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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate had passed with an amendment in which the concurrence of the House is requested, a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 2472. An act to extend certain programs under the Energy Policy and Conservation Act.

The message also announced that the Senate insists upon its amendment to the House amendment to the Senate amendment to the bill (H.R. 2472) ''An Act to extend certain programs under the Energy Policy and Conservation Act,'' requests a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses thereon, and appoints Mr. MURKOWSKI, Mr. NICKLES, Mr. CRAIG, Mr. THOMAS, Mr. BUMPERS, Mr. BINGAMAN, and Mr. AKAKA, to be the conferees on the part of the Senate.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 21, 1997 the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member except the majority and minority leaders and minority whip limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) for 5 minutes.

UNFAIRNESS IN TAX CODE: MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, there is an important question out there and that question is: Why is enactment of the Marriage Tax Elimination Act so important for American families? And I think it is best to ask a series of questions. Do Americans feel that it is fair that our Tax Code imposes a higher tax on marriage? Do Americans feel that it is fair that 21 million married working couples, 42 million Americans, pay on average $1,400 more in taxes just because they are married, $1,400 more than an identical couple who chooses to live together outside of marriage, even though they have identical incomes? Do Americans feel that it is right that our Tax Code actually provides an incentive to get divorced?

Well, the answer is pretty clear: Of course not. Not only is the marriage tax unfair, it is wrong. It is immoral that our Tax Code actually punishes our society's most basic institution, the institution of marriage.

Mr. Speaker, the Congressional Budget Office last year reported that 21 million married working couples paid on average $1,400 more in taxes.

Let me share an example. I will take a couple from Joliet, Illinois, a community in the district that I have the privilege of representing. This one gentleman is a machinist at the local Caterpillar manufacturing plant. He makes $30,500 a year in income, and after taking out the standard exemption that he is able to claim as a single person, he is in the 15 percent tax bracket, which means he is taxed at the 15 percent tax rate. Say he meets a gal and she is a school teacher in the Joliet public schools and she has an identical income of $30,500. If they choose to get married, their combined income of $61,000 pushes them into the 28 percent tax bracket, producing the average marriage tax penalty of $1,400.

In Joliet, Illinois, $1,400 is a lot of money. Here in Washington, D.C., it is a drop in the bucket. But for this couple, this machinist and public school teacher in Joliet, $1,400 is one year's tuition at Joliet Junior College. It is 3 months of day care at a local day care center and several months of car payments and even a significant portion of a down payment on a home.

I mentioned child care and the President talks about increasing the child care tax deduction. So a lot of questions are which is better, eliminating the marriage tax penalty or increasing that child care tax deduction.

I noted earlier that $1,400 is 3 months' worth of day care at a local day care center in Joliet, Illinois. One of the President's ideas, expansion of the child care tax credit, the average family that will qualify with a combined income of less than $50,000, they would see $358 more in net take-home pay. Under the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, they would see $1,400 more in net take-home pay. And in Joliet, Illinois, $358 will pay for 3 weeks of day care. Elimination of the marriage penalty for that machinist and that school teacher will pay for 3 months.

So which is better, 3 weeks or 3 months of day care? Clearly, elimination of the marriage tax would be a bigger help to this working family in Joliet, Illinois.

Under the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, we give this machinist and this school teacher the power of choice where rather than filing jointly, which penalizes them with a $1,400 marriage tax penalty, they can choose to file as two singles. It would be to their financial advantage and they would save that $1,400 by enjoying the lower tax rate.

What is the bottom line? The bottom line is the Marriage Tax Elimination Act would put a married couple with two incomes on equal footing with the working couple with identical income living together outside of marriage. That is an issue of fairness, and I believe that we should stop punishing marriage.

In 1996, this Republican Congress helped families by providing for an

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adoption tax credit so that families could better afford to provide a loving home for a child in need of adoption. In 1997, this Republican Congress provided for a $500-per-child tax credit which would benefit 3 million children in Illinois. $1.5 billion in higher take-home pay will stay in Illinois to meet the needs of local Illinois families rather than coming here to Washington. We believe that those Illinois families can better spend their hard-earned dollars better at home than we can here in Washington.

Mr. Speaker, this year let us help the American family again by eliminating the marriage tax penalty. Let us allow those 21 million married couples who are currently paying on average $1,400 more, just because they are married, under our Tax Code to keep that money to meet their own needs. Let us eliminate the marriage tax penalty and let us pass the Marriage Tax Elimination Act and let us do it now.

H.R. 2400, SURFACE TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will finish its consideration of H.R. 2400, which authorizes surface transportation funding for the next 6 years, better known as BESTEA. This is the most important domestic bill of this Congress and, indeed, well into the next century. It provides for rails, roads and pathways that bind our Nation's cities and regions into one country.

In 1991, ISTEA, the groundbreaking legislation, promoted efficient use of scarce resources by encouraging balanced transportation systems and long-range planning. As a supporter of ISTEA's principles, I have been pleased with the progress of BESTEA through Congress. I want to thank our chairman and ranking members for their terrific work. Thanks to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER), the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI) and the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. RAHALL), H.R. 2400 is proof that in the spirit of bipartisanship, building on sound policy, everyone can win.

BESTEA continues the ISTEA tradition of encouraging real transportation solutions. Our citizens know from experience that an unbalanced, unplanned transportation system can waste millions of their dollars while eliminating their choices and even destroying their communities. ISTEA contained a mix of incentives, instructions and opportunities for citizen participation that helped guarantee that Federal dollars will be spent wisely.

Mr. Speaker, this is a comprehensive bill. Its greatest achievement is in promoting the two pillars of sound transportation: balance and local decision-making. A balanced transportation system is more efficient, cost effective, and it gives people choices about how they get to where they need to go to live, work, and play.

Mr. Speaker, I am particularly pleased that in BESTEA all modes of transportation are supported. BESTEA does great things for bicycling with strong support of the Congressional Bicycle Caucus and a national campaign to promote bikes. It requires increased consideration of safety for cyclists. It adds important provisions to require that bike and pedestrian facilities be considered when new roads are planned, and it increases overall funding for the Enhancements and CMAQ programs, which have been the key to over $1 billion in cycling facilities.

BESTEA does great things for transit and transit does great things for our communities, returning $4 in benefits in the environment, social and infrastructure for every dollar that we invest. Millions of us, whether we use transit or not, have reasons to be grateful for the record funding level of $36 billion over the next 6 years.

BESTEA does great things for rail, one of the most cost-effective ways to move passengers and freight. Rail helps to relieve pressure on our crowded highways and airports, adding capacity at a fraction of the cost.

BESTEA does great things for drivers. These funds are essential for badly needed maintenance and repair of our roads and bridges and to add capacity where it is truly needed. The best thing for motorists is that balancing the transportation system means giving people alternatives which in turn reduces congestion, pollution and even road rage. Even if we do not use the alternatives, the experience for the motorist is improved.

BESTEA also maintains the local decision-making, one of the most important but underappreciated things the Federal Government has done for communities in the last 25 years.

I have to say that one omission does, in fact, concern me. For in 1991, with the passage of ISTEA, Congress required States and larger communities to develop realistic plans that linked transportation and land use. Transportation plans were intended to avoid wasting scarce resources.

Unfortunately, BESTEA takes a step backward by making this planning optional. This means, as a practical matter, some of the States which have the greatest need are less likely to do the integrating planning for the future.

We have been working on improving the planning language for BESTEA for months and this struggle will continue through final passage. We cannot afford to throw money at transportation solutions that will only cause more problems in the long run. Planning does not mean dictating results; it simply ensures that communities cannot get away with ignoring problems, or worse, shifting them on to their neighbors. These are unarguably Federal priorities.

I think the text that best captures the spirit of the ISTEA reauthorization is to be found in the 58th chapter, 12th verse of Isaiah:

> Those from among you.
> Shall build the waste places;
> You shall rise up the foundations of many generations;
> And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach,
> The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

I think ISTEA makes progress towards this timeless goal and I, along with the prophet Isaiah, am pleased to support it.

HONESTY IS AN ABSOLUTE PREREQUISITE FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

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

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Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, I would like to read a piece from the Washington Times that caught my attention. It reads: ''Still amazingly relevant today, New York Gov. Theodore Roosevelt observed on May 12, 1900:

> We can afford to differ on the currency, the tariff, and foreign policy; but we cannot afford to differ on the question of honesty if we expect our republic permanently to endure.
>
> Honesty is it not so much a credit as an absolute prerequisite to efficient service to the public. Unless a man is honest, we have no right to keep him in public life. It matters not how brilliant his capacity.
>
> The weakling and the coward cannot be saved by honesty alone. But without honesty, the brave and able man is merely a civic wild beast who should be hunted down by every lover of righteousness.
>
> No man who is corrupt, no man what condones corruption in others can possibly do his duty by the community.
>
> 'Liar' is just as ugly a word as 'thief' because it implies the presence of just as ugly a sin in one case as in the other. If a man lies under oath or procures a lie of another under oath, if he perjures himself or suborns perjury, he is guilty under the statute law.
>
> Under the higher law, under the great law of morality and righteousness, he is precisely as guilty if, instead of lying in court, he lies in a newspaper or on the stump; and in all probability, the evil effects of his conduct are more widespread and more pernicious.

MORAL DECLINE IN AMERICA

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

Mr. TIAHRT. Mr. Speaker, I am increasingly concerned about the moral decline we are facing in America. As a society, it seems to be sinking to an