

I voted Yes on the Senate amendment to H.R. 8, the American Taxpayer Relief Act.

On January 1, 2013, the 2001 and 2003 Bush-era tax cuts temporarily expired for all American taxpayers regardless of income level. This bill restored the vast majority of that tax relief for 99 percent of taxpayers, and virtually all citizens of the 24th Congressional District.

Specifically, the American Taxpayer Relief Act would permanently extend income tax cuts for taxpayers earning up to \$400,000 per year or \$450,000 for married couples. This amounts to virtually all taxpayers in our part of upstate New York. Under the bill, important tax relief is also provided to protect middle class families from the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT), the death tax, capital gains and dividend rates, among others. Important tax credits like the Child Tax Credit, Earned Income Tax Credit, and the adoption tax credit are also extended in this package.

This legislation also averted a scheduled 27 percent decrease in Medicare physician reimbursement rates. A cut of this magnitude would have forced many providers out of the Medicare program, leaving seniors with fewer healthcare options and further exacerbating the access-to-care crisis in upstate New York. H.R. 8 also extended several Medicare programs that our local hospitals and first responders rely on such as the rural ambulance payments, payment adjustments for low-volume hospitals, and the Medicare-dependent hospital program. Without these important provisions, the entire health care delivery system in upstate New York would have been at risk.

I am also pleased that this legislation repealed the flawed CLASS Act, which was created by the President's health care law. Intended to provide long-term care insurance to seniors, the program was shelved in October 2011 by the Obama Administration once it was determined that the program, as designed, would never be solvent. Repealing the CLASS Act will protect taxpayers from the risks of funding a new, open-ended entitlement program and instead allow Congress to consider workable solutions to improve access to long-term care coverage.

H.R. 8 also extends the emergency unemployment insurance program for an additional year to further assist jobless New Yorkers as they seek to rejoin the workforce. Importantly, this provision maintains several significant reforms initially approved in February 2012 that established job search requirements, required beneficiaries to work towards a GED, and allow

states an option to drug test recipients.

The bill replaced the scheduled "sequestration" spending cuts to defense and non-defense programs for January and February 2013 with alternative savings of equal value to reduce the deficit in a smarter manner. Sequestration's across-the-board cuts would negatively impact Rome Lab, DFAS and defense businesses in New York, as well as indiscriminately cutting priority domestic programs.

Finally, the bill would extend the Farm Bill with some modifications through the end of Fiscal Year 2013. While I would have preferred much more reform to agriculture programs to improve them for farmers and save taxpayer dollars, this extension was included to provide certainty to agriculture and especially provide dairy producers with support such as the MILC program and avoid a spike in milk prices for consumers.

I am pleased that the fiscal cliff has been resolved in a bipartisan manner. This deal was not perfect, and there are frankly some parts of it with which I don't agree. But the responsibility of governing requires compromise for the benefit of constituents and country and this vote embodied that notion.

Most importantly, this bill provides tax cuts – permanently – for 99 percent of Americans and virtually all of my constituents. This is a big win for Upstate taxpayers, families, businesses and farms as well as the principles of fiscal responsibility. Moving forward, it is important that Congress pursue comprehensive tax reform to make our policies even more simple, fair and competitive.

I would have preferred to see much more in the way of long-term spending cuts to reduce our immoral national debt, as well as reforms to protect and strengthen Social Security and Medicare for future generations. I am committed to working to achieve these important goals throughout the new year and beyond.

The bill was approved by a vote of 257 – 167.