California’s small and mid-sized businesses are asking for help. Healthcare costs have risen for 95 percent of us over the past five years, and it’s hard to keep up. Now there’s a real possibility that Congress won’t act in time to spare us from a return of the Health Insurance Tax in 2018. The “HIT” tax adds about $500 to the cost of providing health insurance for each employee. Congress suspended the tax for 2017 to give affected businesses a breather, but unfortunately, the tax will return Jan. 1.

My company, which operates three auto parts shops, will pay at least $12,000 more next year for health insurance. These funds won’t buy us a better health plan; they’ll go right to the government. All told, the HIT tax will take $156 billion from the private sector by 2026, and the majority will come from small businesses like mine.

This is no way to keep the economy growing and independent companies hiring, and I suspect our U.S. Representative Jeff Denham knows it. Every time healthcare costs increase, businesses must cut deeper. Employees don’t get the raises they deserve, companies can’t invest, and we put the country at risk of economic downturn.

While we hold out hope for broad healthcare solutions, it’s essential that the HIT tax be delayed so it doesn’t make things tougher on small businesses in the near term. Rep. Denham should speak out in favor of another suspension of the HIT tax right away.

Jack Gosnell, Next Level Parts, Inc.