and I would say across the country, makes in the range of $40,000, often with both parents working, and after they pay their direct taxes and their cost of Government and their share of higher interest rates because of the huge national debt, because we have not had balanced budgets, they have barely half of their paychecks left to provide for their families. If the Founding Fathers were here today and discovered that Government in America had come to the point that it was taking over half the wealth of our workers away from them, they would be stunned. And I think they would be angered.

What this boils down to is that we are taking about $8,000 a year out of every average family's checking account, and we are making it very difficult for them to provide their fundamental responsibilities, which are getting the country up in the morning and raising it and getting it ready for stewardship. They can barely get that done because of Government policy removing those resources. This legislation goes in the right direction. It does not go as far as it should, I agree with the Senator from Minnesota, but it goes in the right direction. It equates to a refund of that last tax increase of about a third of it. We tried to refund all of it last year, but the President vetoed that. So he has now agreed to refunding about a third of it, and that is good policy. I am very hopeful that the White House will not politicize, ''partisanize,'' seek political gain and advantage over this policy for which so many on both sides of the aisle have come to agree in the Congress.

This is the right thing to do for America, and this is the time to do it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SMITH of Oregon). The Senator from Kentucky.

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT COUNSEL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I have never professed to be clairvoyant, but I was able to predict 8 months ago and subsequently authored an op-ed piece to this effect: that obfuscation and diversion would be the damage control strategy of the Clinton White House and its allies in Congress. They would be engaged in that kind of activity, Mr. President, in seeking to avoid the fallout from the Clinton campaign-DNC fundraising malfeasance in the last election.

This damage control strategy was to be expected from this White House, as wave upon wave of scandal has lapped up on the White House lawn these past 4 years. President Clinton's aides have become highly skilled at putting out press fires, lest, of course, the President be singed. I had hoped for better from Democrats here in the Congress embarrassed—I should hope mortified—by the evidence and admission of illegal conduct by the Clinton campaign-DNC fundraisers.

I thought my Democratic colleagues would step up to the plate, seek the truth and let the chips fall where they may.

A disappointing spectacle it has been to witness this collusion in a disingenuous effort to blur the truth, smear the innocent and protect the guilty, by saying everyone does it, and even trying to drag innocent private citizens before the committee.

We are all victims of the system, they say. What we need, they say, is campaign finance reform. Well, in fact, Mr. President, what we need is an independent counsel. That has been clear for a number of months—an independent counsel to remove the investigation from an obviously politicized Justice Department.

Bearing in mind the Attorney General's indefensible refusal to appoint an independent counsel, and the Justice Department's outrageous conduct in the past few weeks in which it has injected itself into partisan maneuvering regarding the granting of immunity for low-level but key witnesses, the inexplicable and entirely inappropriate action by a Justice Department political appointee to distance the administration from United States intelligence agency findings that the Chinese Government plotted to influence United States elections, Mr. President, there is simply no other recourse to ascertain the truth in a nonpartisan manner but to appoint an independent counsel.

That is why this law was passed some 25 years ago, for precisely these kinds of situations, in which you had a highly political investigation affecting covered employees—for example, the President or the Vice President—where it could be suspected that the Attorney General would be reluctant to pursue alleged claims of wrongdoing.

This episode over the last few months is precisely the fact situation which brought about and argued for the passage of the independent counsel statute.

Now, Mr. President, the truth is going to come out sooner or later. No one here should want to be seen in a position of trying to keep the truth from coming to the public. So the point I would like to make this morning very briefly once again, the Attorney General would appoint an independent counsel to investigate the fundraising abuses of the 1996 election, the violations of existing law that may have occurred—contributions from foreigners, money laundering, raising money on Federal property, all violations of existing law. The Attorney General of the United States is responsible for enforcing existing law, and in situations such as this when a clear conflict of interest is apparent, there is no other logical recourse other than the appointment of an independent counsel.

I call upon the Attorney General one more time, Mr. President, to appoint an independent counsel to complete this investigation.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, how much time is remaining on our side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming, Senator THOMAS, has the time until 11 o'clock.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I yield the floor in deference to the Senator from Wyoming.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

TWO IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING CONGRESS

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I intend between now and 11 to be joined by several of my colleagues to talk about, I think, two of the issues the Senator from Georgia has talked about. One of them that is most important for us, tax relief—I appreciate his comments. The other currently is the hearings that are being held with respect to the illegal contributions for campaigns. These, I think, at least at the moment, are two of the most important issues that face the Congress, two of the most important issues, obviously, that face the American people.

TAX RELIEF

First, in terms of tax relief, which has been talked about, it just seems to me that we have the opportunity for the first time in 16 years to have meaningful tax relief for Americans who are the ones who pay the taxes that support the Government. That is fairly simple. That is a fairly simple concept. And I wish, frankly, we could make it a little more simple. Obviously, in this place whenever there are issues, the technique is to make them as difficult as possible, to make them as detailed as possible, to make them kind of hard to identify. This one really isn't very hard to identify. The issue here is between having more Government and more revenue and more spending as opposed to the idea of seeking to reduce the size of Government, to reduce the spending, to reduce the burden on the taxpayers. And those things do go together.

We talk a lot, importantly, about the idea of balancing the budget. But I think we have to keep in mind you can balance the budget in a couple of ways. One of them is to have the highest tax increase in the history of the world and continue to grow in spending. The other is to seek to reduce spending, to seek to involve the States, to seek to return more government to local government and, therefore, reduce the size of government and the demands on taxpayers. Frankly, I think that is what we have tried to do in the last couple of years. I am very proud of the record of the Congress in the last 2 or 3 years, simply because we have changed the debate 180 degrees.

Three years ago we were talking about not how to reduce spending, not how to balance the budget, but simply, what new programs do we need? What do we need to do to continue spending? We were talking, then, about increasing taxes and did, in fact, increase