

REPUBLICAN TAX PLAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on Monday, I was in Crystal Lake, IL, in the 6th Congressional District. I was joined by realtors and local elected officials to talk about how the GOP tax plan would hurt families in my home State of Illinois. The families in the 6th Congressional District would be hit especially hard since they are in the 12th highest district in terms of the benefit received from the State and local tax deduction—a deduction that is gutted in the Republican House tax plan.

Republicans released this plan last Thursday, have been marking it up in committee this week, with the plan to have it on the House floor next week.

It is already clear that this partisan plan does nothing more than double-down on some of the most damaging ideas from the framework congressional Republicans and the White House released in September—and the bill gets worse the closer you look.

The House Republican bill would bankroll massive tax cuts for the wealthy few and the largest corporations on the backs of hard-working families in Illinois and across the country.

The bill eliminates some of the most vital tax breaks for people in Illinois—making it so that struggling seniors no longer will be able to deduct costly out-of-pocket medical expenses and that the 1.5 million Illinoisans with Federal student loan debt will no longer be able to deduct the interest paid on those loans.

Congressional Republicans didn't stop at eliminating deductions for medical expenses and student loan interest.

Republicans want to take away one of the most valuable deductions for working families in this State—the State and local tax deduction.

Eliminating this deduction to fund a massive tax cuts for corporations and the ultrawealthy was a centerpiece of the Framework Republicans released earlier this year—a move that would raise taxes on one-third of all taxpayers.

After strong opposition within their ranks for eliminating the State and local tax deduction, the House Republican plan released last week proposes a “compromise” to obtain the support of congressional Republicans that represent States like Illinois.

This so-called compromise eliminates the tax deduction for State and local income taxes, and caps the deduction for property taxes, so instead of eliminating the deduction altogether, they just gut it. If you ask me, that is no compromise at all.

The result is still the same: middle-income families would still be double taxed when it comes to income, sales, and some property taxes—once by the Federal Government and again by the State.

This would make it more expensive for families to fund services at the local level like the local schools, police

and fire departments, and local roads and bridges.

Make no mistake, in Illinois—the State with the fifth highest number of taxpayers claiming the State and local tax deduction—would be hit especially hard. Nearly 2 million Illinoisans—roughly one-third of taxpayers in the State—claimed more than \$24 billion in State and local tax deductions in 2015 alone.

If Republicans are successful in eliminating or gutting this deduction, it will mean a tax hike for working families across Illinois.

If completely eliminated, a family of four living in a place like Crystal Lake making around \$76,000 per year would pay more than \$1,400 more in taxes each year.

And what do Republicans do with the money from raising taxes on one-third of middle-income families in Illinois? They give the ultrawealthy and the largest corporations a tax cut.

That is just plain wrong.

I urge House Republicans to oppose any tax plan that would raise taxes on middle-income families by gutting the State and local tax deduction in order to give cuts to the largest corporations and richest 1 percent.

TRIBUTE TO ANN CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to take a few minutes to thank Judge Ann Claire Williams for her extraordinary service to our country. After serving nearly two decades on the Seventh U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago, Judge Williams announced she would be retiring from the judiciary later this year.

Ann Claire Williams is a trailblazer. She is the first African American to serve on the Seventh U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals—an accomplishment that one judge called: “the desegregation of the 7th Circuit.” This was just another in a series of firsts for Judge Williams. She was one of the first two African-American women to clerk for judges on the Seventh Circuit. In 1985, Judge Williams became the first African American woman to become a U.S. District Court judge for the Northern District of Illinois. She served as chair of the Court Administration and Case Management Committee of the United States Judicial Conference—making her the first African American chair of a Judicial Conference committee. Judge Williams also became the first African American president of the Federal Judges Association. Simply put, almost every step of her career has broken new ground.

Born in Detroit, MI, Ann Claire Williams began her career as a third grade music teacher after graduating from Wayne State University with a bachelor's degree in elementary education and master's degree from the University of Michigan in guidance and counseling. Inspired by the television show “Perry Mason” the only lawyer she

knew growing up—and a competitive spirit, Ann decided to attend law school. She chose the University of Notre Dame and the rest is history—or more appropriately, the rest of her career made history.

Judge Williams has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards. Here are just a few: Chicago Lawyer 2000 Person of the Year; the Arabella Babb Mansfield Award from the National Association of Women Lawyers; the National Bar Association's Gertrude E. Rush Award; the American Bar Association's Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award; Chicago Inn of Court's Joel M. Flaum Award; American Judicature Society's Edward J. Devitt Distinguished Service to Justice Award; the Black Women Lawyers' Association of Greater Chicago's Pioneer Award; the Leadership Institute for Women of Color Attorneys, Inc.'s Breaking the Glass Ceiling Award; and was recognized by Newsweek Daily Beast as one of 2012's 150 Fearless Women in the World.

Judge Williams has always been proud of breaking barriers and her history of firsts, but she doesn't want to be the last. Throughout her career, she has been committed to training young lawyers. As a founding member of the Black Women Lawyers in Chicago, Judge Williams uses her story to inspire the next generation—and makes clear through her experiences that young women today can follow the path she paved to reach the top of their fields. She also serves as chairwoman of the Just The Beginning Foundation to help guide more minority law students into the legal profession. Under Judge Williams' leadership, the organization has grown to include programs for students in high school and middle school across the country. For all her achievements, it is her commitment to the future that is truly inspiring.

Recently, Judge Williams said.

You want to be nourished by people that understand your story and your experience. But once you're nourished that means you have to go out and deal with the broader world.

Well, Judge Williams has done just that. She serves on the board of Equal Justice Works, a nonprofit dedicated to creating a just society by training lawyers committed to working in the public interest, and despite her busy schedule, she has made time to travel to Ghana, Rwanda, Liberia, and Uganda to train judges and attorneys.

Judge Williams' career is groundbreaking, and she is a role model for countless young women of color—and an inspiration to the rest of us. I am proud to call her a friend.

I want to congratulate Judge Williams on an outstanding career and thank her for all she has done—and all she will continue to do. The country is grateful for her service. I wish her and her family all the best in her next chapter.

HONDURAS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I want to speak about a subject that many Senators are aware of and should be deeply concerned about.

As we remember, in the early morning hours of March 3, 2016, Honduras lost one of its most courageous and charismatic indigenous leaders, Berta Caceres. Ms. Caceres was the general coordinator of the National Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, COPINH. She was gunned down by assassins in her home in the village of La Esperanza, Intibuca.

Berta Caceres spent her life defending indigenous rights, particularly to land and natural resources. In 2015, she won the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for her outstanding activism and leadership. She and COPINH had been supporting land struggles throughout western Honduras, and because of that—because she was exercising rights guaranteed by Honduran law and international law—she and the communities that she and COPINH supported were the frequent targets of death threats.

In Rio Blanco, her organization and the community of Rio Blanco were threatened repeatedly as they engaged in peaceful protests to protect the river and their way of life from the construction of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam by DESA, a Honduran company supported by international banks.

It was as a result of the threats she received for supporting the Rio Blanco struggle that Ms. Caceres was granted precautionary measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. However, the Honduran authorities not only failed to protect her, they vilified her and other social activists like her.

Berta Caceres was an inspiration to people around the world, and her death was a terrible loss for people everywhere. As I said in this Chamber the day after her death:

The immediate question is what President Hernandez, and his government which has too often ignored or passively condoned attacks against Honduran social activists, will do to support an independent investigation, prosecution, and punishment of those responsible for this despicable crime. And beyond that, what steps will the government take to protect the many others, including members of COPINH, who are in need of protection, and to stand up for the rights of people like Berta who risk their lives peacefully defending the environment and their livelihoods.

Not surprisingly to those who are familiar with Honduran law enforcement, the investigation of the murder got off to a bad start. Not only was the crime scene at Ms. Caceres's home tampered with, the government's first response to the killing was to attempt to falsely pin the attack on her COPINH associates. When that went nowhere, they sought to intimidate the one eyewitness to the shooting, Gustavo Castro, a Mexican citizen who had been wounded. That also failed.

Thanks to intense international pressure including from the U.S. Embassy,

eight people were eventually arrested, including one active duty army officer and low-ranking employees of DESA, the hydroelectric company. This is notable, because the assassination of Berta Caceres was only the latest of more than 100 reported killings of environmental activists in Honduras since 2010. Since her death, there have been others. Investigators for Global Witness, a widely respected human rights organization that documented those crimes, were subjected to threats and spurious accusations by Honduran officials who sought to discredit their report. As far as I am aware, no one has been brought to justice for any of those crimes, and had it not been for the international outcry, there is no reason to think that Ms. Caceres's murder would have been treated any differently.

Shortly after the murder, due to the long history of impunity for killings of journalists and social activists, Ms. Caceres's family urged the Honduran Government to permit the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, IACHR, to send an independent team of legal experts to conduct their own investigation. Not only did the Honduran Government refuse, the Public Ministry has refused to share the bulk of the evidence with the Caceres family's legal representatives, as required by Honduran law.

The family also asked that independent forensic experts be allowed to analyze the ballistics and other evidence. The Honduran Government similarly rejected that request.

Like Ms. Caceres's family, I also called for an independent investigation and urged that the concession granted to DESA for the Agua Zarca project be abandoned. It clearly cannot coexist with the indigenous people of Rio Blanco who see it as a threat to their safety and way of life; yet while some of the international banks have withdrawn, it is 20 months since the murder of Ms. Caceres, and not only does DESA deny any responsibility, it refuses to cancel the project.

After the arrests of the eight suspects, there was hope that those who conceived of and paid for the assassination of Ms. Caceres would also be tracked down and captured, but that did not happen. For more than a year, there has been no further word from the Public Ministry about the case, except that the investigation is ongoing—a familiar refrain in Honduras where criminal investigations have a way of either never beginning, or never ending.

The U.S. Embassy also repeatedly assured me and others who inquired that the investigation was being handled professionally in accordance with the highest standards. It now appears that was uninformed, wishful thinking.

After the Honduran Government refused to permit the IACHR to investigate, Berta Caceres's family arranged for an independent team of international human rights lawyers to con-

duct their own review of the evidence. Over a period of a year, the group, consisting of five experienced lawyers from the United States, Colombia, and Guatemala, known as the International Advisory Group of Experts, GAIPE, interviewed witnesses and analyzed what cell phone data and other evidence they could obtain from the Public Ministry. While the data they analyzed represented only a small fraction of what is known to exist, it included thousands of text messages that revealed a great deal.

There is now little doubt about the identities of at least some of the intellectual authors who conceived of and paid for the assassination of Berta Caceres; yet the Public Ministry has failed to act on this evidence, perhaps because it implicates DESA executives with ties to officials in the Honduran Government.

As I said on October 31, 2017, when GAIPE released the report of its investigation:

[t]his damning report corroborates what many have suspected—that the investigation of Berta Caceres' murder has been plagued by incompetence, attempts to stonewall and deflect blame to protect those who conceived of and paid for this plot, and a glaring lack of political will. The Public Ministry needs to fully disclose, without further delay, all testimony and electronic and ballistics evidence to the Caceres family's legal representatives and defendants' lawyers, as required by law. The Ministry also needs to ensure that every piece of evidence is properly safeguarded, and to follow the evidence wherever it leads to arrest those responsible. It is shameful that despite intense domestic and international pressure, this horrific case has languished, while those responsible have sought to derail it. And there are hundreds of other Honduran social activists and journalists who have been similarly threatened and killed, whose cases have not even prompted investigations.

It is important to note that the GAIPE report indicates that the evidence not only implicates DESA executives and employees, as well as Honduran state agents, in the surveillance, spreading of false information, and plot to assassinate of Berta Caceres; the evidence also reveals other crimes such as obstruction of justice, abuse of authority, and unlawful association. The report documents the shocking extremes to which the company was willing to go, including murder for hire, in pursuit of its financial goals.

In addition to immediately disclosing the evidence to the Caceres family and others who are entitled to it under Honduran law, the Public Ministry should act on the petition of the Caceres family's legal representatives to arrest the intellectual authors.

The Public Ministry should immediately ensure that all electronics and other evidence is adequately safeguarded to eliminate any risk of tampering. For whatever reason, much of the evidence is reportedly in the possession of the National Directorate of Investigations and Intelligence, and given the history in Honduras of evidence disappearing or being destroyed