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Business as Usual: The Assault on American Workers

By [Bracken Hendricks](#) and [Skye Perryman](#), [AlterNet](#)

December 11, 2003

This week, the House passed a spending bill that could cut overtime benefits for nearly 8 million Americans. The newest scheme devised by President Bush and his Congressional Republicans reclassifies workers in relatively low paying jobs who have supervisory roles, as being exempt from overtime pay. According to the AFL-CIO, the measure could affect the pocketbooks of our police officers, nurses, retail workers, medical therapists and insurance claims adjusters – cutting into the paychecks of working families. Such a reclassification would allow employers to shift new burdens onto these workers without compensating them for their extra efforts on the job.

This latest action flies in the face of the will of congress, and the desires of most Americans. Earlier this session, both the House of Representatives and the Senate – in bipartisan majorities – passed bills to protect overtime pay under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). But the Republican leadership in the House ignored the voices of the American people and stripped workers of this basic protection anyway. The Republican move not only disregards the majority of both houses of congress, but it also ignores the hundreds of thousands of American workers who have made their voices heard by speaking out to President Bush and their elected representatives over recent months.

This holiday season more than 8.7 million Americans are without work – for the unemployed, a jobless economic recovery is no recovery at all.

"Compassionate" conservatives have responded by blocking efforts to extend benefits to the unemployed, offering millionaires tax cuts instead of real economic stimulus, and now, by slashing overtime pay protections for those who remain employed.

In the absence of a real plan for the economy, the Bush administration has offered our nation an economic "growth" strategy built on tax breaks for the rich, which siphon needed investment capital into off-shore tax havens, and an energy policy that rolls back protections for consumers, workers, and environment, while directing money from family budgets into the bank accounts of multi-national corporations and undemocratic oil rich states. The Bush economic plan undercuts the long-term welfare of our communities, our environment, and American working families.

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Instead of taking the low road to economic recovery by letting business cut costs on the backs of workers, what America needs now is new investment that creates real growth and broadly shared prosperity. To turn the economy around and create good jobs with living wages, we need to rebuild our infrastructure, revitalize our cities, restore manufacturing jobs, and respond to pressing challenges by investing in new technology.

Yesterday's blow to workers is just another example of the failed conservative philosophy of government that has taken over Congress and state houses across America. To change the governing philosophy in this country we need to do more than point out the bankruptcy of conservative economics: We need to offer a positive vision that people can get excited about and rally behind. Slashing overtime pay protection is just another corporate give-a-way, a transfer payment from the middle-class to the rich, more political pork at the expense of the public welfare.

It is time to draw the line.

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