



March 25, 2010

The Honorable Ann Kirkpatrick
United States House of Representatives
1123 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Kirkpatrick:

On behalf of the 362,000 members of the National Taxpayers Union (NTU), I write to offer our support for H.R. 4720, your Taking Responsibility for Congressional Pay Act. This legislation would reduce the salaries of Members of Congress by 5 percent and block automatic pay increases in 2011.

Rank-and-file Members of Congress currently make an annual salary of \$174,000 (nearly double the median household income of about \$90,000 for the Washington, DC metro area, including wealthy suburbs). This sum does not include taxpayer funds used for lavish pensions, health plans, and generous allowances for travel, staff, and office expenses. Given the current economic climate, it is inexcusable for Congress to pad its already sizeable compensation package as our nation continues to face 10 percent unemployment.

Thanks to a series of post-World War II measures, culminating in a 1989 “ethics” law, Members of Congress have sought to avoid accountability for salary hikes. Annual pay raises are now tied to the Labor Department’s Employment Cost Index. COLAs [Cost of Living Adjustments] now take effect once the TTHUD bill [or in recent years the Financial Services Appropriations Bill] becomes law, although taxpayers would never be able to identify any language in the bill that appears to authorize these pay grabs. Members of Congress would need to specifically vote on, or insert, language blocking the raise if they do not want the increase to occur. Taxpayers are thus condemned to fight a bizarre annual battle over a COLA whose existence is only recognized when Congress opts to block it.

H.R. 4720 would also mark Congress’ first pay cut in 77 years. Like present times, families scrimped and saved to make ends meet during the Great Depression. Our representatives should be doing the same.

While we would like to see stronger language that blocks increases past 2011, we applaud your effort in drafting H.R. 4720 and look forward to working with you to ensure its passage.

Sincerely,

Jordan Forbes
Federal Government Affairs Manager