

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

**Remarks During White House Press Secretary James "Jay" Carney's Briefing
December 20, 2011**

The President. Hello, everybody. Sorry to interrupt.

Press Secretary Carney. It's all yours, sir.

The President. Thank you. Well, good afternoon, everybody. It is no secret that there hasn't been an abundance of partisanship in Washington this year. And that's why what happened on Saturday was such a big deal.

Nearly the entire Senate, including almost all of the Republicans, voted to prevent 160 million working Americans from receiving a tax increase on January 1. Nearly the entire Senate voted to make sure that nearly 2.5 million Americans who are out there looking for a job don't lose their unemployment insurance in the first 2 months of next year. And just about everybody, Democrats and Republicans, committed to making sure that early next year we find a way to extend the payroll tax cut and unemployment insurance through the end of 2012.

But now, even though Republicans and Democrats in the Senate were willing to compromise for the good of the country, a faction of Republicans in the House are refusing to even vote on the Senate bill, a bill that cuts taxes for 160 million Americans. And because of their refusal to cooperate, all those Americans could face a tax hike in just 11 days, and millions of Americans who are out there looking for work could find their unemployment insurance expired.

Now, let's be clear: Right now the bipartisan compromise that was reached on Saturday is the only viable way to prevent a tax hike on January 1. It's the only one. All of the leaders in Congress, Democrats and Republicans, say they are committed to making sure we extend the payroll tax cut and unemployment insurance for the entire year. And by the way, this is something I called for months ago.

The issue is, is that the Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate worked on a 1-year deal, made good progress, but determined that they needed more time to reach an agreement. And that's why they passed an insurance policy, to make sure that taxes don't go up on January 1.

In fact, the House Republicans say they don't dispute the need for a payroll tax cut. What they're really trying to do, what they're holding out for, is to wring concessions from Democrats on issues that have nothing to do with the payroll tax cut, issues where the parties fundamentally disagree. So a 1-year deal is not the issue; we can and we will come to that agreement, as long as it's focused on the payroll tax cut and unemployment insurance and not focused on extraneous issues.

The issue right now is this: The clock is ticking; time is running out. And if the House Republicans refuse to vote for the Senate bill, or even allow it to come up for a vote, taxes will go up in 11 days. I saw today that one of the House Republicans referred to what they're doing as, "high-stakes poker." He's right about the stakes, but this is not poker, this is not a game—this shouldn't be politics as usual. Right now the recovery is fragile, but it is moving in the right direction. Our failure to do this could have effects not just on families, but on the economy as a whole. It's not a game for the average family, who doesn't have an extra 1,000 bucks to lose. It's

not a game for somebody who's out there looking for work right now and might lose his house if unemployment insurance doesn't come through. It's not a game for the millions of Americans who will take a hit when the entire economy grows more slowly because these proposals aren't extended.

I just got back from a ceremony at Andrews Air Force Base, where we received the flag and the colors that our troops fought under in Iraq, and I met with some of the last men and women to return home from that war. And these Americans, and all Americans who serve, are the embodiment of courage and selflessness and patriotism, and when they fight together, and sometimes die together, they don't know and they certainly don't care who's a Democrat and who's a Republican and how somebody is doing in the polls and how this might play in the spin room. They work as a team, and they do their job. And they do it for something bigger than themselves.

The people in this town need to learn something from them. We have more important things to worry about than politics right now. We have more important things to worry about than saving face or figuring out internal caucus politics. We have people who are counting on us to make their lives just a little bit easier, to build an economy where hard work pays off and responsibility is rewarded. And we owe it to them to come together right now and do the right thing. That's what the Senate did. Democrats and Republicans in the Senate said, we're going to put our fights on other issues aside and go ahead and do what's right on something we all agree to. Let's go ahead and do it. We'll have time later for the politics; we'll have time later to have fights around a whole bunch of other issues. Right now, though, we know this is good for the economy, and they went ahead and did the right thing.

I need the Speaker and House Republicans to do the same: Put politics aside, put aside issues where there are fundamental disagreements and come together on something we agree on. And let's not play brinksmanship. The American people are weary of it; they're tired of it. They expect better. I'm calling on the Speaker and the House Republican leadership to bring up the Senate bill for a vote. Give the American people the assurance they need in this holiday season.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:59 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Thomas J. Rooney.

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