

# New Congress needs to create more jobs

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Members of the 112th Congress have their work cut out for them if they don't want to meet the same fate as many members of the 111th Congress. They've got to do something to create jobs.

The official unemployment rate is 9.6 percent, but the underemployment rate is higher at 17.1 percent, according to the Labor Department.

In addition, wages are falling. According to the Social Security Administration, median wages fell by \$253 a year. Half of working Americans earned less than \$26,261 last year. That's barely above the national poverty line of \$22,050 for a family of four.

Here are three things Congress can do to restore good-paying jobs in America: reform trade policy, provide pension relief and modernize our infrastructure.

The decline of our manufacturing base is alarming. We must stop sending jobs and factories to countries with cheaper labor costs and lower environmental standards. But to do this, we need to fix our trade policy and review existing trade agreements.

Public Citizen concluded that House Democrats who campaigned on fair trade for open seats or in competitive races were three times more likely to win than Democrats who ran against fair trade. Only 37 candidates ran in support of more North American Free Trade Agreements - and about half of them lost.

So the time may be ripe to pass a trade reform bill introduced by Rep. Mike Michaud, D-Maine, and Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio. The TRADE Act requires that workers' rights be protected and that citizens' rights take precedence over foreign investors' rights.

An important point about the TRADE Act is that it would prevent future trade deals from forbidding "Buy American" policies.

According to a poll by Greenberg Quinlan Rosser, a majority of voters supported the message "We are committed to 'made in America,' working to support small businesses, American companies and new American industries."

Pension relief is another need. Unless we can protect the retirement security of baby boomers, we will not make room for new workers.

A bill introduced in the House and the Senate would help shore up pension plans and preserve jobs.

Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., sponsored the Senate version. The House version was sponsored by Rep. Earl Pomeroy, D-N.D., and Rep. Pat Tiberi, R-Ohio. Pomeroy lost his race for re-election, but there's no reason the bill can't get another sponsor.

Finally, Congress can pass another jobs program by appropriating money to modernize our infrastructure. This time, though, Congress should be sure to include "Buy American" and "Hire American" provisions for infrastructure projects.

Whatever the 112th Congress ends up doing, it had better do something to create jobs. Otherwise, many of its members will be looking for a new one two years from now.

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