Mr. Speaker, but the facts are plain. Their message on tax relief has definitely changed.

This weekend the President of the United States and even Senator KENT CONRAD both said, “We ought to act now on tax relief.” The momentum in the political debate continues to move in the right direction, Mr. Speaker, namely toward larger, retroactive tax cuts this year. Even the toughest critics of tax relief said if you are going to use tax reductions as a method for economic stimulus, you must act quickly to have any effect whatsoever. Tax cuts will be meaningless to this year’s economy, Mr. Speaker, unless they take effect this year. Our faltering economy is not just about a jittery stock market. There is no need to beam up any one around here today. Everyone seems to agree with the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE) and the Speaker’s announced policy of January 1 of this year. We argued on this floor about the working conditions in other countries as not being up to what they should be; and yet here on our own mean streets of the United States of America, the greatest republic in the world, these factories still exist. Sweat labor still exists, and who speaks for those people, locked away for 12 and 16 hours? Who is here to talk about working conditions and what situations people have to go through to bring bread home to their families? Many times they are the new waves of immigrants, nowhere else to work, but in conditions that you and I would never accept.

Mr. Speaker, this fire is cited in the United States Almanac because it is the worst industrial fire in the history of the Nation. Business at the time was only concerned with the bottom line. Fire inspections and precautions were woefully inadequate. The Triangle factory had never conducted a fire drill. That building was supposed to be fireproof. There was no oversight and there certainly was no OSHA.

Mr. Speaker, we have all heard the debates of the past few weeks about protecting the workers. The employees were not in labor unions either, or just a few of them. There was no one there to protect them or speak for them. They were exploited and abused; and while we talk about working conditions in Honduras, in China, and well we should, right here in major suburbs and cities of this country, we know that the Department of Labor knows best about what goes on behind those locked doors right in the heart of New York City.

Mr. Speaker, in the wake of this tragedy people throughout the Nation demanded restitution, justice, and action that would safeguard the vulnerable and oppressed. It is unfortunate that it took events such as the Triangle Fire to demand change. There were massive protests by people angry at the lack of concern and the greed that had made the Triangle fire possible. As a direct result of this horrible fire, there was a substantial effort to alleviate the most dangerous aspects of sweatshop manufacturing in New York and throughout the nation.

On February 17, 2001, the last survivor of the factory blaze, Rose Freedman, passed away at the age of 107.

It is important that we not let the memory of the Triangle Fire be extinguished from our memories. It is for this reason that I have introduced House Concurrent Resolution 81 with my friend from New York, Mr. KING. This resolution recognizes the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Triangle Fire. In my mind, this resolution is very simple and very straightforward. I taught my students about the fire in just this manner when I taught history class. But apparently, for reasons that escape me, it is just too controversial for history class. But apparently, for reasons that escape me, it is just too controversial for history class.

In 1911, the Triangle Fire brought attention to the many serious problems facing factory employees and paved the way for worker protection laws.

In the year 2001, we cannot even recognize the memory of the fire and its victims on the House floor. But that is not considering a simple, non-binding resolution, is that we are letting history repeat itself.

The truth is that young workers around the world are dying needlessly in burning factories.
March 27, 2001

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—HOUSE

4673

for the same reasons that the women died in the Triangle Fire.

Meeting the bottom line is apparently worth the cost of inhuman conditions. We are repeating the same mistakes that the U.S. reme-died decades ago. And although we have standards to protect American workers, our trade agreements lack teeth and do not even mention labor rights. By ignoring international workers' rights abuses, we are not only allowing, but assisting in the mistreatment of millions of workers in sweatshops around the globe.

It is our own fault that nothing has changed. This global economy that we support, apparently without question or reservation, is allowing countries to fight for commerce by allowing the lowest standards. And if this standard allows for a factory to lock its doors, while children work for twelve-hour days to make children's toys at the lowest cost possible, so be it.

And if there is a 1993 fire at a factory in Bangkok which kills 188 workers, eerily similar to the Triangle Fire, then the company can just move its business to another location and re-set up shop—no questions asked. No sanctions imposed.

As William Greider points out in his introduction to the book, The Triangle Fire, "the passivity of government and the public simply leads further down a low road. More injustices appear, and they, too, must be tolerated in the name of commerce."

In the name of commerce, it is "in the name of commerce" that international laws will not produce reasonable standards for business performance.

It is in the name of competitive advantage, that instead of improving working conditions, countries are trying to out-do each other with the lowest standards to attract our commerce.

Changing the attitude of all Americans is not easy, but it is the right thing to do. Everyone should be outraged by sweatshops. But they should be just as outraged that we in the United States are enabling the sweatshops to continue.

I urge my colleagues to cosponsor House Concurrent Resolution 81, and remember the Triangle Fire. Remember what it did for our country. Honor the victims of the fire. Condemn the Triangle Fire.

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. Bass) at 2 p.m.

RECESS

The Speaker pro tempore. The House stands in recess until 2 p.m.

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. Bass) at 2 p.m.