

## HOW THEY VOTED

WASHINGTON — Here's how members of Congress voted on major issues in the week ending April 20.

## HOUSE

**BUSINESS TAX CUTS:** Voting 235 for and 173 against, the House on April 19 sent the Senate a bill (HR 9) providing a 20 percent income tax cut to virtually all U.S. partnerships and corporations with fewer than 500 workers as a spur for economic growth. The break would be available to firms having from one to 499 employees, many of which meet the federal definition of "small business." Because the deduction would be capped at 50 percent of wages paid, companies would have an incentive to hire new workers or give pay raises to existing ones. But the bill does not require firms to use the benefit to expand payrolls, and they could receive it even if they were laying off workers or sending jobs abroad. Slated to last for the remainder of 2012, the tax cut is officially projected

to add \$46 billion to the national debt.

A yes vote was to pass the bill.

Minnesota > Voting yes: Tim Walz, D-1, John Kline, R-2, Erik Paulsen, R-3, Michele Bachmann, R-6, Chip Cravaack, R-8

Voting no: Betty McCollum, D-4, Keith Ellison, D-5, Collin Peterson, D-7

Wisconsin > Voting yes: Paul Ryan, R-1, James Sensenbrenner, R-5, Tom Petri, R-6, Sean Duffy, R-7

Voting no: Tammy Baldwin, D-2, Ronald Kind, D-3, Gwen Moore, D-4, Reid Ribble, R-8

**GOLF CLUBS, LOBBYISTS, PORNOGRAPHERS:** The House on April 19 refused, 179 for and 229 against, to deny tax cuts under HR 9 (above) to companies engaged in pornography, lobbying, drug trafficking or illegal prostitution. The Democratic motion also denied eligibility to companies that send U.S. jobs overseas, golf courses that discriminate in membership

on the basis of gender or race and firms that violate U.S. trade sanctions against Iran. Finally, the motion required members of Congress who would benefit from the bill's tax cut as a result of their business connections to disclose that fact to constituents.

A yes vote backed the motion.

Minnesota > Voting yes: Walz, McCollum, Ellison

Voting no: Kline, Paulsen, Bachmann, Peterson, Cravaack

Wisconsin > Voting yes: Baldwin, Kind, Moore

Voting no: Ryan, Sensenbrenner, Petri, Duffy, Ribble

**100-PERCENT DEPRECIATION:** Voting 175 for and 236 against, the House on April 19 defeated a Democratic substitute to HR 9 (above) that sought to replace the Republicans' 20 percent tax cuts for small businesses with a one-year extension of "100 percent bonus depreciation" for small businesses. The 100 percent write-off would enable manufacturers and other firms to

spur economic growth by depreciating the full value of plant and equipment purchases in a single year. Under normal IRS rules, depreciation in a single year is capped at 50 percent.

A yes vote backed the amendment.

Minnesota > Voting yes: Walz, McCollum, Ellison

Voting no: Kline, Paulsen, Bachmann, Peterson, Cravaack

Wisconsin > Voting yes: Baldwin, Kind, Moore

Voting no: Ryan, Sensenbrenner, Petri, Duffy, Ribble

## SENATE

**'BUFFETT RULE' ON TAXES:** Voting 51 for and 45 against, the Senate on April 16 failed to reach 60 votes needed to end GOP blockage of a bill (S 2230) to add the "Buffett Rule" to the U.S. Tax Code. The rule is named after investor Warren Buffett, who says it is wrong for wealthy people such as himself to pay taxes at a lower rate than their

secretaries pay. The bill would impose a minimum tax of 30 percent on households with at least \$1 million in income from salaries and/or investments. This would offset the fact that wealthy people tend to take more advantage of tax loopholes than do middle-class taxpayers, have a much lower share of income subjected to Social Security withholding and receive much of their income from long-term capital gains, which are taxed at preferential rates.

A yes vote was to advance the bill.

Minnesota > Voting yes: Al Franken, D, Amy Klobuchar, D

Voting no: None

Wisconsin > Voting yes: Herb Kohl, D

Voting no: Ron Johnson, R

**POSTAL SERVICE OVERHAUL:** Voting 74 for and 22 against, the Senate on April 17 started debate on a bill (S 1789) aimed at putting the money-losing U.S. Postal Service on a profitable basis by

Sept. 30, 2015, mainly through a restructuring that would sharply cut payroll, retirement and health care costs. As now written, the bill would authorize steps such as ending Saturday deliveries, closing or consolidating many of the country's 32,000 post offices, starting new delivery services and using buyouts to reduce the postal workforce by as much as 20 percent below its current 547,000 level. But the legislation is expected to undergo significant change as the Senate adopts amendments. The House has not yet taken up the issue.

No senator spoke against the bill.

A yes vote was to begin debating the bill.

Minnesota > Voting yes: Franken, Klobuchar

Voting no: None

Wisconsin > Voting yes: Kohl

Voting no: Johnson

Compiled by Voterama in Congress

CONTINUED FROM 1A

## &gt; Abandoned youth

Federal and state laws encourage reuniting children with their parents if possible, said Erin Sullivan Sutton, assistant commissioner for children and family services at the state Department of Human Services.

A child's wishes are just one factor in the equation, she said.

## MOM GAVE UP OTHER SONS

Sebastian's parents met in the late 1990s after work one night in downtown St. Paul, Cross told the Pioneer Press in a November interview.

Porter soon moved into Cross' Lakeville home. The couple got engaged, and Porter became pregnant with Sebastian.

At the time, Porter's four children had been placed in foster care after Ramsey County social workers accused her of neglecting them.

Documents filed in juvenile court paint a picture of how Porter cared for her sons.

The children were all boys, each with a different father, and were ages 7, 5, 3, and 2 months old in 1998 when the county took temporary custody.

Porter, who was then Katik Splittstoesser, would leave the children with an 84-year-old great-aunt who worked out of the home. The great-aunt worked downstairs, while the children were upstairs unsupervised. There was sometimes no food in the house.

A stranger reported Porter to the county after finding the 3-year-old in the middle of the street. Someone else said Porter was drinking every day when she was pregnant with her youngest son.

An evaluation in March 1999 determined that Porter abused alcohol but was not chemically dependent.

The county recommended that Porter participate in parenting programs and chemical-dependency counseling, but she refused.

In October 1999, Porter gave up parental rights for her three oldest sons but continued fighting for custody of the youngest.

The county determined that Porter had a history of mental health problems that included "multiple psychiatric symptoms, strong history of alcohol dependence, depression, panic disorder with agoraphobia, obsessive compulsive disorder and deferred borderline personality disorder" and created a treatment plan for her.

Porter eventually was able to keep the youngest son, who is now 13.

## HER TRANSFORMATION

"The woman she is today is a woman who loves her children, loves her family, works hard and sacrifices for all of her sons and is a good mom," said Emily Cooper, Porter's attorney.

Porter, 39, is not the same woman she was when Ramsey County took her children away, her attorney said.

The Dakota County court's recommendation to place Sebastian with his mother indicates how Porter has transformed herself, Cooper said.

Dakota County District Judge Richard Spicer, who is overseeing the case, would

not comment directly about Sebastian's situation.

After 22 years of reviewing child-protection cases, he said, a parent's troubled past is just one consideration.

"It does not carry as much weight as what is currently happening in their lives," Spicer said.

He said evaluations by psychologists and therapists can indicate a parent has fixed what troubled them.

"We work particularly hard toward that goal of reunification" with parents and the child, Spicer said. "It really is a team effort. There are an awful lot of people in these cases trying to promote the best interests of these children."

Porter wants Sebastian in her life again, her attorney said.

Porter has completed all of the court requirements, Cooper said, and for the first time in years is talking with Cross about what's best for their son.

"She wants her son with his parents," Cooper said.

## POLICE CALLS

Sebastian was born in 2000, and his parents — who never married — separated shortly after.

Cross was awarded custody of Sebastian in 2001, and Porter had visitation rights.

From July 2001 to June 2002, Lakeville police reports indicate they were called to the home 10 times. Cross called the police when Porter was late to pick up Sebastian and when she didn't have a car seat. He told police he wanted to document every dispute.

After an argument in August 2001, when they were exchanging custody, both of them were arrested. Cross said that Porter had assaulted him by grabbing his arm, and that a man with her threatened to fight him. He wanted her charged with fifth-degree assault.

Porter told police that she was running late and when she arrived, Cross yelled at her friend and pushed her, causing her to stumble.

Porter was convicted of disorderly conduct, court records show. Cross also was charged and convicted, but the conviction was later dismissed.

Porter lost visitation rights in 2002, court records show.

About two years later, Sebastian began asking about his mother, Cross said in the November interview. He told Sebastian that his mother was dead instead of telling him that she had left.

"I thought it was better for him," he said.

But others knew that Porter wasn't dead. Cross said he told his neighbors, Sebastian's teachers and the school principal that Porter had left. He said he planned to tell Sebastian later, maybe when he was a teenager.

"I knew someday that she's going to know," Cross said.

That someday came in July, when Cross left letters for Sebastian before he fled to California.

"There will be no more me," Cross wrote. "Some good news is your mother is still alive. Though I do not think it is for the best."

## 'I WAS SO HAPPY'

The letter also directed Sebastian to go to the house of John and Joanne Pahl, who lived a street away and whose son was Sebastian's friend. Cross asked the Pahls in a separate letter to take care of Sebastian.

**"We work particularly hard toward that goal of reunification" with parents and the child, said Dakota County District Judge Richard Spicer. "It really is a team effort. There are an awful lot of people in these cases trying to promote the best interests of these children."**

Sebastian stayed there about a month until a Dakota County social worker found Kimii Porter, who is his mother's aunt and a licensed foster parent.

Kimii Porter said she could not comment for this story because it could jeopardize her foster-parent license if she speaks publicly about the children in her care.

According to Ramsey County child-protection records, Kimii Porter also was once the foster parent for two of Katik Porter's four older children. The two oldest sons are now ages 20 and 18. The third-oldest boy, now 17, still lives with Kimii Porter in foster care.

Sebastian was surprised he had family, he wrote to the court.

"When I heard I had family I was so happy," he said in the letter. "So what I want is to stay with Auntie Kim, and have visitation with mom. I'm not sure about dad."

At his great-aunt's house, Sebastian practices taekwondo and participates in Boy Scouts and church, he wrote.

Children older than 10 are given an attorney to represent their wishes in court. Sebastian has a public defender, who did not return calls asking for comment for this story.

Courts consider a child's age and maturity when listening to their requests, child-protection experts say. In many instances, courts encourage children to voice their opinions at hearings, said Sutton, of the state's Human Services Department.

"Through the work over the years, I think there's more and more recognition that the kids need to have a voice," Sutton said. Porter children are sometimes frustrated that "people are making decisions without them."

Sebastian has not spoken in court for his case.

According to the plan adopted last month, Sebastian is spending four nights a week at his mom's house as part of the transition to live with her. He was given two hours every Saturday after Scouts to spend with his brother, who lives with him at his great-aunt's house.

The adults in his life were ordered to prepare for the transition, too. Cross and Katik Porter began working together this month on a shared parenting plan, court records show. Cross also began participating in the county's meetings to discuss the family's future.

When Sebastian will reunite with his father is a decision Dakota County social services and a guardian ad litem — a state employee or volunteer who represents the child's best interests — will decide, court records state. The goal is for Sebastian to live with his mother by the end of April.

Porter, who lives in Minneapolis, is required to continue transporting Sebastian to his current school in St. Paul, taekwondo and Scouts until the end of the school year. But next year, the court said, Sebastian could move to a school closer to his parents.

Sebastian moving three times in a year — to the Pahls', his great-aunt's and

health problems.

The court ordered Cross and Porter to undergo psychological and parenting assessments. They also were ordered to comply with random urine analysis tests and to stay chemical-free and law-abiding.

By December, both parents had complied with the court's orders.

The assessment determined that Cross has a narcissistic personality disorder, court records show. Cross and Porter were ordered to attend individual and family therapy. Sebastian is undergoing therapy, too.

Any court-ordered plan to place a child in a permanent home is focused on the child's health and safety, said Kelly Harder, who oversees social services in Dakota County as the director of community services administration.

It's important to remember that an incident that leads to a child needing protective services might not define the family, he said.


"Our job is to work around and beyond the incident to assure additional facts are presented, too, so that deci-

sions around (the child's) best interest can be made," Harder said.

Cross was charged with gross misdemeanor child neglect shortly after abandoning Sebastian and was arrested in California in August and returned to Minnesota. He was convicted by a Dakota County District Court jury in January and is scheduled to be sentenced May 16.

Sebastian has told the court that he wants to write a victim impact statement to be read at sentencing.

Maricella Miranda can be reached at 651-228-5421. Follow her at [twitter.com/mariwritesnews](http://twitter.com/mariwritesnews).



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