

... the GOP tax bill

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The federal top marginal tax rate decreases from 39.6 to 37 percent — for taxable income above \$500,000. That amounts to a \$32,500 a year tax cut for the top 1 percent, and a \$148,000 a year cut for richest one tenth of a percent of income tax payers.

The law schedules the individual tax cuts to expire after 2025, but not the corporate tax cuts.

Lowering the rates of income taxes on the rich is likely to worsen the rising inequality in the United States.

The 500-page tax package contains other notable elements:

- Lowers the tax on millionaire estates** Under current law, Americans can pass up to \$5.5 million to their heirs tax-free. The new law doubles the threshold, so now the first \$11 million of property, stocks and other assets won't be taxed (\$22 million for

married couples).

- Limits deductions for state and local taxes** Americans formerly could deduct all of what they paid in state and local taxes from the taxable income they report to the IRS. Going forward, those deductions will be limited to \$10,000 per tax filer.

- Doubles child tax credit** The child tax credit will now be \$2,000 per child.

- Ends the individual health insurance mandate** Starting 2019, the new law ends the \$695 per adult tax penalty that the Affordable Care Act imposed on uninsured individuals.

- Eliminates the corporate alternative minimum tax.** Lawmakers long ago realized that some tax filers had become so skilled at milking tax breaks that they paid no tax at all even when highly profitable, so Congress passed an alternative minimum tax formula to rein that in. That goes away in the new law.

- Raises the alternative minimum tax threshold for individuals.** Last year, the alternative minimum tax for personal income tax payers kicked in for

individuals earning over \$120,700 and married couples earning over \$160,900. Under the new law, that threshold is lifted to \$500,000 for individuals and \$1 million for married couples.

- Doubles the standard deduction** The standard deduction will now be \$12,000 (\$24,000 for couples.) That means many fewer households will have to itemize deductions. It also means lower taxes for lower-income taxpayers. But a separate change — eliminating the personal exemption of \$4,050 per taxpayer, will limit the benefit of this, especially for those with lots of children.

- Ends the tax deduction for union dues.** Corporations can deduct payments to lawyers to fight unions, but union members who itemize deductions can no longer deduct their union dues under the new law.

Labor leaders react

"Instead of giving a gigantic tax cut to the rich, Congress should focus on funding our domestic priorities."

— AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka



"At a time when big business is already pocketing sky-high profits and the top one percent of earners are seeing their incomes significantly grow, it is confounding why Congress would focus on increasing their wealth at the expense of the country's workers."

— Teamsters general president James Hoffa, Jr.

"America was the victim of a heist. The culprits were the world's richest people and corporate America, and behind the wheel of the getaway car sat the Republican Congress. Rest assured they will be held accountable for their grand larceny come election day in November 2018."

— Amalgamated Transit Union president Larry Hanley



...Retirees return to truck plant for the first time in decades

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worked 30-plus years, and retired with a pension.

"The retirees are the guys that built this plant and gave up a lot over the years to get where we're at now," said material handler Matt Milburn, a member of Teamsters Local 305. Matt, together with his brother Luke, walked their father Rick through the plant during the visit; he retired from Freightliner in 2005.

"My dad's been talking about it for days," Milburn said by phone Dec. 15. It meant a lot, seeing former coworkers for the first time in over a dozen years. Seeing retirees was a boost to the spirits of current employees too. "You won't find one union member down here that didn't think that was cool that they let them down here," Milburn said.

Seeing retirees looking healthy and happy also showed active members that there's a light at the end of the assembly line tunnel, and a reward for long years of hard work, said former Machinists Lodge 1005 shop steward Dilbert Greer. In 2013, after 35 years on the job, Greer became



ONE OF MANY SHOP FLOOR REUNIONS: Retirees Tam Vo, Scott Mills, and Greg Fast visit Robert Morris (in back).

the last of his family members to retire from the plant.

"We're all happy as clams because we have good pensions," Greer said. "It just tickled the hell out of all of us to be able to walk through and see Mother Freightliner again. It was our bread and butter forever."

Greer credited plant management for the trust placed in employees and visitors.

"The thing that shocked me the most was they said, 'Well you guys go on out and enjoy yourself, go wherever you want.' I was expecting they

were going to take us around in groups, shackle us all together, go where they wanted you to go and talk to who they wanted you to talk to. This was very free. And it went off without a hitch."

Though employees were at work on the shop floor, visiting retirees didn't get in the way of making trucks, said Lloyd Tolar, who's still on the job after 31 years. "Retirees were mindful that we were in production," Tolar said, and kept visits short.

Even just for a few minutes,

it was a very positive experience to see old and familiar faces, Tolar said.

"Retirees need to know that we appreciate them," Tolar said.

"I went down there to see my work brothers," said Painters Local 1094 member Greg Fast, who retired in 2016 after 39 years. "You see them on Facebook but it's still not the real McCoy... Everybody was surprised and had a smile on their face. They were glad to see us."

The idea for the walk-around

event originated on a private Facebook group that Carol Hassebroek set up last year for current and former truck plant workers and their families.

"The intent was to bring people together that hadn't seen each other in a long time," Hassebroek told the Labor Press.

Hassebroek retired last February after 37 years, and at the retiree walk-around, she saw former coworkers she hadn't seen since 1981.

"Everybody was just smiling and happy. I have never been a huggy person, but I was hugging everybody," Hassebroek said.

Hassebroek said Machinists chief steward Mike Housley helped make the visit happen, together with office support staff Ferrol Walton and Brenda Rendon, and of course, plant manager Mike Foley. There's talk of doing another one next year.

"It gives the people on the shop floor hope," Hassebroek said, that there's life after work, even after physically demanding work, on concrete, in steel-toed boots. "You see someone that's been out of there 30 years, and they still look okay, they can still walk. It gives you hope."