who works in the Chrysler or GM plant in Delaware and whose spouse is a school teacher would have too high an income to qualify for marriage penalty relief. That doesn't seem fair. I would have liked to see us give relief from the marriage penalty to many more Americans. Frankly, I would like to see us get rid of the marriage penalty altogether.

The second major component of tax relief in this amendment is in the area of health care. The amendment provides self-employed individuals next year with a 100 percent deduction for their health insurance. This is long over-due. It will help farmers, small business people, and others who buy their own health insurance. Because of this amendment, 3 million taxpayers and their families will have more affordable health care, and you cannot overstate how important this is.

This is a good first step. But I want to be clear that I do not consider it to be everything we must do. There are 18 million other Americans who lack health insurance, some are unemployed, others are elderly, and many have jobs. Simply put, I would like to see these individuals receive an above-the-line deduction for the cost of their health care. This is something I have worked on for some time.

When the Finance Committee marked up the tobacco legislation I placed before the committee a two-part proposal in the area of health care.

The first part was an immediate increase to 100 percent deductibility for health insurance for the self-employed. The second part provided the same benefit to the other 18 million Americans who need health insurance. This attempt was a natural follow-on to my successful efforts in 1995 to raise the deductible percentage from 25 to 30 percent and to make it permanent. Unfortunately, this time my tax cut proposal was not approved by the Finance Committee.

I intended to offer the same tax cut amendment on the floor, and I was pleased that several members—Republicans and Democrats—agreed to support it.

This proposal was also supported by farmers and small business, and I am pleased that it is reflected in the amendment before us now. Though, again, I want to go further. This is a good start, but I hope that in the future we revisit this with a mind to making health insurance more affordable for millions more of American workers.

It is the same with the marriage penalty. It is egregious that married couples are penalized by our tax code. I believe this sends the wrong message in more ways than one, and it must be addressed. We have attempted to do this in the past. For example, in 1995, in the Balanced Budget Act, Congress approved a proposal to phase out the marriage penalty in the standard deduction. Our legislation was vetoed by President Clinton.

I realize that at this point we are constrained by financial limitations and other priorities, and I compliment my colleagues for moving as far as they have with this bill. But I want all of my colleagues to agree with me that this should be seen as only the beginning. There is no justification for a married couple to be penalized just because they are married.

Mr. President, though it is not perfect, and while it does not go as far as I would like, I intend to support this amendment. It sends the right message.

It does provide partial relief. And it is a step in the right direction. I encourage my colleagues to support this effort.

Mr. MURKOWSKI addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. COLLINS). The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

VISIT TO THE SENATE BY ANSON CHAN, CHIEF SECRETARY OF THE HONG KONG SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to this body, the U.S. Senate, Mrs. Anson Chan. Anson Chan is the Chief Secretary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, known to many Senators in this body.

Anson Chan is the head of Hong Kong's 190,000-strong Civil Service. She was appointed to the position back in 1993 by then-Governor Chris Patten and has continued to serve in this capacity under C.H. Tung, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

RECESS

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate stand in recess for 5 minutes, so colleagues may greet Anson Chan, our dear friend.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 3:10 p.m., recessed until 3:14 p.m.; whereupon, the Senate reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. COLLINS).

Mr. MURKOWSKI. I thank the Chair for recognizing Anson Chan. I thank my colleagues who visited with her, as well as the pages.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRAMM. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL TOBACCO POLICY AND YOUTH SMOKING REDUCTION ACT

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

Mr. GRAMM. Madam President, I think somewhere I heard the old saying, ''No good deed goes unpunished.'' In trying to see if we might find some consensus on this issue, I tried to write our marriage penalty repeal amendment in such a way as to limit the amount of resources that it took from the underlying bill.

I did it recognizing that the underlying bill is as full of fat as any bill could possibly be. It is a bill that provides funding for a Native American antismoking campaign that will spend $18,615.55 per Native American who will be served. It is a bill that pays trial lawyers $92,000 an hour. It is a bill that pays tobacco farmers $23,000 an acre, and they can keep the land and go on farming tobacco.

With all of these gross expenditures, our colleagues say that if we take more than a third of the money we are raising in taxes—which they say they are not increasing the tax to raise money—but if we take any more than a third of it and give it back, then somehow the bill is going to collapse.

Then I try to adjust the amendment to keep it within those constraints, and our dear colleague from Massachusetts accuses me of taking money from Social Security. And it goes on and on and on. ''No good deed goes unpunished.''

I have the ability to modify my amendment. I want my colleagues to understand that if we don't work out something on this amendment pretty soon, I am going to modify my amendment, and I am going to take every penny of this money out of this larded bill. So I can solve all of these problems. I tried to help somebody. I tried to work out a consensus, and now we are not able to do it. But I can fix that problem. I can fix the problem by taking the money out of this bill, and I am prepared to do that. I am not going to do it right now. I am going to wait and see if we can work something out. But I am prepared to do it. I have a modification. I have a right to modify my amendment, and I will modify my amendment at some point if we don't work something out.

Madam President, I want to address a number of issues that our colleague from Massachusetts raised.

Our colleague from Massachusetts says, ''Well, I have a marriage penalty correction device, but mine doesn't cost as much and gives more relief.''

So the question is, How is that possible? Well, the answer is that it gives no relief to one particular kind of family. That is a family where one of the parents decides to stay at home and work within the home—one of the hardest and most difficult jobs in America and one of the most important jobs in America.

We have not seen their amendment, but the way our Democrat colleagues could give a marriage penalty for so much less money is that it is a marriage penalty correction that you get only if both parents work outside the