

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Conference Committee Meeting
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Mr. Chairman, we have a very important job to do – and we need to do it promptly and without holding the American people hostage to advance a partisan agenda. We can't put the country through the brinksmanship we did last December.

Here's what I believe we must do.

We should enact a full year's extension of the payroll tax reduction. We should enact a full year's extension of unemployment insurance benefits. And we should protect seniors by solving the problem of inadequate payment for physicians under Medicare.

The first two items on our agenda – extending the payroll tax reduction and unemployment insurance – are temporary measures made necessary by the lingering economic effects of the Wall Street collapse. But the third item – ensuring adequate compensation of doctors providing care to seniors – is a recurring problem. The answer should be a permanent solution, not another short-term fix that only makes the long-term problem worse.

These are goals I hope everyone on this conference shares. Our challenge will not be in agreeing on these priorities; it will be in whether and how we pay for them.

Unemployment benefits have traditionally been covered on an emergency basis, without offsetting savings. That should be our guide here. There is also a case to be made for extending the payroll tax reduction on an emergency basis. We shouldn't weaken its stimulative effect by pulling money out of the economy somewhere else.

I recognize that not everyone on this conference shares this view with regard to every provision being discussed. If we need pay-fors for some of these provisions, we should look first to raising revenues from millionaires who pay less in taxes than the secretaries who work for them or the waiters and waitresses who serve them meals.

There are plenty of corporate loopholes we should close that would raise billions. With oil prices at \$100 a barrel, the special tax breaks for oil companies deserve to be at the very top of our list.

And we should also take seriously the suggestion by the American Medical Association, the hospitals, and others to use the war savings to help find a permanent solution to Medicare's physician payment formula. President Obama kept his promise to end the costly war in Iraq and is in the process of ending the war in Afghanistan. We have savings as a result. They should be on the table.

I would also support raising revenue through spectrum auctions if we can get the policy right.

The House spectrum provisions are objectionable in their current form. They contain special-interest provisions that appear to be designed to benefit AT&T and Verizon at the expense of market competition. They stymie innovation by limiting the authority of the FCC to allocate broadcast spectrum for Super WiFi and other unlicensed uses. And they are opposed by police and firefighters across the nation because of glaring deficiencies in their public safety provisions.

I am prepared to negotiate in good faith with Republican conferees to clean up this title of the bill. If we can do that, we can raise \$15 billion or more by buying under-utilized spectrum from TV broadcasters and reselling it at a higher price to wireless carriers facing growing spectrum shortages.

We have the chance in this conference to strengthen our economy and protect vulnerable seniors and the unemployed. Let us not squander this opportunity.

The bill passed by House Republicans in December is full of provisions that would harm Medicare, cut Medicaid, and undermine the Affordable Care Act. They raise premiums for millions of seniors and families, jeopardizing the promise of Medicare and affordable private health insurance coverage for American families. We must categorically reject these provisions.

We need to get this done. We should learn the lessons of last year and move forward on a businesslike basis to complete the work on issues over which we are in fundamental agreement – and leave the political games behind us. We have a whole election year to play those games. We only have one month to do the job this conference has been assigned.