

press conference with the help of the Chicago Federation of Labor.

The therapists, concerned about the impacts on patients' safety as a result of a planned 25 percent budget cut, expressed their desire to form a union. They have been confronted with a series of anti-union tactics by their employer. One nurse was fired because she spoke out in support of union representation.

Workers across the country, particularly in the health care area, are deciding that they need union representation to protect themselves, their families, and their patients. We should ensure that they have a fair opportunity to make that choice. It is as American as apple pie.

#### CELEBRATING FREEDOM OF WORKERS TO JOIN A UNION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized during morning hour debates for 3 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, I come to the floor in celebration of the freedom of workers to join unions. Would that it were only a celebration for 7 days in June. Workers across the United States are crying out for their right to join unions. Is this America? It is a sad day when we have to draw attention to the importance of the freedom to organize in a society like ours.

One of those 7 days in June will be this Friday, the day in the District of Columbia where Members of the region will sit and hear testimony from union members in this region about the difficulties they have had in joining unions and forming unions in this region.

I know something about this area. I continue to be a tenured professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center. When I was full-time, one of the major courses that I taught was labor law, and I saw and read and studied the deterioration of workers' rights, of the right to strike.

I saw the contrasts between a period of great prosperity in American life when business understood that part of the symmetry of the workplace was the right to organize. We have come to a point instead where there is no longer talk about occasional union-busting, but workers meet wholesale resistance to the development of unions in the workplace whereby most employers, confronted with workers who want to join unions, develop strategies to keep unions from even getting a vote on whether workers want a union, in fact.

Show me a society where the right to organize is in danger, and I will show Members a society without full democracy.

What has our society come to? Wall Street is bursting at the seams. We have had surpluses for years on end. We have the best economy of the century, and we do not want workers to orga-

nize to get a fair share of that economy? We are sending people out off the welfare rolls, as well we should, and we do not want them to be organized so they can get a fair share, so they can in fact support their families as they leave welfare?

What have employers to fear? After all, unions have to win a vote the way we have to win a vote in order to come back to this House every 2 years. That is hard to do with today's demographics, where workers are by no means automatically oriented towards unions. Why, then, do half of the employers threaten to shut down if their workers organize? Why do they fire one in four workers who in fact organize?

Despite these extraordinary efforts, unions are now having remarkable success. They are winning half of their elections of 500 or more unions. Minority and female workers in particular fare much better when they are organized than when they are not.

#### THE MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER. Madam Speaker, this is an important year. As I look back over the last few years and the challenges that we have, and of course there have been big challenges, doing some things we were told we could not do, I remember when I was first elected in 1994 we came to Washington to change how Washington works. There was a group of us in the majority here, and all of us were committed to doing some things there were those who told us we could not do, balancing the budget, cutting taxes for the middle class, reforming our welfare system, taming the tax collectors. But by sticking together and being persistent, we accomplished those very great challenges.

We balanced the budget for the first time in 2 years, we cut taxes for the first time in 16 years. In fact, in Illinois, my home State, 3 million Illinois children now benefit from the \$500 per child tax credit. When we think about that, that is \$1.5 million that now stays in Illinois, rather than coming to Washington to be spent. I personally think that the folks back home can better spend their hard-earned dollars in Illinois than I can for them in Washington.

On welfare reform, the first real welfare reform in a generation is working so well that in my home State of Illinois we have now seen our welfare rolls cut in half.

When it comes to taming the tax collector, we enacted a very fundamental change with IRS reform. If Members have ever been audited or gone to court with IRS in the past, they treated one as guilty until proven innocent. But thanks to this Republican Congress, we now have the same rights in the IRS that we have in the courtroom; that is,

we are innocent until the IRS proves us guilty.

Now we have some big challenges before us again this year, some challenges that the folks particularly on this side of the aisle say cannot be done. Republicans want to strengthen our local schools and make them safer. We want to strengthen social security and Medicare. In fact, we want to lock away for the first time in 30 years 100 percent of the social security surplus, so it is used only for social security. We want to pay down the national debt. We also want to continue working to lower the tax burden on middle class working families.

I believe, Madam Speaker, this year as we work to lower the tax burden on the middle class that we should listen to those concerns that I hear in the union halls and the South Side of Chicago and the south suburbs, in the VFW and local coffee shops and grain elevators.

Not only do people feel their taxes are too high, but they feel the Tax Code is too complicated, it needs to be simplified, and that the Tax Code is really unfair. I believe the first place we should start as we work to make our Tax Code fairer and more simpler is to address the most unfair consequence of today's Tax Code. That is something that has been nicknamed today the marriage tax penalty.

Why it is so important that we address this, this particular important issue that affects working middle class families, is to ask a series of questions. That is, do Americans feel that it is fair, do Americans feel that it is right, that a married working couple with two incomes pays on average \$1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married? Do Americans feel that it is right, do Americans feel that it is fair, that 21 million married working couples, on average, pay \$1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married?

It is just plain wrong that a married working couple pays \$1,400 more in higher taxes than an identical couple living together outside of marriage. That is wrong. The marriage tax penalty on average is \$1,400. Back home in the South suburbs and in the South side of Chicago that is one year's tuition at a junior college, a local community college. It is 3 months in day care. It is several months worth of car payments. It is real money to real people, and it is just wrong that under our Tax Code married working couples pay more just because they are married.

Let me give an example here of a south suburban couple on the south suburbs of Chicago. We have a machinist, who of course works at the Joliet Caterpillar Plant making that big equipment. He makes \$30,500 a year.

Under our current Tax Code, if he is single and files as a single taxpayer, after we subtract the standard deduction and exemption, if he makes \$30,500, he is in the 15 percent tax bracket. But if he meets and decides