

Statement on H.R. 3630, the Conference Agreement related to Unemployment and Other Safety Net Policies

Statement on H.R. 3630, the Conference Agreement related to Unemployment and Other Safety Net Policies

February 17, 2012

It is with mixed emotion that I voted against H.R. 3630, the conference agreement related to the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act. I recognize the conference agreement reflects legislative compromise, where both sides gave ground to come to agreement. I applaud my Democratic colleagues who secured an extension of the payroll tax cut for 160 million Americans, an extension of the unemployment safety net for millions of Americans who lost their jobs through no fault of their own, and secured physician payments so that tens of millions of seniors can continue to see their doctors. I recognize that the Democratic Leaders staved off many horrible provisions that would have inflicted great harm on Illinoisans and Americans.

However, I could not vote in support of the agreement. The hospital and health care cuts were too deep. Republicans insisted on substantial cuts to hospitals, including over four billion dollars from hospitals that serve substantial numbers of the extremely poor - of which Chicago has many. These hospitals provide a lifeline to healthcare for hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans, and I do not support reducing their funding. Further, the Republicans insisted on cutting five billion dollars from the Prevention and Public Health Fund to improve the quality of life of our citizens. I have been a strong proponent of prevention my entire adult life given its proven ability to improve the quality of life for citizens with minimal financial investment. I do not understand the Republican position that increasing the financial burden on hospitals that care for our sick and needy and slashing prevention funding is better public policy than asking the wealthiest in our nation to pay a fair share of their income or stopping tens of billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies for oil companies with record profits.

I further could not support the conference agreement given that it burdens federal workers by 15 billion dollars. Federal employees have contributed \$60 billion to deficit reduction via a two-year pay freeze. To require federal workers to bear 15 billion dollars more in burden while allowing millionaires and billionaires and corporations that ship jobs overseas to maintain unchanged their tax loopholes is not right. Rather than asking for the privileged to help cover the costs for a 10-month extension of safety net programs, Republicans should be ashamed that they demanded that federal workers making \$50,000 a year pay \$1000 per year for the rest of their careers.

Further, I could not support allowing states to drug test or screen unemployment recipients. Promoting drug testing for unemployed workers is a means simply to erect barriers to government support and to bolster stereotypes of the unemployed as substance using and unworthy of federal assistance. Although the provisions are optional; I cannot support the change that overturns the 1960s-era Department of Labor ban on States' screening and testing the unemployed to receive financial support that those individuals already paid into the system.

Again, I am pleased that the compromise ensures continued tax cuts for tens of millions of Americans, continued medical care for tens of millions of seniors, and continued unemployment insurance for tens of millions of Americans. Unfortunately, I could not vote in support of the bill because elements of it will have negative effects on my Congressional District and Illinois.

I vow to continue actively working to ensure that health care and safety net programs remain top concerns of policymakers. My resolute belief in the critical nature of the unemployment insurance safety net led me to offer a privileged resolution on the floor of the House of Representatives this past December. The resolution recognized that the economic crisis remains a daily reality for millions of Americans, that unemployment insurance is a critical lifeline for these citizens to weather the economic hardship and for the economic growth of our nation, and that Members of

Congress have a responsibility to protect Americans and our country from physical and economic harm, especially during times of national crisis.

I will continue to support my colleagues in promoting a strong economy and a strong safety net to protect our citizens during difficult times.