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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. MURPHY).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
May 13, 2003.

I hereby appoint the Honorable TIM MURPHY to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

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

MILITARY ENVIRONMENTAL EXEMPTIONS

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, while the headlines deal with the United States' struggle against terrorism and securing the peace in Iraq after the war, there is another less heralded battle, that is, for the world's environment, literally saving the planet.

When it comes to pure military might, the United States is unsurpassed. No one is even close. On the battle to save the planet, the prognosis is not quite so positive. Sea levels are rising, glaciers are retreating, pollution around the world is on the rise, energy consumption by both the United States and the developing world is increasing, large swaths of forests continued to be devoured, the world's fisheries depleted, and coral reefs dying.

In the United States, on the environmental front, when not missing in action, is certainly not as aggressive in leadership as other developed countries in Europe and Japan. The world's greatest polluter and energy consumer is not accepting our responsibility in our capacity as the world's wealthiest and most powerful Nation.

Ironically, part of the solution is to be found with our Defense Department. The greatest source of pollution in the United States is associated with our military and the testing and development of weapons. The most serious and dangerous, of course, is the nuclear waste in various parts of the country. We have it in our Pacific Northwest. But there are sites large and small in every State of the Union, literally tens of millions of acres.

The United States has made a tremendous investment in training the finest fighting force in the world. We have made a huge financial outlay. A small portion of that outlay could be devoted to cleaning up after ourselves and protecting the environment.

Sadly, the House will soon be debating a proposal that is 180 degrees in the wrong direction. The Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Resources are looking at legislation that would completely exempt the Department of Defense from following environmental rules and regulations. It is wrong on so many different levels.

First of all, there is no need for the legislation. There has never been an example where a waiver that is able, under current law, to be authorized has ever been denied. There has never been an instance of military necessity for training where a waiver has not been granted; not once.

The consequences of military activity occur in many unexpected ways: perchlorate pollution in lettuce in the Imperial Valley, polluted drinking water on Martha's Vineyard. Three times since I have been in Congress we have had to pull firefighters out of the woods because unexploded ordnance has been exploding around them. Exempting, exempting the military from commonsense environmental regulations that apply to the rest of America would put more of our service people at risk, put their families at risk, put their neighbors at risk of bad air, bad water, dangerous practices.

It also misses the real threat to military readiness: the notion of land use encroachment. The same sprawl and unplanned growth that threatens farm and forest land, pollutes our air and water, and congests our roadways is a real threat to our ability to train and maintain the world's mightiest fighting force. Failure to plan and manage these impacts is a serious, ongoing problem that is ignored by the pending legislation.

It is also wrong on the most fundamental level. It is missing an opportunity to use the Department of Defense to set the highest standards. My experience with our military personnel is that given the right resources, the right orders, they can achieve any mission. If part of their order is to protect the environment, to clean up from past mistakes, to set standards of environmental stewardship, they will hit a homerun every time. It would have a transformational effect for the world dealing with tragic debris, environmental carnage of past actions.

There is also a fundamental arrogance and hypocrisy that the Federal Government's rules and regulations are necessary to protect the environment. It will impose them on a small business or local government, but not on the

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United States Government. Indeed, there are those who would try to work to take this misguided military exemption to try and extend it to all Federal activities. That would be a tragedy. It would not only underscore fundamental hypocrisy; it would put more pressure on small business and local governments and individuals because the Federal Government refuses to do its part.

In order to win the battle to protect the environment, America must provide leadership. A critical part of that leadership has always been our military. To send them a signal that environmental stewardship does not matter and that they do not have to play by the same rules the rest of us do is the wrong signal for them; it is the wrong signal for the rest of America; and it is certainly the wrong direction for our efforts against global warming, air and water pollution.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope the House will have the presence of mind to reject this wrong-headed approach.

PENSION SECURITY IS A VICTORY FOR WORKING AMERICANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY) is recognized during morning hour debates.

Mr. DELAY. Mr. Speaker, another week, another victory for working Americans. On the heels of our bipartisan passage of the President's jobs and growth package, this week the House will consider the Pension Security Act of 2003.

This legislation will empower employees and make them better informed about their retirement investment options. It will make businesses more accountable to their employees and corporations more accountable to their most valuable investors. And by giving rank-and-file employees increased flexibility and information, this legislation will better protect American savings from the effects of some misguided companies.

The legislation will allow employees with company stock to sell it and diversify their portfolios after just 3 years, rather than up to 10 as under current law. Employees will still be allowed to own shares of their own company, but companies could no longer require their employees to do so.

The Pension Security Act will help employees get even more personal investment advice than current law dictates. It also provides tax incentives to help working Americans pay for additional retirement planning services. And with this bill, we will ensure that all workers have access to quality advice about investment strategies, diversification, and risks.

To help keep people informed will also require companies to provide their employees with quarterly benefit statements with information about their investment performance and rights to diversify. Finally, this bill will confirm that when workers do not have access to their accounts during so-called blackout periods, companies must act in their employees' best interests.

Mr. Speaker, this is another step towards the establishment of a pension and retirement savings system in this country that does what it is supposed to do. Employees will be assured their investments are theirs, that the diversification strategy they employ will be tailored to their needs, and that they will have access to expert advisors bound to serve the interests of them and not anyone else. By empowering employees with more flexibility and information in their retirement planning, we will be adding to the long-term financial security of our Nation.

So as I said, Mr. Speaker, another week, another victory for working Americans.

REPUBLICANS DENY WORKERS EXTENDED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS DURING ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY), the Republican leader of the House, began his talk by saying, a victory for working Americans last week. It is hard to think it was a victory for working Americans when we have over 1 million people who are unemployed, who are receiving unemployment compensation, and 36,000 of those in Ohio, their benefits expire on May 31; and this Republican Congress and this President refused to extend their unemployment benefits.

Last November many of us in this House, many of us on the Democratic side, called for an extension of unemployment benefits for the 23,000 workers in Ohio and 1.1 million-or-so workers nationwide whose benefits were set to expire at the end of the year. After bowing to public outrage, the White House begrudgingly gave congressional Republicans the green light to help the unemployed. They were reluctant; but because of the pressure they received from people in my State of Ohio and across the country from unemployed workers and people who care about unemployed workers, Republicans could not ignore the expiring of unemployment benefits any longer.

It is 5 months later, and we are going down that same road again. Several days ago, House Republicans passed President Bush's tax cut that gives millionaires an average tax cut of $93,000. If you make $1 million a year, you get a tax cut of $93,000. Fewer than half the people in my State, or about half the people in my State of Ohio, will get less than $200 from that same tax cut bill; but the 1 percent wealthiest people whose income averages $968,000 a year will get a $93,000 tax break. That is twice as much as the median total income of people in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I supported a Democratic alternative that extends unemployment benefits to help families struggling through the Bush recession and to provide real economic stimulus by putting the money in the pockets of those who will spend it, those who are unemployed, those who need it most, those who are most likely to put that money into the economy to create economic activity to create jobs. Our plan provides tax stimulus for small businesses and manufacturing that is the core of Ohio's economy and offers immediate relief to States like Ohio, almost all the 50 States, which are drowning in red ink, help to maintain Medicaid, avoid further job losses and cuts in critical programs, and prevent tax increases, so that States do not feel forced to raise taxes as most of them, Republican and Democratic Governors alike, are doing.

Did the House Republican leadership embrace this commonsense plan? No. Did the Republicans vote to extend unemployment benefits for 1 million Americans whose benefits are running out and who cannot find a job as hard as they are willing to work, one of the best ways to spur economic growth? No. Did the Republicans extend unemployment benefits? No. Did the Republicans give assistance to cash-strapped States all over the country that are raising taxes, cutting health care, and raising tuition rates on middle-class families? No. And why is the Republican answer to all of our economic problems always, always tax cuts for the rich?

The President's tax cut plan echoes the 2001 President's tax cut plan in other ways. The 2001 tax cut delivered 40 percent of its benefits to the richest 1 percent of the people in this country. They marketed it as a tax break for ordinary folks, and now they are saying it again. Keep in mind, half of the tax cut goes to people whose average income is $968,000 a year. The typical family, though, gets a tax break of about $200 next year; but families with incomes of $1 million get $93,000.

Two years ago, the President got his tax cut through Congress, which he claimed would create jobs. Two years later, today, we have lost since then 1.7 million jobs, and now they are saying we should do it again.

The latest unemployment statistics show 360,000 Ohioans are out of work, 33,000 more than were reported in January.

□ 1245

Ohio has lost a quarter of a million jobs since President Bush took office. President Bush has the worst job creation record, averaging a loss of 68,000 jobs a month, of any President in the last 58 years. Every month that President Bush has been in office, we have seen a decrease in the number of jobs