

on the side of families when it comes to taxation policy."

With the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, married, working couples will receive the same tax treatment as singles. Couples will be allowed to choose the tax filing status that makes the most sense for them. The Congressional Budget Office reported that more than 21 million couples suffered a marriage tax penalty averaging \$1,400, and some exceeded \$20,000.

"For most Americans \$1,400 is a lot of money," said Hodel. "That is money that a young family can use to buy clothes for their children, invest in a college savings account or make repairs on a home. The bottom line is it's their money, and a government that truly values families will let families keep it."

INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM,
Arlington, VA, September 12, 1997.

Hon. DAVID MCINTOSH,
Hon. JERRY WELLER,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR GENTLEMAN: The Independent Women's Forum urges Congress to put the tax code where its rhetoric is, and eliminate marriage penalties. Serious steps to reform tax laws would mean real liberation for women, those who work and those who may have to in the future.

Marriage taxes can impose a nearly 50 percent marginal tax rate on second earners, most of whom are wives and mothers. This is state sponsored discrimination against women, the unintended consequences of which is to discourage women from entering the labor force. If Congress is sincere in improving the lives of American women and their families, it will eliminate tax loopholes that choke their paychecks. Real support for the family begins with tax reform.

Sincerely,

BARBARA J. LEDEEN,
Executive Director for Policy.

AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM,
Washington, DC, September 5, 1997.

Hon. JERRY WELLER,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

Subject: End the Marriage Penalty Now!

DEAR MR. WELLER: Americans for Tax Reform supports the Marriage Tax Elimination Act offered by Representatives Jerry Weller (R-IL) and David McIntosh (R-IN). We believe that married working couples deserve the same tax treatment as singles. Now is the perfect time for action because the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is anticipating an earlier than expected fiscal surplus.

For many Americans, the average marriage tax is approximately equal in value to half a year of car payments. With an extra \$1,400, a couple might be able to send a child to the school of their choice. The bottom line is that the marriage tax is very real to many working couples in this country.

In fact, many working Americans are so skeptical of real tax relief that they have expressed doubt the Taxpayer Relief Act, which became law on August 5, 1997, would provide them with any real relief of their tax burden. Giving them the opportunity to choose to end their marriage tax penalty will go a long way in restoring their confidence in the process and tax reform. The Marriage Penalty Elimination Act would allow couples to select the filing status that makes the most sense to their personal finances.

Americans for Tax Reform supports the efforts of the Sophomore Republican Class lead the march towards tax relief for working American couples. We support efforts to enact the Marriage Tax Elimination Act for

America's working couples. We would like to thank you and Davis McIntosh in particular for your efforts.

Sincerely,

GROVER G. NORQUIST.

HEALTHY PRACTICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. MCGOVERN] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, during the past several years, the American Health Foundation, which is based in New York City, has led the charge to reestablish National Child Health Day. Initially proclaimed by President Coolidge back in 1928, this day had unfortunately fallen from our national calendar before being taken up by this foundation. In an effort to bring Child Health Day back on to the calendar, Congressman JOHN PORTER and I recently invited Members of Congress to attend a bipartisan luncheon here in the Capitol which was hosted by the American Health Foundation. While focusing on children's health and healthy behavior is something we should do every day, Child Health Day has the potential to focus our Nation's attention on this issue like never before.

Beginning on October 6, which is National Child Health Day, families across this country are encouraged to make the healthy practices pledge. This pledge consists of five healthy habits that our children can learn at a young age and which can create the foundation for healthy adult lives.

I have been working to take the message of Child Health Day back to my home State of Massachusetts, and on October 6, Massachusetts will proudly unveil the first and only State report card on children's health modeled after the American Health Foundation's national publication. This report is being put together by a team of local volunteers to quantify our strengths and weaknesses in the area of children's health so we can see what we have done right and address those areas where we can improve.

While we have several events planned in my district that will address both children's health and early childhood development, these efforts will be wasted if people do not take the message of keeping children healthy into their homes and to their own families.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a couple of minutes today to share this pledge that has been put together with my colleagues, and I urge all of those parents who are watching here today to agree to sign this pledge. As my colleagues can see, the five items here are not impossible to achieve, and they could make a lasting difference to the lifelong health of our children.

First, have a healthy breakfast. While those of us caught up in the rat race seem to rush around more today

than ever before, there is no reason to leave for work without making sure that our kids have the nutrition they need to start their day. Let us show our kids that we care about this issue and make certain that we at least take the time to sit down with them for a healthy breakfast at least at a minimum 1 day a week.

Second, stop smoking. Children learn by example. Ninety percent of today's smokers became addicted while they were still children. If one personally cannot kick the habit, try to make it a habit not to smoke in front of your children or grandchildren.

Third, engage in physical activities. Watching television is the No. 1 after-school activity for American 6- to 17-year-olds. Childhood obesity is on the rise to the point where some 25 percent of our children are believed to be overweight. Let us make a pledge to teach our children the value of exercise. Supporting our children in sports or just getting out the door and taking a walk will teach our children the importance of healthy physical activity.

Fourth, live and play safely. In my own State of Massachusetts, some 40 percent of parents do not buckle their children in the car. Every day, buckle up. Put your children in the back seat with their seatbelts snugly fastened, secure rear-facing infant seats in the back seat, and have our children wear helmets when biking and in-line skating, and teach them the importance of sunscreen and proper sunglasses. We all know these few steps can really help save lives. We need to commit ourselves to making them a central part of enjoying the outdoors with our kids.

Finally, we need to teach kids to take care of their teeth. Prevention here is so simple. In 1987, some 27 percent of our kids had untreated tooth decay. The number of children who do not brush regularly is staggering. Again, we are the ones who need to set a good example for our kids. Let us make a point to show our kids how important good oral hygiene really is.

Mr. Speaker, although these tips require some effort and planning on our part, their long-term benefits will lead to the better health and full development of our children. Child Health Day gives us an important opportunity to lead the way toward healthier lives for our children. I urge my colleagues to join with me in reestablishing October 6 as a day for us to celebrate our national commitment to our kids.

PROBLEMS WITH FAST TRACK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. STUPAK] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this afternoon to talk about fast track. Recently the President has requested fast track authority from the United States Congress to extend