wage, by passing a bipartisan health insurance reform, and now enacting tax relief for both low-income and middle-income families.

REPUBLICAN MAJORITY DOING THE PEOPLE'S WILL, ESPECIALLY THE SENIORS

(Mr. FOX of Pennsylvania asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. FOX of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment just to review some of the progress that has been made by the Republican majority in this Congress to do what is the people's will and especially with regard to our senior citizens, Mr. Speaker.

In this House, the Representatives have passed legislation to roll back the 1993 tax on Social Security. We have also had legislation that we passed here in the House to raise the income eligibility levels from $11,280 a year to $30,000 over the next 5 years without deductions from Social Security, and it is the same Republican majority trying to save Medicare, and we will accomplish that by making sure we remove the fraud, waste, and abuse.

Thirty billion dollars a year is what the figure is on fraud, waste, and abuse. By passing legislation which will, in fact, make it a crime to double bill or overbill the Government for that $30 billion in fraud, waste, and abuse, we will have the funds ready and available for this generation of seniors and the next generation of seniors so that health care for seniors will be preserved.

REPUBLICANS SAVING MEDICARE?

(Mr. WISE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. WISE. Mr. Speaker, let us jump into this Medicare debate because I am fascinated to hear about my colleagues on the other side of the aisle saying how they are saving Medicare. I say, ''Oh, don't toss me that life preserver if you're going to be the lifeguard, because let's talk about what they do.''

They say they are raising the amount over 7 years from $5,000 to $7,000 per beneficiary. What they do not tell us is that roughly it would be $8,400 under the present program, which means beneficiaries will be paying several hundred dollars more out of pocket. My colleagues may not call that a cut. I think they are going to call that a cut.

They relax some of the restrictions on balanced billing. That means that doctors can overcharge, charge more than what Medicare will permit them to charge. They will be relaxed in certain instances. I do not think that is a big help. This is the same group that, if my colleagues remember, earlier wanted to relax Federal nursing home standards. We cannot have the Federal Government involved in that, protecting seniors, can we?

□ 1045

So these are all issues. Incidentally, do we want this Medicare reform to really save Medicare? If that were the case, we need far less in Medicare reductions than what they are proposing. No; it is to pay for a tax cut for the wealthiest individuals in this country. That is not saving Medicare.

NO MORE MEDICARE UNDER THE REPUBLICANS

(Mr. VOLKMER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. VOLKMER. Mr. Speaker, as we have heard here and as reports have been made, the Republicans are trying to rewrite history as far as what Speaker GINGRICH said with regard to Medicare. There is no question, it is in the RECORD, what he did say:

> We do not get rid of it in round one because we don't think that that is politically smart. We don't think that is the right way to go through a transition period. But we believe it is going to wither on the vine, because we think people are voluntarily going to leave it.

That is what the Speaker said. Now what does it mean? That means he is getting rid of Medicare. That is the way they voted. If we look at all the bills they have passed through here in regard to Medicare, in 7 years, folks, there is not going to be any more Medicare.

Senior citizens out there are waking up to it. They realize it. The Republicans are trying to rewrite what the Speaker said. They are trying to say that that applies to HCFA. Mr. Speaker, that does not apply to HCFA. There is not anybody leaving HCFA. There are not any members of HCFA.

WHEN IT COMES TO MEDICARE, THE DEMOCRATS ARE SCARED TO DEATH TO GIVE CITIZENS THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

(Mr. THOMAS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Missouri failed to inform the American people about one specific word. In the Speaker's quote he says, ''We don't plan on getting rid of it.'' The question is, What is it? The gentleman from Missouri tells us unequivocally it is the Medicare system. He knows he is wrong.

Brooks Jackson on CNN exposed what the Democrats are doing. If we read the whole quote, what the Speaker was saying was that when seniors have an option, when Medicare is changed to allow seniors to choose the system they want, the old-fashioned, socialist, 1960's top-heavy bureaucratic system, will not be the one that seniors choose. It will, in fact, wither away. The only way to make sure that this comes about is for seniors to have choice. We had choice in the bill that passed the House and the Senate and that the President vetoed.

The Democrats are scared to death to give the seniors the right to choose. If they can choose, they would not choose a bureaucratic system. That is what the Speaker meant.

SOME ARE STILL PAYING FOR THE 1993 TAX INCREASE

(Mr. BALLENGER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BALLENGER. Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many other people are in the same situation I am, but when taxes went up in 1993, and of course nobody talks about the tax increase, but a lot of us are with the people that gave you the choice: You can pay up immediately or you can spread it out over 3 years.

I just got a notice from the Internal Revenue Service that my third payment on the increase in taxes that were passed in 1993 was due. How many people in this country today are now paying, finally, the ultimate increase in taxes that was passed in 1993?

If the American people were to stop and think about the notice that they got in the mail saying ''Pay up, 1993 is now due,'' I think we would have a whole bunch of people recognize that that increase in taxes in 1993 ran over a long period of time and some of us are still paying.

PERMISSION FOR SUNDRY COMMITTEES AND THEIR SUBCOMMITTEES TO SIT TODAY DURING 5-MINUTE RULE

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the following committees and their subcommittees be permitted to sit today while the House is meeting in the Committee of the Whole House under the 5-minute rule: the Committee on Banking and Financial Services; the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight; the Committee on International Relations; the Committee on the Judiciary; the Committee on National Security; the Committee on Resources; the Committee on Science; and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HAYWORTH). Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

CORRECTIONS CALENDAR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. This is the day for the call of the Corrections Calendar.

The Clerk will call the bill on the Corrections Calendar.

SAVINGS IN CONSTRUCTION ACT OF 1996

The Clerk called the bill (H.R. 2779) to provide for soft-metric conversion, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the bill, as follows:

H.R. 2779

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Savings in Construction Act of 1995''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds the following:

(1) The Metric Conversion Act of 1975 was enacted in order to set forth the policy of the United States to convert to the metric system. Section 3 of that Act requires that each Federal agency use the metric system of measurement in its procurements, grants and other business related activities, unless that use is likely to cause significant cost or loss of markets to United States firms, such as when foreign competitors are producing competing products in non-metric units.

(2) Currently, many Federal construction contracting officers are requiring as a condition of obtaining Federal contracts that all bidders must agree to use products measured in round metric units, materials which are known as ''hard-metric'' products. This requires retooling, substantial capitalization costs, and other expensive production changes for most construction firms and suppliers to physically change the size of the product.

(3) This ''hard-metric'' conversion requirement is often being imposed only for the purpose of achieving rounded numbers, and without regard to whether that method is impractical or likely to cause significant costs or a loss of markets to United States firms.

(4) United States businesses that manufacture basic construction products suffer great upheaval by being forced to either convert to hard-metric production, or be foreclosed from effectively bidding on Federal or federally assisted projects.

(5) This ''hard-metric'' conversion requirement places domestic producers at a competitive disadvantage with respect to foreign producers; reduces the number of companies that may compete for contracts with the Federal Government; and forces manufacturers to maintain double inventories of similar but incompatible products.

(6) This ''hard-metric'' conversion requirement raises the cost to taxpayers of Federal construction projects, since the Federal Government is often required to pay additional costs, known as a ''metric premium,'' to procure hard-metric products.

(7) ''Soft-metric'' conversion would be a less costly and less intrusive way of meeting the goals of Section 3 of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975. The product itself would remain the same size; its dimensions simply would be expressed in metric units.

(8) As the application of the soft-metric conversion mandates no change in the size of the product, the goals of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 will be achieved without excessive economic upheaval.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

Section 4 of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 (15 U.S.C. 205c) is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraphs (2), (3), and (4) as paragraphs (3), (6), and (8), respectively;

(2) by inserting after paragraph (1) the following new paragraph:

''(2) 'domestic manufacturer' means a manufacturer at least 51 percent of whose production occurs in the United States;'';

(3) by inserting after paragraph (3), as so redesignated by paragraph (1) of this section, the following new paragraphs:

''(4) 'hard-metric product' means a material or product that is—

''(A) produced as a result of a hard-metric conversion; or

''(B) identical to a material or product described in subparagraph (A), although originally produced in metric-based dimensions;

''(5) 'hard-metric conversion' means a conversion that requires, in addition to the expression of the dimensions of a product under the metric system of measurement, a physical change in the size of that product relative to the size of that product established under existing production practices of the appropriate industry;'';

(4) by striking ''and'' at the end of paragraph (6), as so redesignated by paragraph (1) of this section;

(5) by inserting after paragraph (6), as so redesignated by paragraph (1) of this section, the following new paragraph:

''(7) 'industry' has the meaning provided that term by the Board by regulation;'';

(6) by striking the period at the end of paragraph (8), as so redesignated by paragraph (1) of this section, and inserting in lieu thereof a semicolon; and

(7) by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

''(9) 'soft-metric product' means a material or product that is produced as a result of a soft-metric conversion;

''(10) 'soft-metric conversion' means a conversion that requires the expression of the dimensions of a product under the metric system of measurement without changing the physical size of the product relative to the size of that product established under existing production practices of the appropriate industry; and

''(11) 'small business' means a business that would be a small business under the Standard Industrial Classification codes and size standards in section 121.601 of title 13 of the Code of Federal Regulations as in effect on the date of the enactment of this paragraph.''.

SEC. 4. METRIC CONVERSION.

Section 12 of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 (15 U.S.C. 205j–1) is amended by striking subsection (b) and inserting in lieu thereof the following new subsections:

''(b) No agency of the Federal Government may develop, implement, or continue the use of construction design or procurement guidelines that require the use of a hard-metric product if a majority of the contracts that would be proposed pursuant to such guidelines would be likely to result in a certification described in subsection (c)(3)(A).

''(c) No agency of the Federal Government may establish or apply a bidding requirement or preference with respect to any federally assisted construction contract that specifies the use of a hard-metric product if—

''(1) the use of soft-metric product is technologically feasible; and

''(2) an appropriate representative (as selected pursuant to subsection (d) of the industry that manufactures the product) notifies the agency, within 30 days after enactment of this Act, that the representative makes certification or intends to make certification under paragraph (3)(A); and either—

''(3) the certification establishes or will establish that—

''(A) such industry-specific or product-specific factors exist that—

''(i)(I) the product is not readily available as a hard-metric product from 50 percent or more of the domestic manufacturers in the United States; or

''(II) a hard-metric product does not constitute 50 percent or more of the total production of that product by that industry;

''(ii) a hard-metric conversion would require domestic manufacturers that are small businesses that produce the product to incur capital outlays in an average amount greater than $25,000 per manufacturer to invest in new equipment to produce a hard-metric product; and

''(iii)(I) based on the economic situation and customs of the industry, any potential offsetting benefits that could be achieved by that industry by carrying out a hard metric conversion to produce that product would be negligible or

''(II) hard metric conversion would substantially reduce competition for Federal contracts and increase by 1 percent or more the per unit cost of that product; or

''(III) hard metric conversion would create a special hardship with respect to domestic manufacturers that are small businesses by placing those manufacturers at a competitive disadvantage with respect to foreign competitors; or

''(4) less that 180 days have elapsed after the appropriate representative has been notified of a proposed contract specifying hard-metric product.

''(d) The head of each agency of the Federal Government shall establish a list of appropriate representatives of each industry that may make a certification under subsection (c)(3)(A). The agency head shall update that list on an annual basis. The list shall include appropriate professional or trade associations that are recognized as representing the industries.

''(e) When an appropriate representative submits a certification under subsection (c)(3)(A), the representative shall also submit a list of domestic manufacturers that have the capability to manufacture the product that is the subject of the certification as a soft-metric product.''.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Clerk will report the committee amendment in the nature of a substitute.

The Clerk read as follows:

Committee amendment in the nature of a substitute: strike out all after the enacting clause and insert:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Savings in Construction Act of 1996''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds the following:

(1) The Metric Conversion Act of 1975 was enacted in order to set forth the policy of the United States to convert to the metric system. Section 3 of that Act requires that each Federal agency use the metric system of measurement in its procurements, grants and other business related activities, unless that use is likely to cause significant cost or loss of markets to United States firms, such as when foreign competitors are producing competing products in non-metric units.

(2) Currently, many Federal agencies are requiring as a condition of obtaining Federal construction contracts that all bidders must agree to use products measured in round metric units, materials which are known as ''hard-metric'' products. This can require retooling, substantial capitalization costs, and other expensive production changes for some suppliers to physically change the size of the product.

(3) This ''hard-metric'' conversion requirement has sometimes been imposed without

appropriate regard to whether that method is impractical or likely to cause significant costs or a loss of markets to United States firms.

(4) Some United States businesses that manufacture basic construction products suffer harm by being forced to convert to hard-metric production, or by being foreclosed from effectively bidding on Federal or federally assisted projects.

(5) This ''hard-metric'' conversion requirement may place domestic producers at a competitive disadvantage with respect to foreign producers; may reduce the number of companies that may compete for contracts with the Federal Government; and may force manufacturers to maintain double inventories of similar but incompatible products.

(6) This ''hard-metric'' conversion requirement has unnecessarily raised the cost to the Government of some lighting and concrete masonry products and there is consensus that relief is in order.

(7) While the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 currently provides an exception to metric usage when impractical or when it will cause economic inefficiencies, there is need for ombudsmen and procedures to ensure the effective implementation of the exceptions.

(8) The changes made by this Act will advance the goals of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 while eliminating significant problems in its implementation.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

Section 4 of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 (15 U.S.C. 205c) is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraphs (2), (3), and (4) as paragraphs (3), (6), and (7), respectively;

(2) by inserting after paragraph (1) the following new paragraph:

''(2) 'converted product' means a material or product that is produced as a result of a hard-metric conversion;'';

(3) by inserting after paragraph (3) the following new paragraphs:

''(4) 'hard-metric' means measurement, design, and manufacture using the metric system of measurement, but does not include measurement, design, and manufacture using English system measurement units which are subsequently reexpressed in the metric system of measurement;

''(5) 'hard-metric conversion' means a conversion that requires, in addition to the expression of the linear dimensions of a product under the metric system of measurement, a physical change in the size of that product relative to the size of that product established under the system of English measurements in production practices of the appropriate industry;'';

(4) by striking ''and'' at the end of paragraph (6), as so redesignated by paragraph (1) of this section;

(5) by striking the period at the end of paragraph (7), as so redesignated by paragraph (1) of this section, and inserting in lieu thereof ''; and''; and

(6) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(8) 'small business' has the meaning given the term 'small business concern' in section 3 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 632).''.

SEC. 4. IMPLEMENTATION EXCEPTIONS.

The Metric Conversion Act of 1975 (15 U.S.C. 205a et seq.) is amended by inserting after section 11 the following new section:

''SEC. 12. (a) In carrying out the policy set forth in section 3 (with particular emphasis on the policy set forth in paragraph (2) of that section) a Federal agency may require that specifications for structures or systems of concrete masonry be expressed under the metric system of measurement, but may not require that concrete masonry units be converted products.

''(b) In carrying out the policy set forth in section 3 (with particular emphasis on the policy set forth in paragraph (2) of that section) a Federal agency may not require that lighting fixtures be converted products unless the predominant voluntary industry consensus standards are hard-metric.''.

SEC. 5. OMBUDSMAN.

Section 12 of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975, as added by section 4 of this Act, is further amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

''(c)(1) The head of each executive agency that awards construction contracts shall designate a senior agency official to serve as a construction metrication ombudsman who shall be responsible for reviewing and responding to complaints from prospective bidders, subcontractors, suppliers, or their designated representatives related to—

''(A) guidance or regulations issued by the agency on the use of the metric system of measurement in construction contracts; and

''(B) the use of the metric system of measurement for products or materials required for incorporation in individual construction projects.

The construction metrication ombudsman shall be independent of the contracting officer for construction contracts.

''(2) The ombudsman shall be responsible for ensuring that the agency is not implementing the metric system of measurement in a manner that is impractical or is likely to cause significant inefficiencies or loss of markets to United States firms in violation of the policy stated in section 3(2), or is otherwise inconsistent with guidance issued by the Secretary of Commerce in consultation with the Interagency Council on Metric Policy.

''(3) The ombudsman shall respond to each complaint in writing within 30 days and make a recommendation to the head of the executive agency for an appropriate resolution thereto. In such a recommendation, the ombudsman shall consider—

''(A) the availability of converted products and hard metric production capacity of United States firms, or lack thereof;

''(B) retooling costs and capital investment impacts;

''(C) the impact on small business;

''(D) the impact on trade;

''(E) the impact on competition for Federal contracts;

''(F) the impact on jobs;

''(G) the impact on the competitiveness of United States firms; and

''(H) the cost to the Federal Government.

''(4) After the head of the agency has rendered a decision regarding a recommendation of the ombudsman, the ombudsman shall be responsible for communicating the decision to all appropriate policy, design, planning, procurement, and notifying personnel in the agency. The ombudsman shall conduct appropriate monitoring as required to ensure the decision is implemented, and may submit further recommendations, as needed. The head of the agency's decision on the ombudsman's recommendations, and any supporting documentation, shall be provided to affected parties and made available to the public in a timely manner.''.

Amend the title so as to read: ''A bill to provide for appropriate implementation of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 in Federal construction projects, and for other purposes.''.

Mrs. MORELLA (during the reading). Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the committee amendment in the nature of a substitute be considered as read and printed in the RECORD.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Maryland [Mrs. MORELLA] and the gentlewoman from Missouri [Ms. MCCARTHY] will each be recognized for 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Maryland [Mrs. MORELLA].

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee on Science has reported H.R. 2779, the Savings in Construction Act of 1996, introduced by the gentleman from California [Mr. COX] to the House for its consideration under the Corrections Day Calendar.

H.R. 2779 provides for the appropriate implementation of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 in Federal construction projects. The Metric Conversion Act, as amended, requires that all Federal agencies use the metric system in procurements, grants, and other business-related activities, except when such use is impractical or is likely to cause significant inefficiencies or loss of markets to United States firms.

In the implementation of the act, however, certain American construction industries have suffered an adverse economic impact and the government has had to incur additional costs for using metric in certain Federal construction projects. Therefore, there is a need to correct the Metric Conversion Act by providing for flexibility in its implementation.

With H.R. 2779 we can achieve the goals of the act in Federal construction projects without closing project bids to American companies, especially small manufacturers who do not export and who cannot afford to retool their production facilities at great cost to produce products which are identical except for a slight change in size.

The Committee on Science has heard testimony from these affected companies that, under the current implementation of the act, domestic producers are at a competitive disadvantage with respect to foreign metric producers. The number of companies that compete for contracts with the Federal Government are reduced and manufacturers are forced to maintain double inventories of similar but incompatible products.

Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Subcommittee on Technology which has jurisdiction over our Nation's technology and competitiveness policy, I am a strong supporter of encouraging the use of the metric system in the interests of our Nation's industrial competitiveness in world markets. Despite our current laws to promote metric, the United States still remains the only major industrialized country in the world which does not predominantly use metric as the standard measurement system.

Converting to the metric system is a goal that Congress has wisely decided

and should be fully supported. We must continue to promote, sensibly and as vigorously as possible, the metric system to advance our Nation's long-term international competitiveness.

H.R. 2779 is a bill worthy of our support because it balances the need for the Federal Government to maintain our current efforts to promote metric while providing for appropriate implementation of the Metric Conversion Act in Federal construction projects.

Specifically, H.R. 2779 provides specific recourse for the concrete, masonry, and lighting industries in the implementation of the act. The record of the Committee on Science hearing on this bill is clear, that these two industries are suffering a demonstrated adverse economic impact under the Metric Conversion Act which necessitates immediate relief.

Second, the bill provides a mechanism through the appointment of an ombudsman in each executive branch agency for other afflicted industries to gain such relief in the future if in fact needed. The ombudsman would be obligated to balance harm to the industry and objectively apply the flexibility of the existing law to alleviate hardship.

I want to commend the sponsor of this bill, the gentleman from California [Mr. COX], for his corrective legislation providing for this less costly and less intrusive method of meeting the goals of the Metric Conversion Act.

I also want to recognize the chairman of the Committee on Science, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. WALKER], the committee's ranking member, the gentleman from California [Mr. BROWN], and the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Technology, the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. TANNER] for their bipartisan efforts in reporting this legislation to the House, and also the gentlewoman from Missouri [Ms. MCCARTHY], who is a member of the Subcommittee on Technology, who is handling this bill across the aisle.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 2779, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I commend our subcommittee chairwoman, the gentlewoman from Maryland [Mrs. MORELLA], for her efforts on behalf of H.R. 2779; in addition, our ranking member, the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. TANNER], who worked diligently to make this truly a substantial bipartisan effort that shows the results of a great deal of hard work on the part of members on both sides of the aisle of the Committee on Science and on the subcommittee, as well as the staffs of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy, the Department of Commerce, and the General Services Administration.

While there are areas where we hope the Senate will clarify our actions, the problems with the original text that led the administration initially to oppose the legislation, these areas have been resolved, Mr. Speaker. We appreciate the flexibility of the gentleman from California [Mr. COX], who has shown that the can be flexible in these matters. He did not object to the current version as the administration sought, and we heartily support it.

Mr. Speaker, I will include as a general leave statement for the RECORD the more detailed views of the Committee on Science's ranking Democratic member, the gentleman from California [Mr. BROWN], who has been a leader on metric issues for over two decades.

Mr. Speaker, the current version of H.R. 2779, the Savings in Construction Act, deserves the bipartisan support of this body, and while the gentleman from California [Mr. BROWN], in his support, believes that the Committee on science's actions have improved H.R. 2779 substantially, he, too, wishes that we use this legislation as an opportunity to develop a more imaginative approach to measurements and policy questions.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California [Mr. COX], the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. COX of California. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding time to me. Also, I thank the members of the minority for their kind comments and, more importantly, their hard work in support of a very worthwhile venture.

I think it is also important to underscore that almost to a person on the Committee on Science, and I think throughout our House of Representatives and the other body, we are supporters of the eventual conversion of the United States to the metric system. This is a decision taken by Congress in 1975. It is a course to which we are committed. It is an irrevocable course.

But it has been 8 years since Congress evaluated our progress in converting to the metric system: how well it is going, where are the shortcomings, and what is our long suit. We have found some successes, but also some problems. This bill, I think, will help the conversion to the metric system and deal with a significant problem.

Mr. Speaker, while many of us in Congress, and I think, as I said, almost all of us in Congress do support this conversion to the metric system, I should also point out that there are opponents. There are people who for reasons of history, heritage, or perhaps even romance are more attached to the system of pounds and ounces and inches and feet that we all have become so accustomed to here in America.

It is, in fact, very personal. I define myself as a person who weighs 170 pounds. I am 5 feet 10 inches tall. I took a run for 4 miles. These are parts of our daily experience. It is a very personal matter. The truth is, almost the entire world outside of the United States would not define me that way. They are using a more efficient system, frankly, of meters and grams. This is a good thing.

We can learn from history. Back when the Moors in Spain were introducing what we now call Arabic numerals to Europe, there was great resistance to that, because Roman numerals were in use everywhere. The trouble was, you could not add up Roman numbers. You could not put them in columns the way you can with Arabic numerals.

Despite the great convenience of the new system of Arabic numerals, there was great suspicion. The change was resisted, indeed for centuries, by European society. Some quarters thought Arabic numerals were, in fact, the work of the devil. But it was the shopkeepers, the traders, and the merchants who had to add up the numbers every day who eventually caused society to convert. That is the lesson of history that we need to be mindful of here today.

It will be our market system, our global trading environment, that will succeed in converting American industry and American consumers, eventually, to the metric system. It will not be sheer government edict.

Today with this legislation, the Savings in Construction Act, we are not at all backing away from the metric system. We are saying that we still want people who bid on Federal construction jobs to offer their bids in metric, but we are taking advantage of one of the features of the metric system that makes it so superior to our old system of feet and inches and so on that work on different bases than base 10.

□ 1100

If we have a base 10 system like the metric system, you can work marvelously well in fractions. The government, up until today, was telling some bidders on Federal contracts not only do they have to use the metric system but everything had to be in a round number. So every block, every board, every shingle, every tile, every fixture, every window would have to be in a round metric unit.

What business is it of government whether the American people in their commerce use round numbers or not for every measurement? It is good enough that they are using metric measurements as well as the old system of pounds and ounces and feet and yards, and so on. Rather than require whole plants to retool, to remanufacture these blocks and tiles and lighting fixtures, and so on, we are letting the government say, as purchaser, if it will save the taxpayers a lot of money not to have a wholesale retooling, then we are going to save the money.

We had an experience with a Federal courthouse where out of roughly $100 million, 20 percent was going to be added cost from having building supplies furnished in round metric units.

So today we are saying occasionally you can use fractions. As over time our industries are more and more competitive in the global environment, when they discover that their customers in France or in Germany or Japan will not buy things unless they are manufactured in metric, then of course that conversion will be brought about through the market. The government here is being very wise for a change. We are correcting significant government errors and mistakes that have occurred and cost jobs in many, many industries.

I would just like to draw to my colleagues' attention one example of a firm in Wilmington, MA, a small company called Lightolier of Wilmington that has manufactured light fixtures for 70 years. They employ about 200 people. The general manager of the plant told a local newspaper that their equipment could not produce fixtures in round metric units unless they retooled it at a cost of about $4.5 million. But they did not have $4.5 million in a plant of 200 workers. So their alternative was not to bid at all on these jobs. Because they would lose the work, they also would lose the jobs.

Of course, our foreign competitors do not have this problem over in Germany or Japan. So what government was doing was giving foreign competitors an advantage over our United States firms. This was a mistake. It is a mistake that we will fix with our legislation today. We will save a great deal of money in the process.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend once again our chairman, our ranking member, and all of the people who worked so hard on this, but most of all the gentlewoman from Maryland [Mrs. MORELLA], for making this corrections day bill such a success. I expect that it will pass with flying colors.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2½ minutes to the gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. TORKILDSEN].

Mr. TORKILDSEN. I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me this time, and I applaud her leadership and the leadership of the gentleman from California in getting this bill to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2779, the Soft Metric Conversion Act of 1996. This bill clarifies the 1975 Metric Act that required Federal construction projects to use a hard metric system. This bill enables companies that use soft metric conversion over hard metric conversion where applicable, and this will save many jobs in our country.

The 1975 act mandated the use of government-specific hard metric, custom sized products. Often these mandated products would have no market use at all except for the Federal Government. It would require retooling and the purchase of new expensive machinery by firms wishing to enter into a contract with the Federal Government. Many U.S. firms are unable to meet these increased costs of retooling, which are 15 to 20 percent higher than the standard method used now. These firms are missing out on the opportunity to do business with the Federal Government.

As the gentleman from California mentioned, one such company is in my district, the Lightolier Co., a company that makes light fixtures and is located in Wilmington, MA and employs 200 people. Recently I toured Lightolier and met with many of the employees there. Lightolier cannot afford the multi-million dollar cost of retooling to these arbitrary requirements.

In the past Lightolier had a steady flow of Federal Government contracts. Currently the company has had to turn down opportunities to bid on these contracts that require this hard metric conversion. Recently the company had to lay off 35 people.

If the Federal Government had not required these hard metric conversion standards, Lightolier may have been able to keep these jobs through secured Federal contracts. This bill when it passes will allow companies like Lightolier to be competitive again and bid on contracts with the Federal Government.

In addition to that, another interesting point that was mentioned in Lightolier had asked their competitors over the border in Canada what standard would you adopt, because Canada has obviously been in the metric system for some time. They said that the Canadian competition would still be manufacturing to the same size that Lightolier had been prohibited from submitting as a bid to the Federal Government.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers estimates that H.R. 2779 will have an impact on 25,000 American jobs that would be threatened otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to correct this problem and pass this bill today.

Ms. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. WICKER].

(Mr. WICKER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WICKER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman of the subcommittee for her leadership and for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of the Savings in Construction Act, which I am pleased to have cosponsored along with my friend from California. This bill is consistent with bringing back common sense to regulations regarding metric design and labeling of products used in new Federal construction.

The fundamental issue here involves whether to require soft metric conversion where inches are converted to millimeters or centimeters on existing products or to require hard metric conversion where products must be redesigned to arrive at rounded metric dimensions.

Under current GSA regulations, manufacturers of a few products, such as concrete blocks and lighting fixtures, must produce their products in hard metric dimensions for Federal construction. To illustrate, a typical fluorescent lighting fixture is 4 feet by 2 feet. Tens of millions of these fixtures are used throughout the United States in these dimensions. Soft metric conversion would mean relabeling these lighting fixtures as 609.6 millimeters by 304.8 millimeters, a simple and inexpensive approach.

Instead, this industry is being required—as a condition of doing business with the Government—to completely retool their operations to produce fixtures in hard metric, measuring 600 by 300 millimeters, and only for products used in Federal construction projects. The products are not any better, but they just sound better to the Federal regulators.

Mr. Speaker, Congress has already seen fit to provide exceptions in the amended Metric Conversion Act to this hard metric requirement when production costs for hard metric conversion were too high. This bill simply puts teeth into these exceptions by providing a mechanism by which soft metric standards can be substituted.

Without this legislation, bids on all Federal projects for these products will be left to only a very few of the largest manufacturers, leaving a very in competitive marketplace. In other words, this corrections day bill is good for competition and will save money for the taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good bill, it is commonsense legislation, and I urge my colleagues to vote for the bill.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Nevada [Mrs. VUCANOVICH], who actually chaired the task force on corrections day.

Mrs. VUCANOVICH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Maryland for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of H.R. 2779, the 17th bill brought to the floor this session under the corrections day process.

The Corrections Day Calendar has just passed its first year anniversary. Since the commencement of corrections day, eight bills have been signed into law by the President, and eight bills have passed the House and are waiting further action in the Senate. I believe we are compiling a record of success, and that the Corrections Calendar will continue to be relied upon by the House.

The American people are demanding a more responsive Government, and corrections day is a key part in meeting their demands. H.R. 2779, the Soft Metric Conversion Act, would prohibit agencies from requiring contractors to convert masonry and lighting fixtures into hard metric sizes. This legislation would provide specific relief to the concrete masonry and lighting industries that have suffered an adverse economic

impact under the Metric Conversion Act of 1975. I believe that the bill we are considering today is a good example of how the corrections day process works to correct outdated regulations that place financial burdens on many industries in the United States.

I would like to thank the members of the Corrections Day Advisory Group. I also want to recognize Chairman WALKER, Mr. COX, and the Science Committee for the expedient and hard work they did to get this bill to the floor. I am hopeful that the Senate will recognize the need for quick action and send this bill to the President without delay.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California [Mr. CALVERT], who is the vice chair of the Subcommittee on Technology of the Committee on Science.

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my good friend, CHRIS COX, for his foresight and hard work on this important piece of legislation. In addition, I would also thank subcommittee Chair MORELLA for shepherding this bill through the Science Committee.

In many cases hard metric conversion requires plants to retool their facilities to produce a product that is in no way improved. It is merely a slightly different dimension.

In the construction industry, virtually no domestic U.S. manufacturers produce hard metric products.

Only Canadian and other foreign firms have the production capacity to produce sufficient hard metric products.

H.R. 2779 would put teeth into the Metric Conversion Act's impractical, inefficient, loss of markets limitation by providing a mechanism by which a soft metric standard could be substituted when problems arise.

It does not seek to prevent a metric conversion for Federal projects. This bill clarifies the law to more closely pursue its intent, providing for the most efficient and least costly conversion possible.

H.R. 2779 has broad bipartisan support. Vice President GORE's National Performance Review recommended that Federal agencies avoid Government-unique products and requirements due to excessive expense and delays.

H.R. 2779 will do just that. It will eliminate the burdensome hard metric requirement in Federal construction. This alone will reduce Federal construction costs by 15 to 20 percent.

I urge my colleagues to support this important bipartisan proposal.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the distinguished gentleman from Georgia [Mr. CHAMBLISS].

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the recognition by the gentlewoman from Maryland and I particularly appreciate the gentleman from California who introduced this bill. I was very proud to cosponsor it.

Mr. Speaker, this is another of the commonsense reforms that this Congress is trying to make with laws that we have on the books right now. This is simply a way to look at a law that really is not just an inconvenience on those folks who are trying to bid on Federal projects, but it is an inconvenience and a mandate on those folks that really causes an increase in cost to the ultimate consumer, which is the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this bill, and I ask its passage.

□ 1115

Ms. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the gentleman from California [Mr. COX] for this support of the metric system, and again all who worked on the Committee on Science and various agencies, for coming together in this bipartisan effort.

As the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. EHLERS], a member of our Committee on Science, so eloquently pointed out during our committee deliberations on this bill, our Nation's failure to adopt the metric system of measurement in a timely manner has cost United States companies millions of dollars in lost trade opportunities. This situation is ongoing and it has the potential to get worse.

We need to work together for effective metric conversion to close the trade imbalance that now exists. We can increasingly expect our trading partners to require American exports to their countries to be designed and manufactured using the internationally accepted metric system of measurement.

H.R. 2779 exempts small companies from metric usage, and this approach is just one possible solution to the one that represents a can't-do rather than a can-do attitude. With more time, we could look for ways to solve problems while advancing the cause of metrication. We need to continue to work together to help small businesses to participate in international trade.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Senate will have the time to make a conscious effort to improve our work on this bill. Then we will be able to feel comfortable that the entire Congress did its best to meet the long-term needs of the companies we are trying to help. I urge support of this measure.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 minute.

Mr. Speaker, I simply want to commend the gentleman from California [Mr. COX] for authoring this bill, and the Subcommittee on Technology for working in such a bipartisan manner, the full Committee on Science, the corrections committee, and urge my colleagues to support a good bipartisan bill that is certainly going to assist a number of the companies in our great country.

Mr. HASTERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2779, the Savings in Construction Act. I'd like to thank our distinguished chairs, Mrs. MORELLA and Mr. WALKER, as well as Ranking Member BROWN for moving this bill quickly through the Science Committee.

Most of all, I'd like to thank my good friend, the chairman of the Republican Policy Committee, Mr. COX, for all his hard work on this legislation. When the gentleman from California learned about the thousands of American jobs that could be lost, and the millions of tax dollars that would be wasted pursuing a hard metric standard, he responded by crafting this commonsense, bipartisan piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, as part of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975, the Congress required each Federal agency to ''use the metric system of measurement in its procurements, grants, and other business related activities'' but with the important exception of not mandating its use when ''such use is impractical or is likely to cause significant inefficiencies or loss of markets to United States firms.'' Thus, under this law, it seems clear that Federal agencies should seek to use a soft metric standard—for example, requiring that building materials be measured in metric units. This is certainly a reasonable policy.

However, a number of Federal agencies have exceeded the intent of the Metric Conversion Act and are now seeking to apply a universal hard metric standard to purchases of certain construction materials by the Federal Government. A hard metric standard stipulates that not only must materials be measured in the metric system, but that they must also be manufactured in round metric dimensions. In many cases, this would require plants manufacturing construction materials to completely retool their production facilities, and rework their product line to produce a product with slightly different dimensions.

This expensive process would satisfy only the needs and desires of a few Government bureaucrats, not the demands of the free market. Since Federal contracts account for only about 5 percent of the construction industry, only the biggest firms will go to the expense of retooling. This would effectively eliminate hundreds of American small businesses from competition for Federal contracts. The exclusion of these small businesses from the market will result in less competition, fewer bids on contracts, and greater costs to the American taxpayer. What's worse, in seeking to apply a hard metric standard, some Federal agencies are ignoring the direct warning of the Metric Act not to do so in cases where it would be impractical, inefficient, or result in a potential loss of markets.

Mr. Speaker, through the corrections process, H.R. 2779 addresses this problem by taking the existing metric law and giving it teeth. It requires the Government to use common sense in its purchasing decisions, and allows the free market to play a bigger role. It will prevent Federal bureaucrats from arbitrarily imposing a hard metric requirement for Federal contracts on key industries providing construction materials for Federal construction projects. It also creates the position of metric ombudsman, who will make decisions regarding future metric implementation using some basis commonsense standards: the availability of hard metric products, the impact on American jobs, the competitiveness of American firms, and the cost to the United States taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this commonsense legislation. By passing H.R. 2779, Congress can act to enhance the competitiveness of American industry, protect small businesses, save thousands of union jobs from foreign competition, and save the American taxpayer money. I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan bill. I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BROWN of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise with mixed emotions on the bill H.R. 2779, the Savings in Construction Act. While I believe that the Science Committee's actions have improved H.R. 2779 substantially, I regret that we did not use this legislation to develop a more imaginative approach to measurement policy questions.

At the outset, I also want to make sure our colleague from Tennessee, Mr. TANNER receives credit for the pivotal role he played in the improvements in H.R. 2779. His March 5 letter to Under Secretary of Commerce Mary Good, which was co-signed by most of the other committee Democrats, began the chain of events which has permitted this bill to move forward. The end results of his efforts are a more favorable atmosphere within the administration for the concrete block and recessed lighting industries and the improved legislative language now before us. This bill is no longer harmful to the Federal procurement process, and its potential damage to our national policy of metric conversion has been limited.

H.R. 2779, as reported, does a credible job in solving $10,000 problems of a number of small businesses, but it lets a billion dollar national problem fester. As Congressman EHLERS so eloquently pointed out during Science Committee deliberations on this bill, our Nation's failure to adopt the metric system of measurement in a timely manner has cost U.S. companies billions of dollars in lost trade opportunities. This situation is ongoing and has the potential to get worse. The United States is the only industrialized nation to hold onto the English system of measurement. We can increasingly expect our trading partners to require American exports to their countries to be designed and manufactured using the internationally accepted metric system of measurement. If, as in this bill, we restate English measurements in metric terms rather than actually design and measure in metric, we will not fool anyone. American companies that are unwilling or unable to manufacture in rational metric units will lose out to foreign companies that will.

The case was made in our hearings on H.R. 2779 that some block manufacturers have difficulty bidding on construction projects which require their products to be dimensioned in rational metric. However, exempting these companies from metric usage is just one possible solution and one that represents a ''can't do'' rather than a ''can do'' attitude. With more time, we could have looked for ways to solve the block manufacturers problems while advancing the cause of metrication. We could have made sure that metric block molds are an allowable expense under Federal construction contracts. We could have funded research in the design of adjustable molds which could be used for making both metric and English-dimensioned block. As a minimum, we could have limited the duration of the metric block exemption and committed to finding a better solution to this problem during that time. I hope the Senate will take a closer look than we were able to do at alternative ways to help block manufacturers and at setting appropriate limits on the duration of this exemption.

Our solution for lighting industry metrication problems may turn out to be more appropriate. Our lighting industry is positioned to begin manufacturing metric lighting products; a number of the affected companies already have issued metric lighting catalogs. H.R. 2779, through its lighting standards trigger, will allow the exemption to be ignored when the reason for it no longer exists.

The ombudsman concept is a dramatic improvement over the procurement bureaucracy contained in section 4 of the introduced version of H.R. 2779, but the jury is still out on whether it is really necessary. The Government has built a dozen major buildings using metric measurement and only two industries have not been willing to go along. One would think if metric were a problem for other building subcontractors that the problem would have arisen by now.

The busiest time for the metric ombudsmen will probably be at the time of enactment when agencies must figure out what to do with the hundreds of metric-dimensioned construction projects which are in various stages of design and construction. H.R. 2779's silence on this point is likely to lead to problems of interpretation. I urge the Senate to come up with a set of principles to cover ongoing projects and urge the ombudsmen to use common sense in these cases.

In summary, my desire to see the concrete masonry industry get relief leads me not to oppose this bill, but I regret that we did not have more time to perfect our work product. Perhaps the Senate will have the time to make a conscious effort to improve the bill. Then we will be able to feel comfortable that the entire Congress did its best to meet the long-term needs of the companies we are all trying to help.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HAYWORTH). Pursuant to the rule, the previous question is ordered on the committee amendment in the nature of a substitute and on the bill.

The question is on the committee amendment in the nature of a substitute.

The committee amendment in the nature of a substitute was agreed to.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the engrossment and third reading of the bill.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed and read a third time, and was read the third time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the passage of the bill.

The question was taken; and (three-fifths having voted in favor thereof) the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2779.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the provisions of clause 5 of rule I, the Chair announces that he will postpone further proceedings today on each motion to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 4 of rule XV.

Such rollcall votes, if postponed, will be taken after debate has concluded on all motions to suspend the rules.

NATO ENLARGEMENT FACILITATION ACT OF 1996

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3564) to amend the NATO Participation Act of 1994 to expedite the transition to full membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization of emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3564

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act of 1996''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

The Congress makes the following findings:

(1) Since 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has played an essential role in guaranteeing the security, freedom, and prosperity of the United States and its partners in the Alliance.

(2) The NATO Alliance is, and has been since its inception, purely defensive in character, and it poses no threat to any nation. The enlargement of the NATO Alliance to include as full and equal members emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe will serve to reinforce stability and security in Europe by fostering their integration into the structures which have created and sustained peace in Europe since 1945. Their admission to NATO will not threaten any nation. America's security, freedom, and prosperity remain linked to the security of the countries of Europe.

(3) The sustained commitment of the member countries of NATO to a mutual defense has made possible the democratic transformation of Central and Eastern Europe. Members of the Alliance can and should play a critical role in addressing the security challenges of the post-Cold War era and in creating the stable environment needed for those emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe to successfully complete political and economic transformation.

(4) The United States continues to regard the political independence and territorial integrity of all emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe as vital to European peace and security.

(5) NATO has enlarged its membership on 3 different occasions since 1949.

(6) Congress has sought to facilitate the further enlargement of NATO at an early date by enacting the NATO Participation