around you, look around your offices. These women aren't children. They are adults capable of making their own health care decisions. By what right does this House make it more difficult and dangerous for these women to exercise their constitutional right to choose about abortion? By what right does this House limit the medical procedures available in what is one of the most difficult and trying circumstances a woman can encounter? The answer is simple. It suits some Members' political ideology—never mind the rights and needs of the women who work for the Government.

The U.S. Constitution guarantees women a right to privacy and choice about abortion. Without the Hoyer amendment, the bill before us diminishes that right for those who work for this country, for us.

Treat these public servants like other American workers. They should be allowed to choose health care insurance without interference from the heavy ideological hand of Congress.

Vote ''yes'' on the Hoyer amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. The Committee will rise informally.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. STEARNS) assumed the chair.

SUNDRY MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sundry messages in writing from the President of the United States were communicated to the House by Mr. Edwin Thomas, one of his secretaries.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Committee will resume its sitting.

TREASURY, POSTAL SERVICE, AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1997

The Committee resumed its sitting.

The CHAIRMAN. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. SMITH].

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Missouri [Mr. TALENT].

Mr. TALENT. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for yielding me the time.

I rise in opposition to the Hoyer amendment. I want to say right up front that I appreciate, as always, the very gracious style of the gentleman who is offering the amendment and his attempts to keep this debate squarely on the merits and not let it get personal. I want to proceed in that vein as well. Let me speak from the heart about why I am opposing his amendment.

Mr. Chairman, when I look at abortion, I cannot get past looking first and foremost at what the status of an unborn child really is. The scientific facts, and these are scientific facts, is that we are dealing with a life, no question, an unborn child is alive. It is a member of the human species. Not anything else. Has a genetic code, is completely separate from its parents. It seems to me that makes the unborn child a person, a human being. To say otherwise is to make personhood turn on standards of development, how developed a person is, which is a dangerous principle going into the law.

I know the argument on the other side, an argument based on choice. It is a good argument when you are dealing with one person. But it just seems to me it is very circular, when you have to address the question how many people are involved in here. How many people's choices should be taken into account.

That is why I am opposed to abortion and why I believe that as time goes on and as we present these facts to the American people, we will persuade them, and that is what we have to do, we have to persuade them. We cannot now, the Supreme Court has said, we cannot now prohibit this procedure, but we can still try and persuade. One of the ways that we can persuade is say, look, we do not want taxpayers funding the programs to have anything to do with this procedure. Whatever people can or cannot do under the Supreme Court decision is for themselves. We do not want to participate in this with Federal taxpayer dollars. That is all that the bill says, and I do not want the Hoyer amendment to take that out.

You can argue fine questions about whose money this is. I would just say, Mr. Chairman, with the greatest respect to my friend, the gentleman from Maryland, when you get down to fine questions, let us err on the side of life. Let us err on the side of saying, we do not want to have anything to do with this procedure and continue persuading the American people.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Chairman, I yield 30 seconds to the distinguished gentlewoman from California [Ms. HARMAN].

(Ms. HARMAN asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. HARMAN. Mr. Chairman. I rise in strong support of the Hoyer amendment to strike the language that prohibits Federal employees from choosing health care plans that include abortion services.

Let's be perfectly clear: the issue here is not Federal funding for abortions. It's about this Congress forcing its social agenda on the American people, and in this case a specific group of individuals: Federal workers. What's at stake here is the right of Federal employees to use their own money, compensation they have earned, to purchase the health plan of their choice. Congress has no business obstructing private insurance companies from offering services that are necessary for women's health. At least two-thirds of private health insurance plans currently include coverage for abortions. Those private sector employees who object to abortion have the freedom to purchase plans that do not cover such procedures. Federal employees should have the same right to make these personal decisions, and until Congress imposed this policy last year, they did.

Mr. Chairman, this unreasonable restriction of the rights of Federal employees is just one more example of this Congress' fixation on divisive social issues. There are a host of real problems facing America today, from the threat of terrorism to the deteriorating quality of our public schools, which Congress can and should address immediately. Instead, we have met time and again to clash over the right of women to obtain legal abortions with their own funds.

Mr. Chairman, this mother of four urges strong support for the Hoyer amendment to restore the freedom of Federal workers to purchase the health care policy of their choice. Let's shift the focus away from divisive social issues and onto the real problems facing our Nation.

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Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 15 seconds just to respond briefly, just to say to my good friend and just to point out that this is indeed a Federal funding, U.S. taxpayer funding issue. I am dismayed at attempts to suggest otherwise.

In 1995, 73 percent of the money that was expended toward the purchase of health insurance for the Federal employees came directly from the U.S. taxpayers. The remainder was picked up by the premium payers.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Chairman, what is the time remaining?

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Maryland [Mr. HOYER] has 6¼ minutes remaining, and the gentleman from New Jersey has 3¾ minutes remaining.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Chairman, I yield 30 seconds to the gentlewoman from California [Ms. WOOLSEY].

(Ms. WOOLSEY asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Chairman, I predict that historians will write books on this Congress. They will do that by writing about the majority's assault on reproductive choice. Twenty-one votes to compromise a woman's right to choose in just 1 year, that is why passage of this amendment is so important.

Women in the Federal Government work very hard every day for our constituents. Indeed, they are our constituents. But they have had their reproductive health care options taken away from them for political posturing. That is wrong, that is unfair, and it undermines the fundamental protections of Roe versus Wade.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, I yield 1 minute to my good friend, the gentleman from Indiana [Mr. HOSTETTLER].

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

Mr. HOSTETTLER. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to this amendment.

Aruments are routinely raised on this floor that the so-called right to choose is infringed any time the Government refuses to facilitate the practice of abortion on demand—even