

of every report that has been issued in a bipartisan way, most recently by the so-called Gang of Six, or the Simpson-Bowles Commission, or the Senator Domenici-Alice Rivlin Commission—all had a central premise: Do not take actions that undermine the most vulnerable among us. Those were all bipartisan commissions.

I know my friends on the Republican side of the aisle who pride themselves on being the party of Lincoln understand Lincoln's message of healing and bringing us together and making sure that we lifted up our fellow citizens and cared for the sick and the homeless and for the young and, yes, for the old.

So as I said, I thank Chairwoman LEE, such a courageous and powerful voice on behalf of those who sometimes have no voice. I am pleased to join my voice to hers and hopefully to all 435 of us who have been given the privilege of serving in this body to raise our voices on this day on behalf of a Nation that has been perceived around the world as being a Nation of hope, of opportunity, of heart, and of soul. Let us reflect that in whatever way we go forward in ensuring the fiscal health of our Nation, both in the short term and in the long term. And understand that the health of our people physically, mentally, financially will be equally important to the health of our Nation.

I thank the gentlelady for leading this debate.

#### PASS FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

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

Mr. CANSECO. Mr. Speaker, if one were to ask the average American what their top three priorities for the Congress to work on would be, I think you would get the answer of jobs, jobs, and more jobs.

That's the answer because the employment situation in America is not good. Over 14 million Americans are out of work. We have had 29 straight months with the unemployment rate at 8 percent or higher and monthly jobs reports that show anemic job growth.

Clearly, we need to turn our economy around so robust job creation can occur. The American people want and expect nothing less.

Much of why our economy is not creating jobs is because of uncertainty in the economy that has been created by policies passed by Washington, like the government takeover of health care, the credit-restricting financial regulation bill, and the out-of-control spending.

We tried it the way desired by President Obama and Washington liberals, attempting to spend and borrow our way to a better economy. And their bills, all they did was add to the debt that is dragging the economy down.

Worst though is that Washington is ignoring three very easy actions that, if taken, will immediately help our economy. There are three pending

trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea that will create jobs and are at no cost to the taxpayer.

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Altogether, it's estimated by the Business Roundtable that these three agreements will create 250,000 jobs. How can we not pass these agreements that will create jobs and not cost the taxpayers?

Today I want to talk about the benefits of the Panama Free Trade Agreement. In 2010, U.S. exports to Panama accounted for \$6.1 billion, creating \$5.7 billion in trade surpluses with Panama. The United States is Panama's largest trading partner. And once the agreement goes into effect, 88 percent of U.S. goods will enter Panama duty free.

What are some of the products that we export to Panama that could benefit from this agreement? Well, our top exports to Panama now are aircraft, machinery, and agricultural products. In the 23rd District of Texas, which I have the privilege of representing in the United States House of Representatives, agriculture is an important source of economic activity. The Panama Free Trade Agreement will help agricultural products in my district and those districts across the United States. This agreement is helping level the playing field for American agricultural producers.

In 2009, the U.S. exported \$362 million in agricultural exports to Panama. Less than 40 percent of those exports received duty-free status, while more than 99 percent of Panama's agricultural exports to the United States received duty-free status. Upon implementation of the agreement, 56 percent of U.S. agricultural exports will enter Panama duty free, and the remaining tariffs will phase out within 15 years.

While there are benefits to passing this agreement, there are also consequences for failing to pass it. American jobs are at stake as our competitors, notably Canada and the European Union, have their own trade deals with Panama. And once these deals are implemented, their exports will have an advantage over U.S. exports currently going into Panama. This will lead to a loss of market share for the United States exporters and a loss of jobs here at home.

Mr. Speaker, we have the ability to create jobs without spending taxpayer money. With over 14 million Americans unemployed, we must stop waiting. It's time to pass the Panama Free Trade Agreement.

#### POVERTY CRISIS IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE. I rise today as the founding cochair of the Congressional Out of Poverty Caucus to join my colleagues to discuss the urgent crisis of poverty and to provide a voice for those people

living in poverty and who we feel that could get disproportionately hurt by any negotiations that take place that cut too deeply.

I want to thank our leadership, especially our whip, Mr. HOYER, for his powerful words this morning and for his leadership; Leader PELOSI and our Assistant Leader, Mr. CLYBURN, for each and every day standing and working for the least of these.

Mr. Speaker, a daunting statistic speaks for itself: One in 5 million children in America are growing up in poverty, and nearly 45 million Americans are living in poverty today. Our national unemployment rate is 9.2 percent, but for African Americans it is 16.2 percent and for Latinos it is 11.6 percent. And we know it's twice these statistics, given the millions of people who have lost hope in looking for jobs.

Given these heart-wrenching statistics, the Congressional Out of Poverty Caucus, our cochairs—Representatives BACA, BUTTERFIELD, CONYERS, HONDA, and I—sent a letter to the President, the Vice President, and the congressional leadership on both sides of the aisle asking them to protect those programs that support those facing or living in poverty in the debt ceiling negotiations.

My colleagues and I are here on the floor today to remind every Member that it was not American families or children or the working poor that forced Congress to run a deficit, and it definitely was not America's seniors on Social Security or Medicare or people on Medicaid that forced Republicans to turn the first budget surplus into decades of record deficits. Two wars, massive tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires, Big Oil, and Wall Street running wild caused these deficits. The American people are willing to work, they want to work and pay their fair share, but they should not be asked to fill a hole that they did not dig.

We should quickly pass clean legislation to raise our debt ceiling to end this default crisis so that we can move on doing the critical work of creating jobs and responsibly addressing the national debt. Making heartless cuts on the backs of hungry children and struggling American families will not balance the budget. Every Member of Congress should consider the millions of Americans who are struggling—struggling to find work, struggling to pay for health care if they have health care, struggling to stay in their homes, and struggling to feed their children.

Mr. Speaker, more and more Americans are facing poverty every day, and the Congressional Out of Poverty Caucus is on the floor once again to be the voice for these Americans struggling day in and day out just to survive, demanding that we protect these vital safety net programs and help support the poor, especially in this Great Recession.

We are here today to share some stories from people who have benefited from those programs. I have a story