

tax on capital gains provide a disproportionate amount of benefits to the wealthiest Americans. This leaves a majority of citizens possessing less means to increase their income, obtain education for higher paying occupations and provisions for the next generation.

It is necessary to consider the purchasing function and the insurance function of wealth. The quality of a child's education and neighborhood is dependent upon the volume of wealth the parent has access to. Children also receive a very different set of choices and opportunities upon entering the adult world depending on their family's economic status. To combat the further detriment to future generations, taxes must be raised in areas which will inflict minimal harm, and produce the most beneficial results. America is experiencing the largest disproportion of wealth since 1928, and current taxation policy not only aids in widening the income gap, but harms the accumulation of government tax revenue.

The sale of stocks and bonds are called "capital gains." Until the 1990's, the capital gains tax was at 28%. Today its current level is 15% which enables less revenue gained from any individuals whose main source of income comes from stocks and bonds, such as wealthy businessmen. In 2006, for instance, Warren Buffett paid 17.7 percent in taxes on the \$46 million he booked that year, while his secretary paid 30 percent of her \$60,000 salary to the government. Simple practices such as restoring tax rates to past levels are essential to the aid of our country's recovery and to improve the state of the Union.

GENA CHIOLA, MOUNT ABRAHAM UNION HIGH SCHOOL (3RD PLACE)

Today, we face problems concerning the environment, war and conflict, as well as lack of resources. In these times, more than ever before, the solution to these problems lies in global communication. If we put our heads together, and help each other, we can create a plan to reduce climate change. If we increase our efforts to work out conflicts between countries, through effective communication, less people will lose their lives through unnecessary wars. Sharing of resources can occur when we effectively communicate between countries, which will reduce poverty worldwide. All it takes is effective global communication to resolve global issues.

One major global problem is conflict between nations. There will always be conflicts between people, it is part of being human, but how we deal with these conflicts is what makes the difference. Today, approximately 60 countries are involved in a war. Millions of people die each year from these conflicts. This fighting and killing is indeed a form of communication, but it is not effective in solving world problems. We accomplish nothing by killing people. We need to stop thinking of ourselves as being separated by national boundaries and focus on how to break down these walls. By communicating and working towards the same common goal, we will improve the planet. If we think globally, we will have more of a chance of communicating globally, and resolving conflicts through peaceful means, rather than war.

Enter Climate Change conundrum. Climate Change is the increased temperature of the atmosphere due to human carbon emissions. Our use of gasoline to run cars, and oil to heat our homes contributes to the heating of the climate. We are slowly destroying our environment, and creating an increasingly dangerous habitat for all living things. It is no question that this is a dangerous issue that needs addressing. And in order to address it, we must work together. Bill

Mckibben, of Vermont, helps us do this. He organized 350.org, which is a global campaign to solve climate change. The mission of 350.org is "building a global grassroots movement to solve the climate crisis." He organizes global rallies and projects to bring the world together in the face of this crisis. He helps us communicate as a world to get the job done, since it can be done no other way.

Earth's lack of resources needs to be addressed and solved through global communication. 25,000 people die from hunger every day. Other poverty induced diseases, like AIDs, cause millions of deaths worldwide. However, by globally communicating, we can reduce poverty. Global communication can help us redistribute the resources. Some places are brimming over with resources, such as fresh food, water, and technology while others suffer. The U.S.A. has an abundance of resources. If we use global communication to be at peace with one another, we can share what we have, so that less people suffer. If the United States were to share resources with poverty stricken countries of Africa, people in Africa would have happier lives, while people in the United States would still have enough to live comfortably. This can all be achieved through effective global communication.

Global communication is the answer. If we all put our hearts and heads together, and forget our differences, we can change the world for the better, which is always the ultimate goal. Whether it's to prevent wars, bring the temperature of the atmosphere down, or to redistribute resources, it's undebatable that communication is what we need. Let us come together, and work together and never forget the importance of global communication.

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TRIBUTE TO JIM WILLIS

● Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, on March 1, 2013, one of Oregon's most dedicated leaders will retire. I want to take a few minutes to pay tribute to a public servant and one of Oregon's foremost advocates for veterans, Jim Willis.

Jim has worked selflessly to better the State and the nation. For 48 years, he has been helping others, from his two enlistments in the U.S. Air Force, including a tour of wartime service in South Vietnam, to a career with the Oregon State Police, to his time with the American Legion, and finally his leadership at the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs, ODVA.

After his service in Vietnam, Jim knew what it felt like to return home to a country where veterans were not always welcomed and at times forgotten. He understood the words of George Washington when he said, "The will- ingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no mat-

ter how justified, is directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation."

This is why Jim championed funding for the Oregon Veterans' Home, pressed for veteran health care funding under the Federal VA system, increased financing limits on veterans' home loans, supported the construction of the Oregon Medal of Honor Memorial and Afghan-Iraqi Freedom Memorial, and initiated the construction of a second veterans home in Lebanon, Oregon.

I cannot say enough about the distinguished efforts Jim has made over the last 23 years at ODVA on behalf of servicemembers and their families. With his direction, our heroes knew there were trained service officers in their county ready to assist them with benefits, home loans, and countless other issues. The trained professionals and the team he built at ODVA were always willing to help a veteran in a time of need. As President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs, Jim coordinated these efforts nationally to assure veterans received what they worked so hard for.

I am grateful to have had Jim as a partner in several endeavors at the Federal level, including the effort to put a halt to pension poachers who were stealing money and benefits from veterans under the guise of veterans' assistance.

Even in retirement, Jim will continue to find ways to give back to the community. He will continue to serve on the American Legion National Cemetery Committee, on the Veteran of Foreign Wars National Resolutions Committee, and as Vice President of the Oregon World War II Memorial Foundation.

I could not be prouder of Jim and his life's work. He embodies the best of Oregon and the best of a grateful nation. As our servicemembers continue to come home and reintegrate into society, I am confident the benefits and services they have earned will be available to them because of Jim and people like him. His dedication to veterans will continue to have a lasting impact on ODVA for years to come.

Mr. President, I know Senator MERKLEY will be speaking after me to express his gratitude for Jim's many years of hard work. I'm proud to join my fellow Oregonians in recognizing the great service of Jim Willis and wishing him the best as he begins this new chapter in his life.●

● Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I rise today to echo what my colleague Senator WYDEN said in recognition of Jim Willis, a native Oregonian and one of Oregon's greatest champions for veterans and their families.

As an airman during the Vietnam War, and as an officer for the Oregon State Police, Jim has dedicated his life to serving and protecting the citizens of the United States and the State of Oregon.

Jim saw his work as fulfilling a sacred obligation: we all have the responsibility to honor and care for our veterans. For the past decade, under Jim's leadership, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs, ODVA, has stayed true to its mission and recognized and honored Oregon's veterans and their families by providing the highest quality programs, services and benefits.

Jim's dedication to providing quality programs and resources to all veterans and their families has lead ODVA—a relatively small agency—to accomplish a lot during his service. His decision to retire comes on the heels of some major accomplishments over the last few years, including beginning construction of a new veterans' home and the completion of a community center, both to serve Oregon's elderly veterans. Jim's legacy will be the impact that these projects will have on the lives of Oregon's veterans and their families.

With his service to the American Legion National Cemetery Committee and Veterans of Foreign Wars, and his current tenure as President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs, Jim works from a national platform to promote and advocate for veterans benefits. For Jim, every day is Veterans Day.

It has been a pleasure to work with Jim, both as a member of the Oregon State Legislature and as a U.S. Senator.

Jim will be retiring to his home in Albany, where he will spend time with his family. He plans to "continue to be concerned for my fellow veterans as long as I am able to assist in serving them in the future," and in that regard will continue to be active in the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and with the committee overseeing Oregon's World War II Memorial, currently under construction on the grounds of the Oregon Capitol.

Oregon is proud of and grateful for all of the hard work and leadership displayed by Jim Willis over his long and decorated career. I am especially proud of his many achievements and I thank him for his many years of outstanding public service. We wish him a happy and healthy retirement, and thank him for his continued dedication to Oregon's veterans.●

REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE UNION DELIVERED TO A JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS ON FEBRUARY 12, 2013—PM 2

The PRESIDING OFFICER laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States which was ordered to lie on the table:

To The Congress of the United States:

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress, fellow citizens:

Fifty-one years ago, John F. Kennedy declared to this Chamber that "the

Constitution makes us not rivals for power but partners for progress. . . It is my task," he said, "to report the State of the Union—to improve it is the task of us all."

Tonight, thanks to the grit and determination of the American people, there is much progress to report. After a decade of grinding war, our brave men and women in uniform are coming home. After years of grueling recession, our businesses have created over six million new jobs. We buy more American cars than we have in five years, and less foreign oil than we have in twenty. Our housing market is healing, our stock market is rebounding, and consumers, patients, and homeowners enjoy stronger protections than ever before.

Together, we have cleared away the rubble of crisis, and can say with renewed confidence that the State of our Union is stronger.

But we gather here knowing that there are millions of Americans whose hard work and dedication have not yet been rewarded. Our economy is adding jobs—but too many people still can't find full-time employment. Corporate profits have rocketed to all-time highs—but for more than a decade, wages and incomes have barely budged.

It is our generation's task, then, to reignite the true engine of America's economic growth—a rising, thriving middle class.

It is our unfinished task to restore the basic bargain that built this country—the idea that if you work hard and meet your responsibilities, you can get ahead, no matter where you come from, what you look like, or who you love.

It is our unfinished task to make sure that this Government works on behalf of the many, and not just the few; that it encourages free enterprise, rewards individual initiative, and opens the doors of opportunity to every child across this great Nation.

The American people don't expect Government to solve every problem. They don't expect those of us in this chamber to agree on every issue. But they do expect us to put the Nation's interests before party. They do expect us to forge reasonable compromise where we can. For they know that America moves forward only when we do so together; and that the responsibility of improving this Union remains the task of us all.

Our work must begin by making some basic decisions about our budget—decisions that will have a huge impact on the strength of our recovery.

Over the last few years, both parties have worked together to reduce the deficit by more than \$2.5 trillion—mostly through spending cuts, but also by raising tax rates on the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans. As a result, we are more than halfway towards the goal of \$4 trillion in deficit reduction that economists say we need to stabilize our finances.

Now we need to finish the job. And the question is, how?

In 2011, Congress passed a law saying that if both parties couldn't agree on a plan to reach our deficit goal, about a trillion dollars' worth of budget cuts would automatically go into effect this year. These sudden, harsh, arbitrary cuts would jeopardize our military readiness. They'd devastate priorities like education, energy, and medical research. They would certainly slow our recovery, and cost us hundreds of thousands of jobs. That's why Democrats, Republicans, business leaders, and economists have already said that these cuts, known here in Washington as "the sequester," are a really bad idea.

Now, some in this Congress have proposed preventing only the defense cuts by making even bigger cuts to things like education and job training; Medicare and Social Security benefits.

That idea is even worse. Yes, the biggest driver of our long-term debt is the rising cost of health care for an aging population. And those of us who care deeply about programs like Medicare must embrace the need for modest reforms—otherwise, our retirement programs will crowd out the investments we need for our children, and jeopardize the promise of a secure retirement for future generations.

But we can't ask senior citizens and working families to shoulder the entire burden of deficit reduction while asking nothing more from the wealthiest and most powerful. We won't grow the middle class simply by shifting the cost of health care or college onto families that are already struggling, or by forcing communities to lay off more teachers, cops, and firefighters. Most Americans—Democrats, Republicans, and Independents—understand that we can't just cut our way to prosperity. They know that broad-based economic growth requires a balanced approach to deficit reduction, with spending cuts and revenue, and with everybody doing their fair share. And that's the approach I offer tonight.

On Medicare, I'm prepared to enact reforms that will achieve the same amount of health care savings by the beginning of the next decade as the reforms proposed by the bipartisan Simpson-Bowles commission. Already, the Affordable Care Act is helping to slow the growth of health care costs. The reforms I'm proposing go even further. We'll reduce taxpayer subsidies to prescription drug companies and ask more from the wealthiest seniors. We'll bring down costs by changing the way our Government pays for Medicare, because our medical bills shouldn't be based on the number of tests ordered or days spent in the hospital—they should be based on the quality of care that our seniors receive. And I am open to additional reforms from both parties, so