

The House of Representatives has been in session since Thanksgiving, but aside from a few post office naming resolutions, it hasn't been doing much of the people's business.

But over the last few days, Republican leaders have been in close negotiations with the White House over the 2001-2003 tax cuts that are set to expire at the end of this month. This morning, they announced a bipartisan agreement to extend the current tax cuts for all earners for two years and extend the middle class Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) for some 21 million households. The compromise tax cut package also includes a 13 month extension of unemployment benefits and limits the estate tax to thirty-five percent for estates worth more than \$5 million.

The main question that remains is whether Speaker Pelosi and the Democrat controlled House will allow this bipartisan compromise package to be voted on in the House. Despite President Obama's willingness to sit down and work with Republican leadership on this plan, the Speaker has not yet signaled a similar bipartisan commitment.

I don't like everything about this package. And I will not compromise in ways that ultimately hurts the people of Missouri. But, on balance, I think this is a package that is necessary for the economy. We cannot pile an enormous tax increase onto a weak economy and expect economic growth.

As we enter the Christmas holiday season, 9.8% of Americans and 9.4% of Missourians are unemployed. Getting Americans back to work should be our top priority as lawmakers - but we cannot do that without understanding some basic economic realities. The top 10% of income earners pay 70% of income taxes, while the bottom 40% of wage earners pay nothing. Many of the top earners in our country are also employers. We simply cannot expect job growth when we tax away the capital business owners need to expand their businesses and hire new employees.

While we don't know exactly when or if the tax cut package will come up for consideration, I have been told that the current House leadership expects to consider a continuing resolution for funding the government. It is also possible that they will hold a vote on the controversial DREAM Act, legislation which would permit illegal immigrants to receive in-state tuition at public colleges and universities.

