



THE
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1,000 Days of Pain

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This week marks the 1,000th day of John Boehner's speakership in the United States House of Representatives.

It also marks the 1,000th consecutive day without a vote on a single serious piece of legislation to address the nation's continuing unemployment crisis.

I know because I arrived in Congress 1,000 days ago to bring attention to the human costs of the nation's lingering mass unemployment and to enact solutions. I have been going to the House floor nearly every morning the House is in session, telling stories of the pain and suffering caused by unemployment, highlighting proven policy options, and counting up the days of inaction.

And I intend to keep doing so for as long as the Republicans ignore this emergency.

While Speaker Boehner and his Republican colleagues continue to behave as though the Great Recession is long gone, it's quite a different picture when you look at the African-American community (13 percent unemployment), the Hispanic community (9.3 percent unemployment), or the youngest workers (22 percent unemployment). Across America, there are nearly 12 million people officially out of work and tens of millions more who are underemployed or who have simply given up looking.

Think of all the anxiety, ill-health, and lost dignity that lurks behind these numbers.

Instead of even considering action to address this crisis, the House of Representatives has voted 45 times to defund an expansion of healthcare. House

leaders have pursued a policy agenda based on Rep. Paul Ryan's budget that explicitly aims to fire public workers, including teachers, firefighters, construction workers, public health workers, medical researchers, public defenders, bus drivers, social workers, and police to cut spending. It would be one thing if--as the Republicans claim--these cuts gave private businesses the confidence to start hiring people. But they don't. Both private-sector and government economists have shown that unemployment would be nearly a point lower and economic growth would be about two points higher were it not for the fiscal tightening.

By threatening the country with a continued government closure and a debt default crisis, Republicans have forced Democrats to give in to these rock-bottom job-killing budget levels in the 2014 spending bill. And now -- refusing to consider these concessions adequate -- they're demanding a dismantling of the Affordable Care Act.

People want jobs. People want healthcare. No one wants to revive the Great Recession by playing these dangerous games with the economy.

We've now tried the Republican theory of reckless budget cutting, and we know it fails to deliver on people's basic desires. Even the International Monetary Fund, a notoriously hardline free-market institution, has acknowledged that its previous calls for sequester-style budget cuts were flat wrong, causing job losses and stalling economic recovery.

Ending this economic shutdown and debt ceiling hysteria is just the first move in a turn back to

fiscal sanity. And there's no shortage of options to find our way back to full employment.

This summer, I introduced an updated version of President Obama's American Jobs Act for the 113th Congress. The bill creates new opportunities for teachers and first responders as well as public-private partnerships to meet urgent infrastructure needs and tax credits for small businesses that hire people who have been unemployed for six months or longer.

My colleague, Congressman John Conyers of Michigan, has introduced the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment and Training Act to create work opportunities and training initiatives in infrastructure repair and construction, energy efficiency, education, public health, and neighborhood renovation for people in need of work.

House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer's "Make It in America" agenda would invest in innovation, education, and exports to bring high-paying manufacturing jobs back to the country.

The message that catapulted conservatives to their House majority and John Boehner to his Speakership in 2010 was a different approach but sensible enough: Get businesses hiring again by removing regulation and ending "uncertainty" for investors and financial markets.

A lot has changed in the past 1,000 days, but the end of "uncertainty" has yet to arrive.

As our current government shutdown makes clear, the Tea Party tactic of governing by crisis

has resulted in more uncertainty for businesspeople than at any time in memory. As the Washington Post's Lydia DePillis put it, "a government shutdown, and the prospect of a default on the national debt, is pretty much the definition of economic uncertainty."

But this Congress has caused something much worse than uncertainty for businesspeople. It's caused 1,000 days of unnecessary and avoidable pain and suffering for American workers and their families.