



Frederica Wilson: Get jobs back on congressional agenda

Rep. Frederica S. Wilson

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The U.S. Congress now has an approval rating of less than 10 percent. By some estimates, that's a lower rating than cockroaches and traffic jams.

While politicians in Washington make all kinds of excuses for this abysmal level of public support, I believe the reason is simple: Congress is ignoring the single issue that matters most to the vast majority of Americans: jobs. Over the past two years, the leadership of the House of Representatives, where I serve, has not allowed a single vote on serious legislation to address the plight of America's 12 million unemployed.

This week, I introduced an updated version of President Obama's American Jobs Act, a bill that, according to independent analysts, would have created 1.9 million jobs and boosted growth by 2 percent if passed when originally proposed two years ago. While the original American Jobs Act expired at the

end of last year without even receiving a vote, it's needed now more than ever.

The bill would save jobs threatened by the reckless budget cuts, restore household spending and small business hiring and restore hope to the long-term unemployed.

While the private sector has been adding jobs, our unemployment rate remains stubbornly high because the public sector has shed more than 625,000 jobs nationwide in the past three years. As both private-sector and government economists have shown, unemployment would be nearly a point lower and economic growth would be up to two points higher were it not for federal fiscal tightening. And the reckless across-the-board budget cuts known as the sequester are making matters much worse.

By putting public workers — including teachers, police,

firefighters and construction workers — back on the job, the American Jobs Act will not only cut unemployment but also enable desperately needed improvements to our schools as well as to roads and seaports like I-95 and PortMiami. By providing tax credits to low- and middle-income workers, the American Jobs Act will boost Americans' purchasing power, giving our businesses more customers and more reason to hire. By eliminating the sequester, this updated version of the American Jobs Act will stop public-sector layoffs and improve conditions for everyone from soldiers to airline passengers to hospital patients to kids served by Head Start.

Ultimately, the American Jobs Act will do the most for those hit hardest by the Great Recession: the long-term unemployed. At least 4.4 million Americans have been unemployed for more than six months. These Americans have not only lost benefits — they're

draining their retirement savings in order to pay for food, healthcare and shelter for their families. This bill extends unemployment benefits, provides new tax credits to firms that hire workers who have been out of work for six months or longer, introduces innovative new retraining programs, and bans employers from discriminating against the long-term unemployed in hiring decisions.

This should not be a partisan issue. The American Jobs Act comprises bipartisan ideas like middle-class tax relief and a business-led infrastructure bank. As the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office demonstrated with the president's 2011 bill, the American Jobs Act would actually reduce budget deficits over a 10-year period. The only responsible way to repair our federal budget is to get people working again so they can start earning their own income and start contributing to the tax base. We cannot cut our way to economic growth.

It's time for members of Congress to look in the mirror: The public has lost trust because lawmakers have stopped addressing real people's struggles. The best way to right this wrong is to pass a strong and comprehensive jobs bill.

U.S. Rep. Frederica Wilson represents Florida District 17 in Congress.

