

Folks, this past week in Washington, DC, Congress passed an important measure to prevent a looming tax increase for all Americans on January 1, 2011. The simple truth is higher taxes do not get anyone hired. Our economy continues to struggle, and unemployment is too high because of the uncertainty and skyrocketing spending coming out of Washington. To get our economy moving again, people must get back to work, bring income home to pay their bills, put a roof over their heads, and inject life into the economy. This bill's "cost", cited as a reason to oppose the measure by some, assumes that taxpayer dollars earned next year belong to the government! Only in Washington does that logic make sense. The bill, signed by the President on Friday, December 17, certainly was not perfect, but it's critical that a tax hike on American families is stopped.

Another important issue coming out in the news this week was the year-end report on the conditions and progress in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The report cited the progress in Afghanistan as I witnessed myself just a few weeks ago during my recent visit. The report also noted, however, that the progress is "fragile, reversible," and in the same breath, encourages a drawdown of military forces within seven months. I believe this does a disservice to the men and women who have already served and are currently serving in Afghanistan. We must work to succeed there to prevent terrorists from establishing a safe haven where they can plan attacks against others, including the United States. Instead of plotting our exit strategy, we must be thoughtful about achieving our mission there outside of arbitrary deadlines. Above all, the credit for progress in degrading the Taliban's strength cited within the report is due to the brave men and women on the ground in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is their hard work and unwavering sacrifice which stands as the force for good and progress within the region. During my recent visit, I was encouraged by the high morale of our men and women serving to create a more stable Middle East Region and ultimately for the safety and security of this country. It's my hope that we remain focused on defeating those who wish to do us harm; and continue unwavering in our support for those on the front lines there.

As we look forward to 2011, Congress's next step to get our economy moving is to address the debt and deficit problem – the first order of business in January. As we begin the 112th Congress, my first priority will be to rein in spending and cut out waste, fraud and abuse in the federal budget. Our future lies not in the size of government, but in the people who drive this country's prosperity: the entrepreneurs, the innovators, and those who work hard to achieve their American Dream.

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