requirement to cut defense spending by an estimated $465 billion over ten years. Specifically, this authorized funding has been reduced $19 billion from the Fiscal Year 2011 National Defense Authorization Act, $21.8 billion from the House-passed version of the Fiscal Year 2012 National Defense Authorization Act, and $24.1 billion from President Obama's budget. While our nation's economic plight has forced us all to tighten our belts, we cannot put Americans at risk by engaging in irresponsibly deep cuts to our defense spending that would hollow out our nation's military. This conference report strikes the right balance between the important priorities of reducing wasteful government spending and providing for a strong, robust, national defense.

The conference report also sets forth key policies that will help to ensure the safety of our nation and the effectiveness of our military. A few examples are discussed below.

The conference report provides for new sanctions on entities that engage in financial transactions with the Central Bank of Iran, including other state central banks. The provisions apply to the purchase of petroleum, which is of course one of Iran's key natural resources. The threat from Iran has only grown in recent weeks and months. Iran has continued its relentless drive towards developing nuclear weapons; continued its unceasing promotion of terrorism, including a brazen attempt to assassinate the Ambassador from Saudi Arabia to the United States, on American soil; sought to exert its malign influence over key countries in the region, including the nascent democracy of Iraq; and threatened America's strongest ally in the Middle East, the nation of Israel. Cutting off Iran's access to international financial transactions will help stop Iran from making progress towards any of these harmful goals.

Further, the conference report codifies conscience protections for military chaplains. Chaplains are crucial to the well-being of the members of our armed forces, who rely on them for guidance and spiritual nourishment especially when they are serving overseas. Chaplains shall never be forced to act against their consciences. Accordingly this conference report protects chaplains from being forced to perform same-sex marriages in violation of their conscience or their moral principles.

Lastly, the conference report forbids government funding from being used to transfer or release Guantanamo Bay detainees into the United States. To permit known terrorists to enter the U.S. would create an unacceptable threat to the safety of the American people and the conference report rightly prevents such an unthinkable scenario from occurring.

In short, this conference report provides crucial funding and sets forth key policies to ensure our nation's defense.

I unequivocally urge my colleagues to vote for this important legislation.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2055, CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012

SPEECH OF

HON. PEDRO R. PIERLUISI

OF PUERTO RICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, December 16, 2011

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my concern over the changes that would be made to the Pell Grant program by this spending bill.

In 2009, my colleagues and I on the House Education and Labor Committee made a landmark investment in the Pell Grant program when we passed the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act. Through that legislation, we increased the maximum Pell Grant award to $5,550, up from $4,050 in 2006. As college tuition rises, the higher maximum award has served as a lifeline to students who want to better their future by attending college or a technical or trade school. I am pleased that the bill we are considering today protects that maximum award level.

However, I am disappointed that this spending bill makes several changes to the Pell Grant program that will close the doors to college to many students in Puerto Rico and across our nation. Specifically, the bill would limit the number of semesters during which a student may receive a Pell Grant, require that a student hold a high school diploma or General Equivalency Degree to obtain a Pell Grant, and reduce the income level below which a student will automatically receive the maximum Pell Grant award from $30,000 to $23,000.

These changes appear to be premised on the belief that, for a student to benefit from postsecondary education, he or she must take a traditional path—graduate from high school or obtain a GED, and then complete college within a set amount of time. Most, if not all, of us in this body took that path. But today, an increasing number of students are not taking that path, particularly as our economy continues its slow recovery. If we require students to meet our preconceived notions of the type of student who is worthy of a Pell Grant, we will shortchange many of our nation's young people who seek a better life for themselves. Some students are unable to graduate from high school, to receive a GED, or complete college within 12 semesters because they must work to provide for their family. Other students must care for an ill family member. Whatever the reason, if a student is motivated to attend college or a technical or trade school, we should provide the same financial assistance that we provide to students who take a more traditional path.

In today's economy, graduating from college is more important than ever. Fifty years ago, an individual could obtain a well-paying job without a college degree. Today, college opens so many doors for our nation's youth that would otherwise remain sealed shut. We in Congress should do everything in our power to increase access to college and technical and trade schools. I regret that this spending bill falls short on that measure.

TRIBUTE TO MAYOR OF MITCHELL, INDIANA MR. DAN TERRELL

HON. TODD ROKITA

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, December 23, 2011

Mr. ROKITA. Mr. Speaker, it is my great privilege as the representative of Indiana's Fourth District to rise and pay tribute to Mr. Dan Terrell, Mayor of Mitchell, Indiana.

Mayor Terrell is a man of deep civic conviction, a loving father of 6, and a devoted grandfather of 17.

Dan Terrell was born in Mitchell, Indiana, and has remained there his entire life. He has never lost the small town conservative spirit that growing up in the Heartland of America gave him.

Following his retirement from the Canadian Pacific Railroad, Dan Terrell was ready to concentrate fully on helping his hometown overcome challenges that so many small cities and towns have faced: lost businesses, sidewalks that were unsafe or non-existent, infrastructure in total disrepair, drinking water barely able to pass State regulations. During Mayor Terrell's four years in office these, and many other concerns, have not only been addressed but have been corrected. That is leadership.

Besides the tangible accomplishments, his representation of the City as he traveled throughout Indiana offered his constituents a Mayor they could be proud of. A great example of this is the fact that he chaired the Southern Indiana Mayors Roundtable, a convention of all the mayors in Indiana.

His leadership and vision will be truly missed as he leaves the Mayor's office. His love and his devotion for his hometown will continue. Mr. Speaker, it has been a true honor to stand in tribute and offer my thanks to the civic service of Mayor Dan Terrell, one of Indiana's best mayors and my close friend.

MOTION TO GO TO CONFERENCE ON H.R. 3630, MIDDLE CLASS TAX RELIEF AND JOB CREATION ACT OF 2011

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 20, 2011

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of "The Temporary Payroll Tax Cut Extension Act of 2011." This bill is an updated version of H.R. 3630, as amended by the Senate that sends the right message at a critical time for Americans.

At the final hour, with less than three days before millions of Americans decide between whether to buy a toy for their child or turn up their heat, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have finally recognized the importance of working in a bipartisan fashion to provide a tax break to middle class families, to support the unemployed, and to prevent cuts to the payments Medicare provides to doctors.

It appears returning home and facing constituents who would not be able to pay rent or place food on the table for their families, have caused House Republicans to realize that political posturing impacts the lives of those who can least afford it. I stand firm in my support of measures that will help families and those who are trying their best to weather the challenges caused by this economy.

I supported the measure the Senate passed last Saturday. Although not perfect I believed then as I do now that it would grant the American people the certainty they need as we head into a new year.

The Senate Amendment to H.R. 3630 received overwhelming bipartisan support in the Senate; passing by a margin of 89 to 10. After a period of negotiation, language has been added to provide simplicity for payroll administrators, and mollify my colleagues on the other side.

The Senate version would allow employees to continue to pay a 4.2 percent tax on wages, and the self-employed would be required to pay 10.4 percent; which represents a 2 percentage point cut in taxes.

This tax cut would provide a much-needed boost to the economy as the resulting tax savings could be used for investment, savings accounts, and for the purchase of both goods and services. This kind of commercial activity is what will keep the economy moving.

The Senate Amendment removes onerous unemployment provisions from H.R. 3630. Namely, the provisions that would allow states to test those who apply for unemployment benefits for illegal drugs and a provision that would require a GED, a high school diploma, or attendance in a course to attain a GED prior to being able to qualify for unemployment benefits. These provisions stigmatize the unemployed and penalize those who without benefits may not be able to afford job training.

In addition, the Senate amendment to H.R. 3630 removes a $300 million special interest provision, which had passed the House. These funds would have only helped a handful of specialty hospitals while cutting billions of dollars in funding from community hospitals. In effect, the Senate Amendment rejected the assault on the elderly, the unemployed, and the middle class that could be found in the original House version.

RULES COMMITTEE'S LAST MINUTE CHANGE TO THEIR AGENDA

Earlier this week, the Rules Committee was originally scheduled to convene an emergency meeting at 7:05 p.m. The purpose of their meeting was to discuss a motion to concur with the Senate amendment to H.R. 3630. I arrived at the Rules Committee prepared to give testimony to buttress the two amendments I proposed to the measure and to give my support to the Senate Amendment to H.R. 3630.

The Committee refused to accept my amendments and also refused to accept testimony; to add insult to injury, they delayed the meeting from 7:05 p.m. to 9:15 p.m. Again, I was prepared to speak on the measure and my amendments. To my surprise, the Rules Committee failed to discuss or bring up the motion to concur with the Senate Amendment to H.R. 3630.

It is my belief that something must have occurred prior to and immediately after the 7:05 p.m. meeting that would cause the Republican led Rules Committee to drastically change its agenda.

By 9:15 p.m. Rules began to address a completely different agenda which did not include the Motion to Concur with the Senate Amendment. I am askance by the Committee's failure to address this issue head on and rather choosing to bend to whatever pressures they received prior to meeting on the Senate amendment.

My amendments would have made it clear that hedge fund managers would finally be required to pay their due share of carried interest; at minimum they would be required to pay the same amount in taxes, as their housekeepers.

In addition my second amendment would have ensured that millionaires would also pay their fair share of taxes. Because of the actions of the Republican led Rules Committee, I never got the opportunity to express my support for these important amendments, nor did I have the opportunity to support the Senate Amendment. This was an unforeseen and drastic change to the agenda.

CERTAIN REPUBLICANS NEVER INTENDED TO SUPPORT A PAYROLL TAX CUT

There is little doubt that there have been factions within the Republican Party who never intended to support a payroll tax cut for middle class Americans. When the idea of a payroll tax cut initially surfaced there was an instantaneous reaction against the idea among certain conservative Republicans. The behavior of the Rules Committee, which changed the agenda at the last minute, is a probable example of these internal disagreements. Why else would they fail to bring forth the Motion to Concur with the Senate Amendment to allow the Full House to decide whether or not the Senate Amendment was the right choice for the American people.

Less than two weeks ago a Tea Party Republican made it clear that he did not support a payroll tax cut. In order to convince him to support H.R. 3630 is seems that other provisions had to be added, provisions like the Keystone Pipeline.

A Tea Party Republican made it clear that "[Republican Leadership] certainly seem to be dragging me kicking and screaming to the 'yes' line" Such is the comment of a Member of Congress who wants us all to believe that he was undecided on a payroll tax cut. I wonder how many promises had to be given before the American middle class could have a chance of receiving a much needed cut in taxes.

This Tea Party Republican's position was also shared by a Senator, who is part of the Senate Republican Leadership. This Senate Republican Leader voted four times against proposals to keep the tax holiday. According to this Republican Leader "We get paid to vote . . ." and he certainly did his duty and voted, he voted against payroll tax cuts for the middle class. These are examples of people who never intended to support a payroll tax cut, if less than two weeks ago they were firmly against this position. In the case of one of the two, commonsense and reason prevailed. In the case of the other, partisan politics and in-fighting appears to have won out, and the middle class will be paying the price.

Washington Republicans, in general, found themselves in a quandary. Should they support a measure that would protect provisions in Medicare, extend unemployment, and provided a payroll tax cut or stick to partisan politics? Washington Republicans apparently did not believe that a break, which would have lowered the payroll tax from 6.2 percent to 4.3 percent, would help job growth next year.

Then there are those, like one Republican Member of Congress, who express a greater concern with not giving the President what some would consider a victory.

The victory would not be for the President, the victory would be for the American people. For the moms and dads who as a result of the payroll cut would be able to buy their child a new pair of shoes, place an additional meal on the table, or pay their rent.

It is not a surprise that those Republicans, who dug their heels into the ground, long before today, are the very Republicans who are allowing the American people to bear the brunt of this stalemate.

As referenced above, the version of H.R. 3630 that passed in the House had a list of poison pills. These nightmare provisions would have harmed not only the health of Americans but the health of the American Economy.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Republicans targeted the unemployed by slashing 40 weeks of unemployment insurance. Such an action would have negatively impacted the lives of millions of families.

These are the very families who are still struggling under the weight of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. The Senate rejected this assault on families and the elderly.

It was clear that our failure to act to support the Senate amendment to H.R. 3630 would have resulted in twenty-two jurisdictions with the highest unemployment rates being the hardest hit these states are: My home state of Texas, Alabama, California, Connecticut, DC, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee and Washington.

According to report released by the Department of Labor just two weeks ago, 3.3 million Americans would lose unemployment benefits as a result of H.R. 3630 compared to a continuation of current law. In my home state of Texas alone, 227,381 people will lose their sole source of income by the end of January.

There is nothing normal about this recession. Republicans seem to want to blame the unemployed for their unemployment. Until it was clear that the American people would not stand behind Republican efforts, House Republicans continued to put in jeopardy tax cuts for the middle class and aid for the unemployed. In this economy the unemployed are not to blame; it is the failure of Republican leadership to bring forth any job creating measures before this house. Currently, there are over four unemployed workers for every available job, and there are nearly 1 million fewer jobs in the economy today compared to when the recession started in December 2007. In our nation's history there has never been so many unemployed Americans without work for such a long period of time. Republicans are clearly out of touch.

For every dollar spent on unemployment insurance, a study found an increase in economic activity of two dollars. According to the Economic Policy Institute extending unemployment benefits could prevent the loss of over 500,000 jobs. Further, a study by IMP AQ International and the Urban Institute found unemployment insurance benefits reduced the fall in GDP by 18.3 percent. This resulted in nominal GDP being $175 billion higher in 2009 than it would have been without unemployment insurance benefits.

If Congress fails to act before the end of the year, Americans who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own will begin losing their unemployment benefits in January. By mid-February, 2.1 million will have their benefits cut off, and by the end of 2012 over 6 million will lose their unemployment benefits.

We must act now to extend unemployment insurance and remove dastardly provisions related to drugs and education that do nothing more than insult the integrity of the jobless.

Currently, 9.8 million people are receiving unemployment insurance in some form. We have 7 days to act. On December 31, federal unemployment insurance benefits are set to expire, which means nearly 2 million will be

cut off from unemployment insurance early next year if Congress doesn't act now.

And if partisan politics is not to blame, I am not sure what else the issue could be as Congress has never allowed emergency unemployment benefits to expire when the unemployment rate is anywhere close to its current level of 9.1 percent.

THE IMPACT ON AMERICANS POISON PILLS IN H.R. 3630

The reforms to unemployment and other provisions that we sent over to the Senate, sweeping as they were, may have been lost amid other features of the Republican package.

DRUG TESTING

Under current law, states are not allowed to deny workers unemployment insurance for reasons other than on-the-job misconduct, fraud or earning too much money from part-time work. H.R. 3630 would have allowed states to screen those who applied for unemployment benefits for illegal drugs. The drug testing requirement in H.R. 3630 is burdensome and onerous.

Unemployment is at its highest in twenty-five years, the economy is in a downward spiral, millions of people are just getting by and the Republicans want to further degrade them.

A worker advocacy group recently described the drug testing element in the House-passed bill, the ''most disturbing'' part of the Republican unemployment reforms. ''Devising new ways to insult the unemployed only distracts from the current debate over how to best restore the nation's economy to strong footing and the discussion over how to best support the unemployed and get them back to work''

No evidence has been presented that the drug testing requirement is necessary because there is no evidence to support that the average person who applies for unemployment insurance is an illegal drug user. The inference that those who need this benefit must be screened for drugs is offensive. Hardworking Americans are depending on a benefit they worked to attain. The Senate amendment to H.R. 3630 removes this offensive provision.

GED/HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA REQUIREMENT

In addition, the Senate amendment does not blame the unemployed for being unemployed. By this I mean, the version of H.R. 3630 which passed the House would deny unemployment benefits to individuals who did not have or were not attempting to attain a high school diploma or a GED.

As supported by House Republicans, H.R. 3630 denies unemployment insurance benefits to the most vulnerable workers, those without a high school diploma or GEDs, if they can't demonstrate they are enrolled in a program leading to a credential.

It is true that workers with less than a high school diploma are unemployed at significantly higher rates than workers with a bachelor's degree (13.2 percent v. 4.4 percent). I understand the rationale behind wanting to advance the skills of our nation's work force.

Frankly, the hardships faced by those who have not attained a GED or high school diploma are indisputable. The labor force participation rate for persons without a high school diploma is 20 percentages points lower than the labor force participation rate for high school graduates. Further, approximately 70 percent of all students graduate from high school, but African-American and Hispanic students have a 55 percent or less chance of graduating from high school.

If this measure had passed as written, without the Senate Amendment, African-Americans and Hispanics who are already the hardest hit by this economic downturn will now lose access to unemployment benefits at a greater rate, solely based upon their educational attainment. This is not fair.

Only 52 percent of students in the 50 largest cities in the United States graduate from high school. That rate is below the national high school graduation rate of 70 percent, and also falls short of the 60-percent average for urban districts across the Nation. Over his or her lifetime, a high school dropout earns, on average, about $260,000 less than a high school graduate, and about $1 million less than a college graduate.

I vehemently disagree with how H.R. 3630 chooses to address increasing the skills of our workforce. I do not believe we should blame those who for a variety of reasons were not able to attain a high school diploma or GED.

We should not punish them by excluding them from benefits that they have earned. We should be focused on programs to encourage and retrain our workforce. Programs like those offered by organizations like the National Urban League.

MEDICAID

My colleagues on the other side in H.R. 3630 singled out Medicare premium increases that would have permanently increased seniors' costs by $31 billion. The Senate Amendment addresses the Medicare Sustainable Growth Rate, SGR, extending physician payment rates and preventing a 27.4 percent cut through February 29th; and it addresses Medicare and Medicaid Extenders policies through February 29th as well. It also includes a simple extension of TANF through February 29th.

If we do not pass the Senate version of H.R. 3630 this would result in significant changes to Medicaid, threatening healthcare resources for the 60 million people, half of them children that rely on this program to stay healthy.

A block grant for funding or a cap on federal Medicaid spending would increase the cost for states and the low income families who benefit from the program.

Harris County has one of the highest Medicaid enrollment records in Texas. Limits and cuts to Medicaid funds would significantly hurt the citizens of Texas' 18th District. Harris County averages between 500,000 and 600,000 Medicaid recipients monthly, thousands of people who may not have access to healthcare under this budget.

These cuts would hurt the doctors trying to serve soldiers and their families. Just the other day, I was visiting a hospital in Riverside. The doctors and staff were committed to the care of veterans and their families, many of who were suffering from PTSD. The quality of their care could be jeopardized without the ''Doc Fix'' which would prevent a significant decrease in doctor reimbursements from Medicare and will impact TRICARE as well.

Currently, the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services has announced plans to delay processing of physician claims in the hope a fix will soon be enacted, they can only do so until January 17 when they will have to start paying at lower rates with a 27-percent cut. January 17 is the very day the House convenes for the 2nd session of the 112th Congress, which means there will be no opportunity for Congress to pass a fix before the cut kicks in.

If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle continue to block a short term extension, the following will take place: 650,000 physicians and practitioners would see payment delays and a 27-percent cut in payments when payments are made; Over 800 rural hospitals would lose eligibility for ''hold harmless'' payments that help cover the cost of outpatient hospital services and roughly 90 hospitals would receive payments that do not reflect the competitive wage environment in which they operate; Physical therapists, occupational therapists and speech language pathologists would no longer be allowed to use an exceptions process that protects seriously injured patients from hitting an arbitrary dollar cap on therapy services and halting their access to needed care later in the year; Over half a million (520,000) low-income Medicare beneficiaries would no longer receive financial assistance with their Medicare premiums.

This is an untenable situation to place our veterans, soldiers, their families, and millions of other Americans who rely upon Medicare and the doctors who provided that care.

Again, I want to emphasize that if there is a single federal program that is absolutely critical to people in communities all across this nation at this time, it would be unemployment compensation benefits. Unemployed Americans must have a means to subsist, while continuing to look for work that in many parts of the country is just not there. Families have to feed children.

Personal and family savings have been exhausted and 401(k)s have been tapped, leaving many individuals and families desperate for some type of assistance until the economy improves and additional jobs are created. The extension of unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed is an emergency. You do not play with people's lives when there is an emergency. We are in a crisis. Just ask someone who has been unemployed and looking for work, and they will tell you the same.

I am committed to producing tangible results in suffering communities through legislation that creates jobs, fosters minority business opportunities, and builds a foundation for the future. We cannot now, or ever, allow partisan politics to keep us from addressing the needs of American families, the unemployed and seniors. I encourage my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to drop these harmful policy riders and support the ''Temporary Payroll Tax Cut Continuation Act of 2011.''

MOTION TO GO TO CONFERENCE ON H.R. 3630, MIDDLE CLASS TAX RELIEF AND JOB CREATION ACT OF 2011

SPEECH OF

HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 20, 2011

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Speaker, first my Republican colleagues opposed extending the current payroll tax cut for the middle class. Then they decided they would support it after all—but they objected to asking millionaires help pay for it and insisted that a completely unrelated and controversial project called the Keystone XL pipeline be included in the final package.