give 4.5 percent increases. We do not make the decision. The appropriators do in this House of Congress. And if the appropriators do not allocate your 4.5 percent increase, if they do not allocate a dime, those children do not get a dime.

That is not current law. Current law does not leave itself at the whims of politicians to decide what children will get. Current law says, we do not want to put this in the political realm. Let us leave it for the children, and let us make sure they are guaranteed an opportunity to have a decent lunch or breakfast.

Your bill, the Contract on America bill, does not do that, and that is perhaps the most important point. You can claim you are increasing funding by billions of dollars. You can claim percentage increases over what we have this year. It is all just a claim because you cannot guarantee you are going to do one thing or the other.

In fact, you are already making changes to your own Contract on America welfare proposal from what was in writing and what you promised people in November 1994. So why should anyone believe that what you promised in November, which has already changed, is what you are going to do in 1997?

Let me go on to something further I prefer to discuss because it is getting very little attention.

For children who are disabled right now, we should beware. If you are a parent of a child who is disabled, it is tough enough right now to raise a family. But if you have disabled kids, I suspect you can tell just about anybody in this room, in this floor right now, that it is an even more daunting challenge, regardless of your income level.

But if you are a parent trying to raise a family and if you are a parent trying to raise a family with a disabled child, beware because H.R. 4, the Newt Gingrich Contract on America welfare proposal, will tell your children you are no longer going to get supplemental security income which helps you supplement your family income to provide services to your disabled child.

Beware because about 225,000 children in America are going to be dumped from a program where families are assisted in aiding their disabled child. And over the next 5 years, around 700,000 disabled children will be denied SSI as a result of the Contract on America welfare proposal.

In Los Angeles, roughly 20,000 disabled children and also blind children receive SSI. H.R. 4 changes all of that.

Now, we hear claims by the supporters of H.R. 4 that we have parents who are abusing SSI. The supporters of H.R. 4 say that the caseload in SSI for disabled children is growing because parents are teaching their kids to pretend that they are retarded in order for them to qualify for SSI.

Are there parents abusing SSI? Are there 225,000 disabled children faking their disability? Well if there is fraud, then let us deal with that aspect within the eligibility process for SSI for disabled kids. But the political Contract on America goes too far. It is overkill.

Let me give two or three quick examples.

Six-year-old Jennifer suffers from congenital bowel malformation which requires a colostomy. She also suffers from eye problems and lacks peripheral vision which causes her to run into walls. At age 6 she was not yet toilet trained.

Kendra, 2 years old, suffers from a rare growth condition in which one arm is twice as long as the other, causing loss of balance, motor impairment and spinal curvature and a loss of lung volume.

Both of these two young children probably will not qualify for SSI. So here we see it. Cuts to kids. Cuts to school lunch. And what else do we have? Cuts to taxes for the rich and wealthy. $66 billion is saved under H.R. 4. What is it for? Tax cuts for the wealthy. This is not the way to go.

WELFARE REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California [Mrs. SEASTRAND] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. SEASTRAND. Mr. Speaker, here we are debating what I believe to be one of the most important issues of our time, welfare reform.

This has not been a particularly civil debate. Frankly, I am amazed by the rhetorical warfare being waged by the opponents of welfare reform. And that is exactly what they are—opponents of welfare reform who are defending a failed system which has cost this Nation almost $5 trillion and has hurt the very people it was designed to help.

In addition, many of the comments made by these welfare reform opponents have been completely out of line. I find it ironic that the standard lines Democrats have used for years—lines like dividing the country along racial lines; deceiving the public by hiding the facts; engaging in class warfare; favoring the rich at the expense of the poor are precisely—are precisely—what the Democrats themselves are doing.

What we are trying to do is fundamentally reform a system that does not work.

How compassionate is it to continue with a system that has quadrupled illegitimacy rates over the last 25 years; where 68 percent of black children and 23 percent of white children are born out of wedlock?

The current welfare system has created a cycle of dependency where the average length of stay, including repeat periods, is 13 years. The current system robs people of the dignity of work. Of the 5 million families on welfare, only 20,000 people work. Is it compassionate to maintain this kind of system?

There are rampant abuses in the current system such as in the SSI Program. The number of recipients in this program has nearly tripled over the past 5 years because SSI isn't going solely to the disabled children where it's supposed to go. It is going to drug addicts and alcoholics who are not eligible for these benefits yet continue to receive them.

Is it compassionate to maintain this kind of system?

Then there is the exploding cost of maintaining the current welfare system. Over the past 30 years, the Federal Government has spent almost $5 trillion on various forms of welfare assistance. If we do not act, welfare spending will increase from $325 billion in 1993 to $500 billion in 1998.

Is this what the Democrats call reinventing government and cutting spending?

The Republican reform bill will fundamentally change the welfare system of America, but not in the way our opponents have described. Allow me to remind welfare reform opponents and the American people of the facts in the Republican bill:

First, the Republican welfare reform bill saves $66.3 billion dollars over 5 years by slowing the growth of, or freezing, welfare spending not by cutting it. Only in Bill Clinton's Washington would reductions in the rate of increase or a freeze be considered a cruel slashing of spending.

Second, with all of the reforms Republicans intend to make in the current welfare system, spending will still increase from 1 year to the next.

For example, under the Republican plan, funding for school lunch programs increases 4.5 percent in each of the next 5 years—which is more than Bill Clinton's proposal.

Third, the Republican bill addresses the critical problem of skyrocketing illegitimacy by no longer rewarding those on welfare with additional benefits for having more children.

Fourth, the Republican bill is based on the belief that work is necessary, essential, dignified, and is the best opportunity for moving welfare recipients into jobs.

Fifth, the Republican bill puts American citizens first by eliminating welfare assistance—not emergency medical services—to noncitizens.

Sixth, the Republican bill cracks down on the deadbeat parents who would abdicate their responsibilities by establishing uniform state procedures and computer registries.

Seventh, the crux of the Republican bill is an acknowledgement that the Federal Government has not done a good job of administering aid to those in need and that the States can do a much better job of providing this aid—if they are given the flexibility to do so.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing that would more clearly demonstrate a lack

of compassion than not making fundamental reforms to our welfare system. When Bill Clinton campaigned for President, he told American that he was going to ''end welfare as we know it.'' In reality, what the President and the Democrats are doing is defending welfare as we know it.

The Republican bill will make the welfare system more just, more compassionate, more efficient, and more responsible. It does this by recognizing and facing up to the fact that the current system simply does not work. The current system has compounded the problems that it set out 30 years ago to eliminate.

If we are truly interested in breaking the cycle of dependency; if we are truly interested in maintaining a safety net for those who are unable to help themselves; if we are truly interested in offering credible and responsible solutions for the 21st century; and if we are truly interested in creating and expanding opportunities for all Americans; then we must pass the Personal Responsibility Act. Now.

□ 2115

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CALVERT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. POSHARD] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. POSHARD. Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to address the House. I ask permission to revise and extend my remarks.

Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to this debate on welfare reform over the past 2 days. I have read my mail, trying to understand how the people I represent feel about this important tissue. And, yesterday, I received some correspondence from the Christian Coalition, a group whom I respect, articulating their strong support for H.R. 4, the Republican welfare reform bill, and at the same time, their equally strong support for the $500 per child tax break for families with incomes up to $200,000.00 per year. And, having grown up in a fundamentalist church, being a southern Baptist by personal choice, I have struggled in my spirit to understand these seemingly disparate views.

The Christian Coalition, as have other religious groups in the past, has chosen to enter the political arena and to use the weight of their membership to influence public policy. The particular position of the Christian Coalition on any given issue is almost always the Republican position and thats understandable. After all, it is run and financed by Rev. Pat Robertson, a former Republican presidential candidate. The vote of each member of Congress is recorded on a scorecard and sent out to the membership of the Christian Coalition and, by and large, Democrats score poorly. And, as a result of that, although it is not explicitly stated, the inference drawn by Christian Coalition members is that Democrats are less Christian, more ungodly. This is, afterall, the ''Christian'' scorecard.

As a Democrat, as a Christian, as a southern Baptist, as someone who fundamentally believes in the words of the Bible, this approach troubles me greatly. Not because of what a low score on the Christian Coalition scorecard means to my political career. Everybody puts out scorecards—we have so little control over what people say about us or how they judge us. That doesn't bother me. What troubles me is when I see a particular position taken by the Christian Coalition, that position being portrayed as the ''Christian position'' and yet in my heart I feel, as someone who has shared this basic Christian culture all my life, that the position doesn't match up to my understanding of the Bible.

Which brings me to this debate on welfare reform. Let me say that I do not believe that God's response to the poor is some wild-eyed liberalism running around with a guilt ridden conscience, trying to do more things, asking neither responsibility nor good judgment from those whom we seek to help. Not realizing that often in our desire to do good, we build systems that end up manipulating and controlling the poor, more than liberating them.

But, neither do I believe that God's response to the poor is to treat them as though they are the least priority, almost as though they are a nuisance to be dealt with. And, if the words of the Scripture are true, God would never have us stand in judgment of a poor person by saying in our hearts or assuming in our minds that ''there he stands in the midst of rural Appalachian poverty or ghetto tenements, among the homeless, the dispossessed, the disenfranchised because he chooses to be there.'' God would never condone that presumptuous attitude.

And with all due respect to the Christian Coalition and its position on this, the recission bill and the tax relief legislation next week, where does it say in the Scriptures that the character of God is to give more to those who have and less to those who have not? I understand that there is still an overall increase in the growth of the federal spending for some of these programs, but it is questionable as to whether or not that will keep up with the need, and in any case, it should not be the position of the Christian community to slow down the growth of assistance to the poor while increasing the growth of assistance to the wealthy. Out of a $1,600 billion budget less than $300 billion go directly to support the poor.

If there is one thing evident in the Scriptures, it is that God gives priority to the poor. In the Old Testament, the subject of the poor is the second most prominent theme only to idolatry. In the New Testament, one out of every 16 verses is about the poor.

In Christ's first sermon at Nazareth, he laid down the mission of his ministry, He said:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and to give sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.

In the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, time and again he says, blessed are the poor.

He said in the day of judgment:

> I will say enter my good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things, now I will make you master over many things. When I was thirsty you gave me drink, when I was hungry you fed me, when I was naked you clothed me, when I was in prison you visited me.

And we will say in that moment,

> Lord when did I do these things?

And he will say,

> When you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

The least, the poorest, those who are at the bottom-most rung of the ladder—these are the ones to whom God gives the priority. This to me is the Christian message as I understand the scriptures.

Mother Teresa last year spoke to us about God coming to us in the ''distressing disguise of the poor.''

Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker said this:

> The mystery of the poor is this: that they are Jesus and what you do for them you do for Him. It is the only way we have of knowing and believing in our love. The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge of and belief in love.

I do not question nor judge Rev. Robertson nor the Christian Coalition, nor my colleagues here who embrace this legislation. I do not believe they are mean-spirited. They are all good people, I'm sure they are true to their faith and desiring to do what is right.

But, I pray that you do not judge me, or any other Democrat, in the name of the Christian faith as though the leading of the Holy Spirit within us is somehow less valid or less Christian than the way you are led by that same Spirit.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. WELDON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELDON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, as I go through life, there are many events and things people say that become very riveting and memorable for me, and one of the most memorable events that I experienced in my campaign for the U.S. Congress was when I met a man who was an administrator of one of the hospitals in my community in the 15th District of Florida, and this gentleman told me that, before he had moved to Florida, he had lived in Oklahoma, and he had taken part in a program where he would go into inner city housing projects and read to young children in those projects. This program started because it has been