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By Rep. Tom Rooney

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Unless Congress acts soon, your taxes will go up on Jan. 1 .

This \$3.9 trillion tax increase - the largest in history - would hit all taxpayers, including the 75 percent of small-business owners that file taxes as individuals and are responsible for nearly two-thirds of private-sector job creation.

With our economy on the ropes and unemployment in Florida still above 11 percent, this job-killing tax hike on families and small businesses is the last thing we need. Small-business owners want to invest and hire new workers, but instead they're bracing themselves for costly new tax increases.

Freezing taxes at their current levels would immediately give our small-business owners and entrepreneurs the confidence they need to jump-start their businesses and help put Americans back to work. Although a majority in Congress and across the country supports this common sense, bipartisan position, the Democratic leadership remains committed to increasing taxes on higher earners and small businesses.

To make matters worse, Democrats recently announced that they would not take any action on taxes until after the election, leaving families and small-business owners in limbo. That is unconscionable. Small businesses cannot grow and hire new workers under the threat of \$3.9 trillion tax hike. We need to act now.

Democrats looking to raise taxes argue that we cannot extend all of the tax cuts because our deficits are too high. That is a false argument. We have record deficits because Washington spends too much, not because our taxes are too low. In 2008, federal spending per household was \$25,000. Today, it's \$31,000, and under President Obama's most recent budget, it would reach \$36,000 by 2020. That is unsustainable.

Higher taxes and higher deficits are both fiscally irresponsible and deeply damaging to our economy. In order to grow, we must not increase taxes; we must lower tax rates while cutting spending to reduce the deficit.

For the past four years, Democrats in Congress have written 10-year budgets that kept projected deficits artificially low by assuming the \$3.9 trillion tax increase would offset their massive spending binges. The lone exception was this year, when Democrats refused even to write a budget. As a result, the \$13 trillion debt they have created will grow by \$3.9 trillion over the next 10 years if the cuts are extended but not offset.

The alternative is to make some tough decisions to cut waste and rein in big government. I have identified more than \$4 trillion in spending cuts that Congress could enact immediately, which not only would pay for extending the tax cuts but also would be a good start toward curbing the debt.

By freezing discretionary spending at pre-2008 levels and setting strict caps on spending, we could save \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years.

Ending the failed stimulus and TARP programs, which have significantly added to the deficit but have done little if anything to grow the economy, would save \$426 billion and \$266 billion, respectively.

Two million Americans have cast votes through the YouCut program to cut wasteful spending programs, ranging from taxpayer subsidies for union activities to funds for non-reformed welfare. By overcoming Democratic objections and enacting each winning YouCut proposal, we could save \$154.5 billion. Cutting earmarks in half would save nearly \$100 billion over 10 years.

Last year, the federal government spent more than \$110 billion on improper payments to individuals and contractors - payments that went to the wrong person or for the wrong reason, either by error or as a result of a scam. Phasing out improper payments by federal agencies would save approximately \$980 billion over the next 10 years. The federal government currently wastes \$25 billion annually maintaining unused or vacant properties; that's \$250 billion over 10 years.

As a former Medicare fraud prosecutor, ending fraudulent payments is one of my top priorities - and it would save \$470 billion, without compromising patient care. I have spent the past two years fighting to end the wasteful alternate engine program for the Joint Strike Fighter, which would save \$3 billion.

Cutting payments for in-flight upgrades for federal employees (\$1.46 billion), stopping payments for unused labs at the National Institutes of Health (\$156 million), and following efficiency recommendations from the Department of Health and Human Services (\$90 billion), would be a good start.

Enacting these cuts would save American taxpayers more than \$4.24 trillion over the next 10 years, which would not only pay to extend tax relief, but would also put us on the path to end deficits and pay down the debt. Now is the time to listen to our small business owners, listen to working families, and stop this massive tax hike. But that's only the first step. We must also get serious about cutting waste and reining in out-of-control spending.

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