

I rise today to call on my colleagues to join the Congressional Dialogue on Vietnam. It is founded by myself and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. ZOE LOFGREN). This group will facilitate the dialogue between Members of Congress. It will also provide information to interested parties, and it will engage in discussions between Congress, the administration, and the Vietnamese-American community.

Last September I co-chaired a human rights caucus, a briefing on the human rights situation in Vietnam. During this briefing we heard from representatives from international, religious, and human rights organizations about the status of human rights, religious persecution, and the social and political state of Vietnam.

Through this hearing we learned that there are several voices wanting to be heard on this issue, and it is our job to give these groups the forum to do so. I strongly believe that with the normalization of relations between the two countries there comes a great responsibility. Now, more than ever, it is of critical importance that we pay careful attention to the progression of developments in U.S. Vietnam policy. Again, I strongly urge my colleagues to join the Congressional Dialogue on Vietnam, and I look forward to working with each of them on this important issue.

MOVING OUR COUNTRY TOWARDS A FAIRER, FLATTER, AND SIMPLER TAX CODE AND TAX SYSTEM

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

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I take to the floor during morning hour to just bring Members' attention to very interesting developments yesterday that really signaled the first round in a national debate about reforming our Tax Code and moving our country in the direction of a fairer, flatter, simpler Tax Code and tax system.

If Members will for a moment just compare the contrasting styles, the tone of the debate by the proponents and advocates on both sides of this issue. Yesterday two of our Republican colleagues, the House majority leader, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DICK ARMEY) and the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BILLY TAUZIN), spoke to three different groups back here in Washington. This was part of their Scrap the Code tour that they have taken on the road to cities around the country.

Yesterday majority leader Armeay, who was one of the leading congressional proponents of the flat tax, and the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. TAUZIN), one of the leading Congressional proponents of a national sales tax, a national tax on consumption, spoke to these three groups as part of what I think is a very rational, a very

level debate about replacing the current Tax Code in favor of one of these two plans, both of which, in my view, would be simpler and fairer than the current system. Again, they have been doing this around the country as part of an effort to inform and engage the American people in this debate.

Contrast their, again, very rational approach to discussing these issues with the President's remarks yesterday back here in Washington. I am quoting from the Washington edition of the Los Angeles Times. The headline is "Clinton Rips Reckless Overhaul of Tax Code."

The article says, "Facing an unexpected stampede in Congress to wipe out the U.S. tax code and replace it with a radical new system," and "radical" is the word the L.A. Times writer uses, "President Clinton on Monday denounced the approach as 'misguided, reckless, and irresponsible,' and warned that it would imperil the economy." Gloom and doom. These are just scare tactics, Mr. Speaker.

The article goes on to say, "In an unusually pointed attack, Clinton and his top advisers assailed popular legislation," legislation that is now pending in this House, in this Congress, "that would end the current tax code on December 31, 2001, to make way for a wholly new version.

"No one concerned about fighting crime would even think about saying, 'Well, three years from now we are going to throw out the criminal code and we will figure out what to put in its place,' Clinton told the National Mortgage Bankers Association. No one would do that. That is exactly what this proposal is. That is exactly what some people in Congress are proposing to do."

Excuse me? I do not see the analogy. I do not see any comparison between our efforts to move the country in the direction of a fairer, flatter, simpler Tax Code with this analogy to throwing out the criminal code. Frankly, I think most of us, the 143 of us that have sponsored legislation to scrap the Tax Code, resent any analogy or suggestion that somehow it is comparable to eliminating the criminal code.

Nothing could be further from the truth, and, as Jack Ferris, the President of the National Federation of Independent Businesses, which is trying to garner 1 million signatures from American citizens nationwide in support of scrapping the Tax Code, as he put it yesterday, what is irresponsible is a 500 million-word code, a 9,000 page Tax Code, that is antiwork, antisaving, and antifamily. That is exactly what we have in America today. We have a Tax Code, a tax system that is riddled with perverse incentives that actually favor consumption and spending over savings and investment.

We cannot go down this path. We should be able to have a rational, informed, bipartisan debate on this in this country without the defenders of the status quo having to, like the President, resort to scare tactics.

Let me tell the Members, what they are attempting to defend is absolutely indefensible. Here are some of the articles that have appeared in publications recently regarding the collection abuses and the culture at the IRS. Here is one that says new audit at IRS finds some agents focused on quotas. "The IRS Unveils New Taxpayer Protections to Limit Agents' Ability to Seize Assets."

Why do they have to do this? Because the new commissioner is quoted in here as saying, "I am concerned about the number of questionable procedural violations that may have occurred in the cases we have reviewed. I am especially troubled about the emphasis," in the IRS, "placed on improving collection status without equal emphasis on customer service and safeguarding taxpayers' rights."

"Treasury Chief Files Action Against IRS Quotas."

Another one, "Top Official Offers Mea Culpa for IRS."

Mr. Speaker, let us have an informed, rational, bipartisan debate. Let us transform the IRS into an agency that treats all taxpayers with respect and gives them the services they deserve, while we move the country in the direction of a fairer, flatter, simpler Tax Code and tax system.

SPEAKER'S TASK FORCE REPORT ON HONG KONG TRANSITION

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

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, last March, Speaker GINGRICH visited Asia. In the course of his visit to Hong Kong, he determined it would be appropriate to create a House task force to observe and report on the Hong Kong transition as it moved from colonial rule of the United Kingdom to become a separate but integral part of the People's Republic of China. He mandated that I chair that task force.

We created a bipartisan task force of equal numbers from the membership of the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific of the House Committee on International Relations, eight members total. The Speaker mandated that we visit Hong Kong and Beijing a minimum of every 6 months and provide a quarterly report to the Congress on the transition, to let the People's Republic of China know that we are watching that transition and to thereby try to protect the freedoms that existed in Hong Kong before the transition. Interestingly, the Australian Parliament has a similar effort underway.

In the first report of the Speaker's Task Force on the Hong Kong Transition, dated October 1, 1997, we reported that Hong Kong's reversion to China was characterized as "so far, so good." Six months after the official reversion, that characterization still applies.