

minutes since our friend, Senator CORNYN, is here for his remarks.

These words were actually written by a human being. The only thing more bizarre than the fact somebody thought they made sense was the language was then made law by another group called the Congress. So there is a reason the dictionary definition of the adjective "taxing" means "wearingly burdensome."

This burden is especially hard on small businesses. Small businesses are the engine that keeps our country going, but it is amazing they can move at all under the weight of what the Tax Code subjects them to.

The National Association of the Self-Employed is today releasing results of a survey of their members that shows what the 45 million small businesses and self-employed persons are going through with their taxes.

The group's survey, for example, found that almost one in five people who had gone to the IRS to get answers to their tax questions got conflicting responses, sometimes even from the same office.

The time small businesses waste complying with the tax laws is mind-boggling. Thirty-one percent of them recently said they spent 20 percent or more of their time every week on paperwork and other tax-related preparations. That is 1 day a week totally lost to tax preparation. That is a huge penalty that is being imposed on small business for complying with the rules of the IRS.

Another group suffering with our Tax Code is our older people. During the 2004 tax year, the IRS mailed 200,000 error notices to older Americans who miscalculated their taxes. Mr. President, 34,000 went to taxpayers who received the same notice in 2 tax years; 10,000 went to taxpayers who received it in 3 tax years.

What does all this tell you? It tells you the IRS cannot make their explanations understandable to the Nation's older people.

There was one word that kept coming up in this survey over and over. The people surveyed said: You have to simplify the Code, simplify our tax system.

That is what I am trying to do with the legislation I have introduced as a Member of the Senate Finance Committee. It is called the Fair Flat Tax Act, and it eases the burden on our taxpayers by offering them a simplified 1040 Form. Instead of this kind of mumbo-jumbo, it is 1 page, 30 lines for every individual taxpayer. The folks over at Money magazine, the financial publication, took the one-page 1040 form in the fair flat tax, and they could fill out their taxes in just 15 minutes.

The legislation makes our code flatter. It collapses the current system of six individual tax brackets down to three. The fair flat tax eliminates scores and scores of special interest tax breaks. The revenue derived from these changes is used to hold down the rates for everybody and keep progressivity.

More importantly, with the fair flat tax everybody in America has a chance to get ahead. There is a new opportunity with this legislation to promote economic growth, to grow the American economic pie, which is especially important during these times of great economic uncertainty.

One last point. For all of us on the Finance Committee—and I think Senators of both parties understand this—there is a Tax Code meltdown coming. The child tax credit ends in 2010, the marriage penalty roars back in 2011, and it comes back harsher than ever. The same meltdown is going to hit other income taxes—capital gains, dividend taxes—and if Congress doesn't come up with a thoughtful and responsible bipartisan solution, there is going to be new chaos in the world of taxes.

I have tried this afternoon to be a little bit lighthearted in discussing what is certainly a pretty dry topic for most Americans. But when you look at what they are going through tonight, if you are middle class and you are dealing with AMT, this is obviously not a laughing matter. The people of this country need tax reform, and they need it now. The fair flat tax would make our system simpler, fairer, and more progrowth. It makes sense for individuals, for families, and the businesses of our country. The Congress cannot any longer ignore the tax meltdown that is coming. It is time to fix the broken American tax system and eliminate this kind of needless suffering that so many of our citizens are going to endure over the next 33 hours.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CORNYN. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Mr. CORNYN pertaining to the introduction of S. 2852 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

COLOMBIAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I have been listening to my friend and colleague, Senator WYDEN, talk, and I am going to study his bill. It sounds like it is an answer to a long overdue problem and one that, as he said, is a train wreck getting ready to happen. This is something we ought to be able to work on in a bipartisan fashion, and I look forward to studying his proposal.

I want to spend just a few minutes talking about another important issue when it comes to our economy and job creation, and that is the Colombian Free Trade Agreement, which the Speaker of the House, last week, said she would not allow to come to the floor of the House of Representatives.

It now remains indefinite as to when, if ever, that free-trade agreement would be allowed to come to the floor.

It is very important for the public to understand that this is more than just about free trade. It does, not coincidentally, create a market in Colombia for about \$2.3 billion in goods and farm commodities sold by the State of Texas into Colombia. And because of a previous Andean Free Trade Agreement, actually Colombian goods coming into the United States bear no duty or tariff, but goods made or grown in Texas or throughout the United States currently bear a duty that would be eliminated by this Colombian Free Trade Agreement.

Now, that is important because it creates jobs and opportunity in the United States. It levels the playing field, and it creates a situation where Colombia and the United States can become equal partners when it comes to commerce and international trade.

But this is important for many other reasons. Because of the war on terror, much of our attention recently, of course, has been focused on the Middle East. But we must be careful not to neglect other parts of the world that are also very important to U.S. security and our economic prosperity, and that is particularly the case in our own hemisphere. Not the least of these important regions is one of the closest to us; that is, Latin America. Unfortunately, Latin America's close proximity hasn't always translated into close ties and friendships. We have seen firsthand and heard firsthand how some Latin American leaders—most notably Hugo Chavez of Venezuela—have taken strong stances against the United States. That is one reason it is so important we embrace wholeheartedly our friends and allies and partners in the region.

Countries that share our focus on freedom and democracy and work with us to fight against terrorism and the spread of narcotics need our support to counter those who support, tacitly or otherwise, the spread of hateful anti-American ideology and militant extremism and criminal drug cartels. We must remember, if we do not stand with our friends, if we do not stay involved in Latin America, someone else will.

Already, nations such as China and Iran have dramatically increased their alliances and influence within the region. Not long ago, President Ahmadinejad of Iran toured Latin America, strengthening Iran's ties to the likes of Hugo Chavez and leaders of the terrorist group known as FARC.

Not long ago, I met with the commander of the U.S. Southern Command, the U.S. military official who is in charge of that region from the standpoint of the Department of Defense, Admiral James Stavridis, and I talked with him about current issues, current developments, and challenges that our Nation faces in his area of responsibility, which includes Latin

America. He made it very clear to me that there is a real threat of the spread of terrorism in Latin America. A major component of that threat that remains is this so-called Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, in short.

It is noteworthy that recently, when Colombian forces tracked down FARC rebels who happened to be across the border in Ecuador, they confiscated not only some computers, but they were able to confiscate 66 pounds of uranium in the hands of the FARC in Latin America. That is something that ought to cause all of us pause, and ask a lot of questions—for what purpose did they have 66 pounds of uranium in Latin America?

The FARC continues to carry out terrorist attacks throughout the region, which has caused the death of numerous innocent Colombians. They finance their terrorist activities through two of the most despicable forms of criminal activity imaginable—kidnapping and selling deadly drugs. Worst of all, the FARC continues to find sanctuary from Colombian prosecution inside neighboring countries such as Venezuela. If we do not stand firmly behind Colombia, we will see the advance of both terrorist organizations in Latin America and the smuggling of illegal drugs into the United States.

If drug smuggling were not enough to convince us of the need to support our friends and allies in Colombia, we should consider the potential boost to terrorist organizations throughout the world that might otherwise occur. Through lessons learned in the poppy fields of Afghanistan, we have been made painfully aware that the drug trade often finances global terrorism. Without a strong ally in Colombia to fight the expansion of drug cartels and terrorist-backed drug trade, global terrorism will find new financial roots from which to grow and carry out its murderous plans.

I have had the privilege of traveling to Colombia and meeting with President Uribe personally. He affirmed to me his commitment to fighting back against illegal drugs and terrorism in his own country, and he expressed a sincere desire to continue to work closely with the United States.

We have a chance now to further solidify that purpose with our best ally in Latin America. The Colombian people have heard the call to democracy and freedom and they are taking it seriously. We owe it to them and we owe it to ourselves to demonstrate that the United States is a nation they can depend on.

While there is no doubt that more can be done to fully cement the principles of equality and justice, their commitment to the very same principles and rights we hold dear in this country is undeniable. The Colombian people deserve our firm support and it is time for the United States to enter into a free trade agreement with them.

As I mentioned last year, Texas led the Nation in exports to Colombia.

Even with damaging Colombian tariffs, Texas manufacturers and farmers sold \$2.3 billion worth of products to that nation. This agreement will remove those tariffs and allow Texas manufacturers and producers to sell even more goods to this large and growing market. When this market is open, employers will be able to hire more Texans to work in good, high-paying jobs, right here at home.

I might add, at a time when we are concerned about immigration into the United States by people who cannot find work where they live, this is another way for us to deal with our border security issues and our broken immigration system, by creating trading partners who are able to create jobs in Latin America so people do not have to come to the United States to find hope and opportunity.

Already, Colombia has been granted one-way preferential access to our markets. That country has added jobs to keep pace with growing trade in the United States and now it is time to bring it full circle. This agreement will implement two-way trade and it will level the playing field for our own manufacturers and exporters and create jobs right here at home. At a time when our economy has suffered a bit of a downturn, it strikes me as something desirable, to look for ways to bolster, indeed increase, jobs right here at home. This free trade agreement would be one way to do that.

Open trade helps boost the economy and it is an essential ingredient to the growth of businesses, jobs, and our economy in general. But despite the numerous positive aspects to this agreement with Colombia, some of my colleagues continue to fight against it. In any other setting, it would be comical to lay side by side their complaints against this partnership with their vows to work with foreign governments, to supposedly improve our image in the world. While many of those on the left have vowed to work with enemies such as Hugo Chavez and sit down with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, they balk at the prospect of strengthening ties and working with our greater Latin American ally. How ironic indeed. It would seem their willingness to pander to some supersedes their desire to restore our image internationally. Shouldn't we be more willing to work with our friends and allies than our enemies?

Now, more than a year after the President first began working with Congress on this agreement, and 90 days away from our scheduled recess, the majority is outraged. Speaker PELOSI particularly is outraged that this agreement is on the fast track and the President actually asked they vote on the agreement. It is sometimes comically tragic to compare the work we do here in Washington with the jobs ordinary Americans do every day. Only in Congress would a 3-month deadline not be enough to finish a project that started about a year ago.

I hope the Speaker of the House will reconsider and not take the Colombian free trade agreement with all of its ramifications as merely a negotiating chip she can use against other projects in which she is interested. We have seen that happen already with the Foreign Intelligence Act modernization. The failure of the House to pass that bill has left us literally deaf to emerging terrorist activity that cannot be monitored because of the failure to pass the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. Why the Speaker of the House would compound that mistake and add insult to injury now by sticking a thumb in the eye of one of our greatest trading partners and allies in Latin America frankly escapes me.

I hope she will reconsider. This free trade agreement is in the best interests of the United States. It will help create jobs here at home during a time of a softening economy. It will allow us to have a closer working partnership with one of our best allies in the region and to demonstrate to the likes of Hugo Chavez and Raoul Castro that being a friend to America produces some reward, which is closer economic ties and a better quality of life and security for all.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

FLAT TAX

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, today most Americans are struggling with filling out their tax returns which are due tomorrow. This week I am introducing legislation that will make it possible for an American taxpayer to file his or her tax return on one page, a one-page optional flat tax on individuals and businesses at the rate of 19 percent for the first two years and 17 percent thereafter. Think what a change that would be. Taxpayers spend an average of over 26 hours to complete tax returns; and 13.6 hours just to complete form 1040.

Think how different it would be to simply fill out one page and turn that in. In 2005, taxpayers spent 6 billion hours and approximately \$265 billion to comply with the Tax Code. Think how much extra leisure time or productive work time we could have if every American had the option of a one-page simplified tax return.

Mr. President, \$705 was the estimated compliance cost for a Tennessean in 2005. And operating costs for the Internal Revenue Service almost tripled between 1970 and 2004. Think how much money we would save if every American had the option of filing a one-page, 17-percent flat tax and if every American business had the option of doing the same.

Here is what the optional flat tax legislation I will be introducing this week will do. As I mentioned earlier, it will simplify the Tax Code by providing an optional flat tax on individuals and