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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2105

August 12, 2011

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The Honorable Barack Obama
President
United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

As you know, nationwide unemployment remains unacceptably high. The job numbers released earlier this month show that the private sector added only 154,000 jobs. While this number was higher than expected and marked the 15th straight month of private sector growth, it also demonstrated that our economy is simply not creating enough jobs to meet the needs of jobseekers. This is particularly true in some of the hardest hit areas in our country, such as my hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts, where unemployment is at 10.3%, and neighboring Lawrence, where it is 16.8%.

Despite the bleak jobs picture nationwide, the House of Representatives has not considered a single bill to spur job creation during 2011. In fact, no bills passed in the Republican-controlled House have created a single job, and many that have passed would lead to dramatic lay-offs. Much of the focus on Capitol Hill this year has instead been placed on deficit control and avoiding a possible default on paying our nation's bills. This debate has been necessary since we must find ways to reduce the deficit and find savings for the prosperity of our nation. I voted for the recently enacted deal to address the debt ceiling to ensure that we will not default on our obligations and to make a significant down payment on the debt. But with this deal in place, I welcome your decision to turn the national conversation toward initiatives that grow our economy and create jobs.

The cities of Lowell and Lawrence and many other communities throughout my district are struggling. I regularly hear from constituents who have lost jobs, some who have been looking for more than three years. In one example of many, I heard from a software engineer who, after months and months of looking and numerous interviews, finally found a new job only to be let go again when a new round of layoffs hit. His all too common story illustrates the need to break the cycle of long-term unemployment.

While the Recovery Act we enacted together two years ago stopped our economic freefall and did much to save jobs and prevent a deeper recession, it did not do enough to create new jobs in historically hard-hit communities like Lowell and Lawrence, two mid-sized post-industrial cities I represent. Almost two years ago I wrote to you calling for a short-term direct hires program

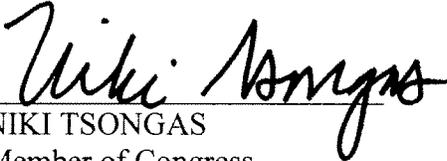
modeled after the work programs so successfully utilized by President Roosevelt during the Great Depression. Since then, the length and depth of the recession have only reinforced the need for such a program, which need not compete with private sector jobs but could help advance desperately-needed projects focused on public improvements and preservation efforts in our communities.

Furthermore, recalcitrance in Congress has proven that your leadership on job creation is needed now more than ever. As you evaluate legislative ideas to promote job creation, I ask that you consider the far-reaching impact of direct public service employment, particularly for jobs in infrastructure and in restoration and preservation of local and regional civic landmarks.

As you know, our nation's roads, bridges, waterways, and other transportation arteries are critical to our economic strength, yet many are in very serious need of attention and repair. Employing our citizens in the work of maintaining, improving and building critical infrastructure projects would both address our immediate economic needs and ensure our future competitiveness. Likewise, just as New Deal programs wisely promoted the arts, public service jobs today could focus on revitalizing and restoring publicly owned buildings that are historically, culturally or architecturally significant such as libraries, municipal buildings, city halls, auditoriums and theaters. Instead of allowing our civic treasures to further decline during this downturn, we can capitalize on this moment to create jobs, give our citizens an opportunity to contribute to their communities, and revitalize our cities while saving our civic, cultural and architectural heritage.

You face many tough choices as you weigh job creation strategies. Given the urgency of the crisis and the opportunity to make a lasting impact on our communities, I urge you to consider the benefits of direct employment.

Sincerely,


NIKI TSONGAS
Member of Congress