

Published in the Ramona Sentinel

In my role as a newly elected member of Congress, the first few days of the legislative session have been both challenging and rewarding. There is certainly a lot to learn, particularly when it comes to tradition and parliamentary procedure on the House floor. At the same time, I am enthusiastically looking forward to representing the Ramona community over the coming years and working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to promote a positive vision for America.

Soon after the new Congress was sworn in and the ceremonial activities ended, we got right to work and considered two bills that would purportedly address pay disparities in the workplace. These bills, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act, would allow pay discrimination lawsuits to proceed years or even decades after alleged instances of payment discrimination occur.

In the interest of protecting Ramona's small businesses and workers, I opposed both of these measures. While these bills are well-intentioned in their attempt to create a standard of fairness in the workplace, they will likely have the opposite effect should they become law.

In fact, they would likely lead to reduced wages and employment opportunities for many workers since businesses would then adjust their operations in order to avoid lawsuits. There is also the likelihood that these bills would put workers at a disadvantage because employers might attempt to eliminate legal risk through selective hiring practices.

Clearly, these policies would complicate things for local business owners and workers, benefiting only trial lawyers who seek big damage payoffs for stale lawsuits that are difficult to defend. America's workers and business should come first, not certain interest groups that stand to profit from these changes.

Even the legislation advanced last week by House Democrats to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) would disadvantage those who the program is intended to serve. SCHIP was created by House Republicans in 1997 to provide low income families and

children with essential health care coverage. The legislation voted on by the House would expand SCHIP to 11 billion new enrollees, many of whom already have private health insurance or far exceed the minimum threshold condition for program participation.

According to budget experts, this will cost taxpayers approximately \$69 billion over the next five years, a \$44 billion increase over current levels. This revenue will be generated, in part, from a 61 cent tax increase on tobacco products and new restrictions on hospital specialties. Equally concerning as the price tag is the fact that, under the bill, children of illegal immigrants in the country for more than five years automatically qualify for the program.

These factors will surely constrain SCHIP and its ability to provide much-needed health care benefits to low-income children. I joined many of my colleagues in voting against this bill while voicing strong support for an alternative proposal, which would have ensured our children receive the care they need and rightly deserve. Once again, special interests have been put first.

Congress is also expected to soon consider a \$825 billion economic stimulus package. While I have significant concerns with this proposal, particularly in light of the poor oversight exercised with the \$700 billion Wall Street bailout, it is critical that any potential legislation produced by Congress reflect the best interest of taxpayers, create jobs for American workers and represent a lasting path toward economic recovery.

The best way to accomplish these goals is to get more money in the hands of American families, reduce their tax burden and empower them to make good decisions about the use of their own money. At the same time, we should invest in American industries and offer companies incentives to purchase and use domestic-made materials. This is the direction we should take. Spending taxpayer dollars on transportation and public works projects alone will not give our economy the jumpstart that is desperately needs.

As the legislative session continues, I look forward to serving as your Representative in Congress and the opportunities that lie ahead. Together, we will confront the challenges facing our nation today so that we can build a prosperous and productive path to the future.