cannot get to where we need to get without doing so.

The math is irrefutable. We cannot get to where we need to go if we ignore revenues or if we fail to ensure our safety net is sustainable for generations to come. A balanced approach that looks at defense spending, revenues, and entitlements is the only real way we're going to put America's fiscal house back in order.

A balanced approach is also key to making sure everyone pays their fair share. We cannot ask the middle class families and seniors to bear the entire burden of balancing the budget. The most well-off among us, which is most of us, by the way, in this body must also contribute to that objective.

But as we focus on ways to restore our budget balance, we cannot and must not forget the immediate jobs crisis that too many families face.

Any plan to bring down the deficit must start, as Bowles-Simpson and Domenici-Rivlin both observed, with getting people back to work. That is why I hope Republicans and Democrats will work together to bring the President's proposed American Jobs Act to the floor for a vote without delay. As the President said, we have 14 months to wait until the next election. People without jobs, people's whose homes are underwater, people who have lost their homes, they don't have 14 months to wait.

The jobs program suggested by the President mirrors many components included in the House Democrats' Make It In America agenda and will help create jobs in the short term.

All of us, Democrats and Republicans alike, must be invested in the committee's success. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to be committed to the success of reaching agreement in this committee of 12. This is a time to put partisan politics aside and do the hard things, very hard things, the courageous things that we have to do for our country.

I believe we're equal to the task. And I say to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, if we are not equal to the task, then all of our citizens will rightfully be extraordinarily disappointed, as they are today, in their elected representatives on both sides of the aisle.

Success of this committee, success of this House and the Senate in reaching and meeting the challenge that confronts us is essential if the confidence level of our own citizens and the international community is to be raised and given the level necessary for future success.

AMERICAN LAND ACT

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

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, many, many years ago the second American Revolution took place when Washington, D.C., was invaded by the British in the War of 1812. Many forget that the Capitol, the White House, and Washington, D.C., were burned to the

ground by the British. And after the War of 1812 was over with, America found itself in a situation that's not unfamiliar with us today. America was out of money.

So what did people decide to do here in this body of Congress about how to get more money into the Federal Treasury? They thought of a unique approach that maybe we ought to think of and do today.

Right now we talk about raising taxes, cutting spending, and we need more revenue. Maybe we ought to think outside of the box when it comes to revenue instead of more government taking from the people and giving it to its special groups. Let's do what they did at the end of the War of 1812.

The Federal Government decided that it would sell some of the land to Americans—what a novel thought—and let Americans own America. They could produce that land, and then they could pay more taxes. And that's what they did at the end of the War of 1812.

We talk about the land in America. Who is the biggest landowner in this country? Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam owns 27 percent of the land mass in the United States. This poster here shows the land area in red, including Alaska, that is owned by the Federal Government, Uncle Sam. Twenty-seven percent of the land! Half of the land west of the Mississippi, or in the West, belongs to the Federal Government. Those folks in the West, half of it belongs to Uncle Sam. He's their neighbor in every western State. It's different in the East because much of that land was sold at the end of the War of 1812.

Now, 27 percent, what does that mean? That's really hard to understand how much that is. If you were to superimpose the 27 percent of the land mass in the United States into Europe, you would find that Uncle Sam would own almost all of Europe. Western Europe is about 27 percent of the land mass of the United States. And of course that includes the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Italy, Poland, and even Spain.

Now, we're talking about a lot of land. Does Uncle Sam really need all of that land? Much of it's unproductive, not paying any taxes, not paying any revenue to local and State governments.

So maybe we should do something that our forefathers, our ancestors did—sell some of that land to Americans and allow that revenue to come into the Federal Treasury so we can pay off all of our debts that we have accumulated over the years. Twenty-seven percent of the land mass is 623 million acres in this country.

Ronald Reagan tried to do that when he was President, but it did not go very far at all. You know, even President Obama mentioned about a month ago that there's 300 acres in Los Angeles County that's owned by the Federal Government. We could sell that for $2 billion.

So maybe we need to think outside of the box. I've introduced the American Land Act. We talk about the American Jobs Act. The American Land Act would require that the Federal Government sell a portion of that land over a period of years.

Now, I want to be careful to state we're not talking about the national parks. We're not talking about Yosemite. We're not talking about the marshes and environmentally sensitive areas in this country. We're talking about unused land by the Federal Government. And then we could raise some revenue.

I believe that this could be up to about $200 billion of revenue that would be brought into the United States. Sell it to Americans and that will bring revenue into our treasury. When Americans own America, they can also develop that land. Then they can be productive and then they can pay even more taxes.

□ 1020

When people own land, they pay property tax. That tax primarily goes to local and State governments, which pays for our school systems. So that undeveloped land, that unused land, some of that should be sold to Americans. Let Americans buy American. Real property in the hands of real Americans. What a novel thought that is.

Uncle Sam, the Federal Government, is all about power and control over everything. Loosen up a little, and let Americans buy part of America. Uncle Sam shouldn't prevent Americans from having a real stake or share in our country, the United States of America. It doesn't belong to Uncle Sam—at least it shouldn't. It should belong to Americans. The United States owns most of the grand estate in this country, and it's time to let more Americans own it because America should belong to Americans.

And that's just the way it is.

A REFLECTION ON THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING SYSTEM AND LABOR UNIONS

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. It is unfortunate there is an attempt to scapegoat America's unions for the economic problems that beset us.

After all, it was not America's grocery clerks, nurses, teachers, postal workers, and electricians who nearly caused the meltdown of the economy. It wasn't America's labor unions that were pushing for tax loopholes that made our revenue system a hopeless, inefficient mess. It wasn't unions that pushed for shortcuts for worker safety that produced the tragedy that we've seen in our mines. America's working men and women didn't engineer poor loans, systematically cheat consumers, and transform financial institutions into giant casinos.

No doubt there were some consumers who took unfair advantage as well as others who were not as vigilant as they should have been in the financial meltdown; but the truth is they were part of an unprecedented economic scheme that played on those weaknesses, the gullibility and some individual greed to make it into a vast industry.

Are there some areas where unions are too effective in securing benefits for their members? That probably depends on who you ask about the give and take of the collective bargaining process. The leadership of unions are, in fact, much more democratic than their corporate counterparts. Union officials are routinely challenged for reelection. There are insurgents even in the most powerful and entrenched unions, something one seldom sees on the boards of public corporations. How many business directors are defeated? It's not easy to even have opposing nominees through today's shareholder democracy. It's pretty sketchy compared with what happens with unions.

There is a very direct remedy for union power in the negotiation process. For 18 years, I was a local elected official, part of that time responsible for a collective bargaining program. I like to think that I bargained tough but that I bargained fair—but I bargained. I've supported collective bargaining rights for public employees since I was first in the Oregon legislature and still believe that honest, tough, principled negotiations will lead to the best results.

Having someone attempt to dictate working conditions unilaterally is not calculated to produce enhanced productivity. It matters how people are treated and how they feel. Employee-owned corporations illustrate this principle in spades, some of which are not only employee-owned but have unions in addition. One of the best performing of the world's economy is Germany, where they still manufacture and have a huge export market for high-value products. The Germans work hard to integrate labor and business with government in the decision-making process, something that is, sadly, too rare in the United States.

Unions are not the answer for every employee and every company, but every employee and every company ought to have that option. Even companies that are nonunion benefit. I've had executives from successful companies candidly tell me that they treat their employees right because they don't want them to unionize. Even these nonunion company employees benefit from higher wages, better benefits, and a system that respects worker rights because of the competition with the unions.

Instead of treating employees fairly by allowing them to organize, far too many corporations have chosen instead to attack the fundamentals of collective bargaining. It is today an art form in some companies to stall, delay, intimidate, even to flagrantly violate the