U.S. MILITARY READINESS: A DEEP CONCERN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the President released his budget for fiscal year 2001, and with that begins another round of authorizations and appropriations.

This afternoon what I want to do is focus on the issue of military readiness, a concept which the administration, until recently, has failed to embrace. In fact, the President has consistently proposed defense budgets which were completely inadequate.

I am happy to see that the President has proposed a $11.3 billion increase in discretionary defense spending in recognition of the deplorable circumstances with which this administration has allowed our forces to deteriorate.

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States military has been forced to do more with less. The defense budget has decreased by 8 percent, or $24 billion, since 1990, and is the only major spending category to steadily decline since 1994. In contrast, the nondiscretionary spending and entitlements have increased nearly 60 percent, or $458 billion.

Despite the reduced spending and force reductions, the pace of operations, other than war, has increased dramatically. Our forces are engaged in humanitarian, peacekeeping, civil assistance, and other areas of non-combat operations. In addition, the United States continues to engage in combat operations over Iraq and the conflict in former Yugoslovia. In terms of commitments abroad, the United States has about 260,000 personnel in over 100 countries, according to the Department of Defense.

The Clinton administration has pursued a military policy of open-ended commitments to operations which have had no bearing on our national security at home or abroad. U.S. military forces have been deployed more times under this administration than they were throughout the entire Cold War period.

This pace and scope of non-combat operations, the time away from family, and substandard pay and benefits have led to recruitment and retention problems. In fact, the Marine Corps was the only service to meet its recruiting requirements for 1999. Our forces are now coping with the inability to recruit highly qualified individuals, while at the same time losing the most experienced soldiers. My office has received letters from constituents, many of whom having proudly served in our Armed Forces, saying they were inclined to discourage young Americans from joining today's military force.

Mr. Speaker, this is a demoralizing statement to hear. To add further emphasis, the Heritage Foundation, in its National Defense Report, concluded that our military is suffering the worst personnel crisis since the draft ended in 1973.

The problem extends beyond personnel. Operations and maintenance accounts have suffered, and the lack of funding has resulted in spare parts shortages and the cannibalizing of existing equipment. Cannibalizing for parts, once considered a last resort to maintain combat capability, is now a common practice.

Nations which may be potentially hostile to the United States are investing in advanced weaponry and technological upgrades to existing systems which can seriously impact our military superiority. For example, China in fact is working on a defense system that may be able to defeat stealth technology by monitoring radio and television waves for turbulence resulting from aircraft flight. In addition, smaller countries can invest in and upgrade highly capable and advanced surface-to-air missiles for a fraction of the cost of an offensive weapon platform. Such a high-volume air defense could spell disaster for current U.S. air forces.

Mr. Speaker, these are but a fraction of the concerns facing military readiness. Last year, Congress recognized the need to halt the decline of our military. We provided for an increase in pay, retention bonuses, procurement, research and development and operations and maintenance, over $4 billion above the President's request.

I look forward to examining the President's budget for 2001 to see exactly where his goals lie and how he plans to allocate the funding for our military. I sincerely hope he has realized inadequate funding leads to inadequate forces. I need not emphasize what drastic consequences inadequate forces would lead to.

INAUGURAL MEETING OF INTER-AGENCY GROUP ON INSULAR AFFAIRS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Guam (Mr. UNDERWOOD) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Mr. Speaker, nearly 2 weeks ago President Clinton delivered his final State of the Union. It included the achievements of his administration, remarkable as they are, over the past 7½ years, rebuilding and returning America's economy to great posterity; over 20 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment rates in 30 years, the lowest poverty rates in 20 years, the longest period of economic growth in America's history. President Clinton also pointed out that we have crossed the bridge we have built to the 21st Century and that we must now shape a new 21st Century American revolution of opportunity, responsibility, and community for all Americans.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are many Americans who do not participate in this prosperity. There are thousands of Americans who do not enjoy the prosperity that most of America has felt across the Nation. Americans living in the U.S. Territories, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa, often rely on economic factors and economies apart from the American mainland for their economic well-being.

U.S. Territories are unique because we are not fully incorporated with the U.S. Though we share many issues with our fellow Americans living in the U.S. mainland, our geography, our history and our political status present a number of economic challenges common amongst ourselves. Our commonalities, however, give this Nation and the President the opportunity to craft Federal policy that recognizes our status and extraordinary challenges to participate in the prosperity of the Nation.

Like no other President, Mr. Clinton has risen and has been responsive to the challenge and has created an Interagency Group on Insular Areas called IGIA to provide guidance on Federal policies towards the U.S. Territories. This initiative will include Governors and Delegates to Congress and other elected officials that will come together and bring together some coherence in Federal policy.

Next month, this inaugural meeting of the IGIA will take place. This will be an historic moment for the leaders of the territories, and I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the IGIA meeting and forum to address issues of economic development in Guam, particularly land and taxes, and, in light with that, to also remember the President's call to include all Americans in the prosperity of the Nation and to finally craft a policy which will bring the Territories into the prosperity of the Nation.

Many of the situations that we face in Guam in terms of land and taxes need reform so that we can economically grow. We still face problems on the return of excess Federal lands. We are a small territory, but over one-third of our land is held by the Federal Government and we need assistance in making sure that these valuable lands are returned to the people of Guam.

We are also trying to seek equity in the taxation of Guam, particularly for foreign direct investment. I have introduced a bill, H.R. 2462, which brings equity between Guam and other areas of the United States in terms of taxing foreign investment. Right now we are disproportionately taxed. In another related area, my colleague, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN), has introduced a bill, H.R. 3247, which would make U.S. Territories eligible for empowerment zone designation. These are all resources that are a hand up, not a handout, and will go a long way towards bringing

much needed assistance towards the Territories.

There are many other programs, and we will discuss this as we go along, but the IGIA meeting early next month is the perfect vehicle through which to craft and review policy initiatives which will bring prosperity to those American communities which are offshore and have a very different relationship to Washington, D.C. than most Americans.

I call upon the administration to work with the representatives of the Territories here in Washington and the chief executives of the respective territories to craft a new economic policy which will make sure that no child in Pago Pago goes without the educational life chances that children in the U.S. mainland have, that no family in St. Croix or St. Thomas will not have the same access to health care that Americans everywhere deserve, and that bread winners in Hagatna, Guam, do not have to leave their homeland and travel 6,000 miles to find a decent job.

ENACT H.R. 6, MARRIAGE TAX ELIMINATION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, over the last several years, many of us have been asking a question that we hear time and time again back home. I have the privilege of representing the south side of Chicago and the south suburbs, communities like Joliet and Lancing and Morris and rural communities like Tonica and elsewhere; and they often ask me a pretty basic question. That question is, as we talk about taxes, they say, why? Why do married working couples, a husband and wife who are both in the workforce, why do they pay higher taxes when they get married? They ask, is it right, is it fair that under our Tax Code, married working couples pay higher taxes? On average, 25 million married working couples pay, on average, $1,400 more in higher taxes than identical couples who choose not to get married, but live together outside of marriage. That is not right.

The folks back home tell me that it is time that those of us here in Washington should do something about it, that we should work to eliminate what has been called the marriage tax penalty. Mr. Speaker, $1,400, the average marriage tax penalty, is a lot of money back home in Illinois. Mr. Speaker, $1,400 is one year's tuition for a nursing student at Joliet Junior College, our local community college; it is three months of day care for a working mom and dad with children. It is almost 4,000 diapers for a family with a newborn child.

It is real money for real people; and there are, of course, some here in Washington who say they would much rather spend that money here in Washington than bring about tax fairness by eliminating the marriage tax penalty.

Well, I am proud to say this House is doing something about the marriage tax penalty. Last year we passed and sent legislation to the President which would have wiped out the marriage tax penalty for over 25 million couples; and unfortunately, President Clinton and Vice President Gore vetoed that bill. They had a lot of excuses. They wanted to spend that money. But this year, there is no excuse. We have Valentine's Day approaching, and what better gift to give 25 million married working couples who suffer the marriage tax penalty than to pass legislation wiping out the marriage tax penalty.

This Thursday, we will be considering in the House legislation approved by the Committee on Ways and Means, H.R. 6, the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, which I am proud to say now has 236 cosponsors, including almost 30 Democrats who have joined with us in our effort to eliminate the marriage tax penalty. We help real people.

Let me introduce a couple here. This couple here, Shad and Michelle Hallihan of Joliet, Illinois, two public school teachers in Joliet, Illinois. They happen to make about $60,000 in combined income from their two teaching salaries, and Shad and Michelle suffer almost the average marriage tax penalty.

Well, under the legislation that the House is going to be considering this week, Shad and Michelle will benefit, because two public school teachers who chose to get married who now suffer the marriage tax penalty will essentially have their marriage tax penalty wiped out. Michelle told me the other day, she says, Congressman, tell your friends in the Congress, particularly those who believe it is not a good idea to eliminate the marriage tax penalty, what wiping out the marriage tax penalty would mean for them.

They say $1,000, which is essentially the marriage tax penalty, would buy 3,000 diapers for their newborn baby. That is money that is currently going to Washington that they could use to take care of their child. Frankly, if we want to be fair, it is their money. We should eliminate the marriage tax penalty.

This Thursday, H.R. 6, the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, will help couples like Shad and Michele Hallihan. We do it in several ways. We double the standard deduction. One-half of married couples do not itemize their taxes; they use the standard deduction, so we double it for joint filers. The marriage penalty is created when a married couple of course get married, they file their taxes jointly, their combined income usually pushes them into a higher tax bracket. That is what pushes Shad and Michelle into the 28 percent bracket.

What we want to do, of course, is for the nonitemizers, which is about half of the married couples who suffer the marriage penalty, to double the standard deduction for joint filers to make it twice that of singles. For those who itemize, who are the other half of married couples who suffer the marriage tax penalty, those who itemize are homeowners. The average middle-class family itemizes their taxes because they own a home. We want to help them and provide marriage tax relief as well. So we widen the 15 percent bracket, the basic tax bracket that every one of us pays. We are all in the 15 percent bracket, regardless of our income, for the lowest bottom bracket of our income. By widening the bracket so that joint filers, married couples, can earn twice as much as a single filer and be in that same bracket, we help those who itemize.

We also help the working poor. There is a marriage penalty for the earned income credit, and we provide tax relief for them.

This Thursday, let us have an overwhelming bipartisan majority. Let us work together. Let us eliminate the marriage tax penalty. There are no excuses. We want to be fair. Eliminate the marriage tax penalty.

EXTREMISM, RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA SWEEPING AUSTRIA: HOUSE RESOLUTION 417

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, last week I called the attention of my colleagues to the rise of neofacism in Austria. The deed is now done. The extremist, racist, xenophobic FPO party has entered the Government of Austria. I want to thank all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have joined me in supporting this resolution expressing our regret and dismay.

Joerg Haider, the leader of this party, had ample praise for Adolf Hitler and for SS veterans whom he described as ''decent people with character who stuck to their beliefs.''

I want to commend the European Union, all 14 nations, which have chosen to downgrade their diplomatic relations with Austria. I want to commend our own State Department for recalling our Ambassador to Austria and for promising to watch developments carefully.

At a time, Mr. Speaker, when the European Union, the United States, and other democratic nations are working actively to discourage ethnic hatred in the republics of the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, Joerg Haider and his neofascist allies are appealing to racist sentiment and xenophobia. Haider learned this lesson early on. His father joined the Nazi Party in 1929. His mother was an active and enthusiastic Nazi Party member as a teacher. Haider has surely learned the lesson well.