

The countries of Europe have created large, extensive welfare systems. They have outrageously high taxes. They tax and spend, all to support growing government social programs. And the result? In December 2003, Belgium had an 8.3 unemployment rate. In January 2004, France, a vocal critic of U.S. economic and foreign policy, had a whopping 9.3 percent unemployment rate. Germany, another consistent critic of the U.S., in January of this year had a 9.1 percent unemployment rate.

Mr. Speaker, in January of 2004 America had a 5.6 percent unemployment rate.

A leftist European model does not work in foreign affairs and it does not work here in economics. Unfortunately and unwisely, Democrats have adopted this kind of approach for their platform.

We have weathered a recession and September 11 with the \$1 trillion impact it had on our economy, and we remain committed to tax relief. And this month the Employer Outlook Survey reported that 28 percent of the 16,000 employers that they surveyed expected to hire more workers from April to June of this year.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BLUMENAUER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### "EXXON VALDEZ" IS NOT THE ONLY SHIP AGROUND

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. MCDERMOTT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, America will pause tomorrow to remember the 15th anniversary of the *Exxon Valdez* environmental disaster. On March 24, 1989, the captain in charge of this massive tanker was unfit to command even a row boat, yet the intoxicated captain was at the helm, and he ran the *Valdez* aground in Alaska's fragile and pristine Prince William Sound. Eleven million gallons of oil emptied into the sea and devastated everything in its path. It will take generations, if ever, for there to be a complete recovery.

Fifteen years later, at least 100 tons of toxic waste, concentrated by years of weathering, continues to kill and maim Alaska's environment. Fifteen years later, thousands of Alaskans continue to wait for the \$5 billion a jury ordered Exxon to pay. The money remains in Exxon's pocket. Exxon would rather buy time and influence than pay what amounted to 1 year of profits for an environmental catastrophe.

Sound familiar?

It should.

The President's proposed budget hemorrhages red ink about as fast as

the *Exxon Valdez* gushed oil into the Prince William Sound, and the consequences are just as devastating. This President has run the U.S. economy aground with the same disregard for protecting ordinary Americans as a drunken captain had one night for protecting Alaska's environment. It will take generations, if ever, for there to be a complete recovery.

Here is the damage report from the scene.

The President rewards our soldiers returning from Iraq by increasing fees for medical service in his budget. Welcome home, soldiers. Get out your checkbooks.

The administration orders universal health care for everyone in Iraq, but not America. Administration officials claim everyone in America already has health coverage. That will come as a surprise to 44 million Americans.

The person who knew the prescription drug bill would cost \$139 billion more than the administration said it would, he was told he would be fired if he released that data. If only Supreme Court Justice Scalia were a Member of the House, he might lead the Republicans in a great "Quack, Quack" when the drug bill passed on quack data.

Perhaps we should have heard a similar refrain when the administration decided that flipping hamburgers was a manufacturing job. Perhaps the President should have declared, "Quack, Quack" when the administration rewarded corporate buddies by throwing out the rule book for overtime pay for ordinary Americans.

The average American is a sitting duck for this administration.

Millions of Americans are drowning in a sea of unemployment, but the administration refuses to throw a lifeline by extending unemployment benefits.

Average Americans received an average cut of \$676. Millionaire Americans received an average cut of \$112,925. This must be an example of the compassion the President says motivates him every day.

Big oil gets invited to secret meetings conducted by the Vice President to map out a future energy policy for America. Somehow, I do not think they talked at all about the *Exxon Valdez* or the money Exxon owes the people of Alaska for their drunken sailor.

I could be wrong, but we may never know because the administration refuses to tell America what went on behind closed doors.

Speaking of doors, they are slamming shut on average Americans at an alarming rate. Interest rates are at a record low. Mortgage foreclosures, personal bankruptcy and credit card delinquencies are either rising or are at record highs.

I wonder if we will hear a "Quack, Quack" from the White House on that one? Probably not. Duck hunting, after all, is best done on private lands owned by oil companies with the Vice President leading a Supreme Court Justice who has elevated duck calls to a Supreme Court decision.

How much things change. How much they stay the same.

The *Exxon Valdez* ran aground when there was a President Bush in the White House. The U.S. economy ran aground when there was a President Bush in the White House. The *Exxon Valdez* caused the greatest environmental catastrophe in history when it ran aground. Our President Bush, Bush II, may trump that with the largest economic catastrophe in history when he ran America aground.

#### HONORING THE CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CONFERENCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of the first anniversary of the Congressional Hispanic Conference. Formed just 1 year ago, the Conference promotes the interest of over 40 million Americans of Hispanic and Portuguese descent. As an associate member of this Conference, along with our founding members, we have provided a needed voice in Congress and in issues important to the Hispanic and Latino community.

Hispanics, by principle, value moderate and conservative beliefs, and the Congressional Hispanic Conference's policy objectives mirror those beliefs.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe "Los valores le los Hispanos son los valores de los Republicanos," meaning "Hispanic values are Republican values."

When you address the issues, it is clear that the values of the Republican Party are the values of Hispanic and Latino Americans.

In the 108th Congress, the Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003, known by most as the "Bush tax cut," was passed and signed by George W. Bush. This legislation lowered taxes for every American taxpayer, and now several million working Americans of low income benefit from a new lower tax bracket of 10 percent, allowing them to keep more of what they earned. But also note, these hard-working Americans in the lowest tax bracket receive the largest percentage reduction in their tax burden. In fact, 3 million low-income families no longer have to pay Federal income taxes.

Another benefit of the Bush tax cut to strengthen families is that we increased the child tax credit from \$600 to \$1,000 per child this year. An estimated 34 million families benefit from this provision to help them. And I would note that we also strengthen families and, particularly, the institution of marriage by eliminating the marriage tax penalty.

The Congressional Hispanic Conference is committed to passing legislation which provides common-sense lower taxes for all Americans.

With the No Child Left Behind Act designed to help our schools passed by this Congress, signed into law by President Bush, minority parents are empowered with the freedom to remove