Mr. Speaker, Presidents Aliyev and Kocharian, President Kocharian of Armenia, have been meeting on a number of occasions at multilateral meetings where both countries are represented, and I welcome these direct talks and hope that they will continue.

Azerbaijan and Armenia must normalize their relations with one another. They have to work for greater economic integration, development of infrastructure, and cooperation in other areas. This is the path that President Aliyev must be encouraged to follow. Indeed, the benefits to his country would be significant by opening up trade investment and assistance, that these benefits cannot begin to flow to Azerbaijan until Azerbaijan lifts its blockades against Armenia and Karabagh. I truly hope Mr. Aliyev will hear this message and not continue to believe he can play the oil card, trying to use Azerbaijan's presumed oil reserves as a way of getting the U.S. to sell out the principle behind section 907.

Mr. Speaker, last week at a White House ceremony to accept the credentials of Armenia's new ambassador to the United States, President Clinton pledged to aid Armenia to achieve a durable and mutually acceptable resolution to the conflict over Nagorno Karabagh. President Clinton also praised President Kocharian and President Aliyev for their willingness to act boldly for peace. He stressed America's commitment to helping Armenia-established democratic institutions and a market economy, and noted that the progress made by the Armenian people means that the U.S. can shift our assistance from humanitarian aid to development projects.

Unfortunately, the President's fiscal year 2001 budget proposal actually calls for a 27 percent reduction in assistance to Armenia. Congress will have an opportunity to reverse this, and I intend to work hard to make sure that the assistance is actually increased.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to renew my call for Armenia's President Robert Kocharian to be extended an invitation for a state visit to Washington. Last November 25, my colleagues in the House joined me in a bipartisan call on President Clinton to extend the invitation to President Kocharian.

I see one of my colleagues on the Republican side, the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA), is here and she was one of those.

□ 0945

While President Aliyev's current visit is not an official State visit, President Aliyev has been here on a State visit. President Kocharian, who was elected nearly 2 years ago, has yet to be accorded this honor. To solidify the growing bonds between the U.S. and Armenia, I believe it is time for a State visit for President Kocharian.

PRIVATE BILL FOR VIRGINIA ANIKWATA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing a private bill on behalf of two of my constituents, Virginia Anikwata and her 11-year-old daughter, Sharon. Virginia is a resident alien from Nigeria who faces imminent deportation back to her home country. Her daughter Sharon, who was born here in the United States and is a United States citizen, unfortunately faces constructive deportation with her mother since she has no other family or close friends here in the United States to care for her. Virginia's husband, and Sharon's father, died unexpectedly of cancer during the time that he was a student in this country 11 years ago when Sharon was a newborn baby.

What makes this case so compelling is that Sharon would surely be subjected to the horrendous practice of female genital mutilation if she and her mother were forced to return to Nigeria, since that is a universal practice in the community and clan where Virginia's family and her in-law family live. Her in-law family, who are entitled to make these decisions for a widow and a child in Nigeria, have made it clear that FGM, female genital mutilation, would be imposed upon Sharon.

We in Congress have found this practice so abhorrent that we have made FGM subject to criminal sanctions under Federal law. It would seem contrary to the intent of this law for our own government to place itself in the position of aiding and abetting the commission of FGM on Sharon by constructively deporting her to Nigeria when this conduct is subject to criminal prosecution here in the United States.

It also is important to note that Virginia and her daughter are model members of their community. Since her husband's untimely death, Virginia has been a law-abiding resident, supporting herself and her daughter by working as a practical nurse, paying taxes regularly, never seeking or expecting any form of government assistance and contributing to her community in significant ways through her work and religious observation. As a matter of fact, the daughter has been a model student. She is an honor student, very much involved in student activities.

Virginia and Sharon's case present a unique set of circumstances that deserve special recognition and treatment by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and by the U.S. Congress. There has been an overwhelming outpouring of interest and support for this case from members of the public, who have been horrified at the prospect of an American citizen child being placed in the position of being constructively deported or permanently separated from her only surviving parent and family member here in the United States and subjected as well to the horrific practice of female genital mutilation.

I do not introduce private bills usually, but this is an exceptional case. By passing this private bill to provide permanent resident status to Virginia Anikwata, we can prevent a miscarriage of justice and save an American citizen from unimaginable cruelty.

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NATIONAL ORGAN DONOR MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, what if just one of us could dramatically benefit 80 people at one time? What if through just one event any one of us could literally save the life of a peer? Every single one of us has within ourselves the ability to effect positive changes by giving the gift of life.

Yesterday, this House passed a resolution recognizing the value and the need for organ donations. As we celebrate National Organ Donor Month, we need to remember the thousands of innocent families who will lose a loved one because no viable organ was available; and we must consider our options to help these families.

It has often been said that life is short and the nearly 60,000 patients who are currently waiting on this waiting list to receive these organs know just how precious time is. The waiting time for patients hanging on to life continues to expand. Unfortunately, the number of organs and the number of organ donors does not expand. Every 16 minutes, a name is added to the ever-growing waiting list of those who will wait transplantation. These facts translate into 13 people who die each and every day just because there are not enough organs available for them.

As I said, there are over 60,000 people awaiting organ transplants today; and, sadly, most of them will continue to wait for a tissue or an organ that may never come. Transplantation saves lives and it is important that we, as Members of Congress, do everything we can to raise awareness on the importance of organ and tissue donations and to increase the amount of donors throughout our land and especially in our districts.

Organ donation is as simple as filling out a donor card and indicating one's intent with their driver's license bureau. There are no limitations on who can donate. In fact, organ donors have included newborn babies all the way to senior citizens. However, the most important step that one can take is to discuss this important decision with their family members. It is essential

that family members know our wishes, as relatives will be contacted and asked to sign a consent form upon our death.

Most Americans support organ donations. Nonetheless, only about 50 percent of the families asked to donate a loved one's organs have agreed to do so. Americans traditionally have strong values and share the spirit of giving within ourselves, within our communities, and in our Nation. Yet most Americans do not realize that the loss of one's life can result in the gift of life for many others.

Our corneas could give sight to two people, our kidneys could free up two people from dialysis, our heart, lungs, and liver can literally save the lives of patients who are in desperate need of a transplantation.

There is no greater gift than the gift of life. We must encourage this giving and work to leave a lasting legacy to prevent the needless and tragic deaths of thousands of Americans.

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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. Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of representing the south side of Chicago and the south suburbs in Illinois; and I am often asked about a fundamental issue of fairness, whether I am at the steelworkers' hall in Hegwish in the City of Chicago, or a legion or VFW post in Joliet, the Chamber of Commerce functions, a coffee shop in my hometown of Morris, or at a grain elevator, and that is the fundamental issue of whether or not it is right or it is fair that under our Tax Code 25 million married working couples on average pay $1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married.

My colleagues, the folks back home, whether they live in the city, the suburbs, or the country, have all told me that they think it is just wrong that under our Tax Code 25 million married working couples pay on average $1,400 more just because they are married. They think it is wrong, and they want Congress and the President to do something about it.

Let me introduce Shad and Michelle Hallihan, two public school teachers from Joliet, Illinois. Shad and Michelle chose to get married a couple of years ago. They just had a little baby, just a couple of months ago. But Shad and Michelle are a typical example of the 1.1 million Illinois married couples who suffer the marriage tax penalty. Now, if Shad and Michelle stayed single and decided just to live together, they would avoid the marriage tax penalty because the marriage tax penalty results when two people get married and they file jointly.

So, for example, Shad and Michelle have identical incomes of $31,000. Michelle is making $31,000 a year. Under our Tax Code, if she is single, she pays at a 15 percent tax bracket. But when she and Shad chose to get married, and suppose that Shad has an identical income of $31,000, remember he is in the 15 percent tax bracket as well, but when they get married they file jointly and their combined income pushes them into the 28 percent tax bracket. So they are now paying a 28 percent tax rate on that same income. Is that right? Of course not. It is time that we do something about the marriage tax penalty.

I am proud that this House this past week, last Thursday, voted to wipe out the marriage tax penalty with the passage of H.R. 6, legislation that wipes out essentially the marriage tax penalty suffered by Shad and Michelle Hallihan as well as 25 million other married working couples who are punished just for getting married under our Tax Code.

H.R. 6 passed this House with an overwhelming bipartisan vote. Every House Republican and 48 Democrats bucked their leadership and voted to wipe out the marriage tax penalty for 25 million married working couples. That is a big momentum. Of course, our hope is the Senate will follow our lead.

One thing that I am so proud of our leader, the leader of this House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT), the House Speaker, I thought made a very smart decision. He made a decision to allow H.R. 6 to come to the floor as a stand-alone bill, a bill that only deals with one subject. A clean bill that wipes out the marriage tax penalty and that is all it does. No extraneous issues.

Remember when the President and AL GORE vetoed our effort to wipe out the marriage tax penalty last year? It was part of a package, tax-related legislation. And, unfortunately, they used the other provisions as an excuse to wipe out our efforts to eliminate the marriage tax penalty.

My colleagues, we have a great opportunity. And my hope is the Senate will follow our lead and move quickly to move H.R. 6, the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, through the Senate as a stand-alone bill. No extraneous provisions, no riders, no poison pills. We need to keep it bipartisan. Let us keep partisan politics out of our efforts to wipe out the marriage tax penalty.

Over the next few weeks, 25 million married working couples like Shad and Michelle Hallihan are going to be back home watching to see if Congress and the President do something about the most unfair aspect of our complicated Tax Code, and that is the marriage tax penalty. We have a great opportunity, and it is all about fairness. Is it right, is it fair that under our Tax Code 25 million married working couples pay on average $1,400 more just because they are married? Twenty-five million couples just like Shad and Michelle Hallihan.

Let us wipe out the marriage tax penalty. The House has done its job. My hope is the Senate will do its job, and my hope is the President will keep his word. Because, remember, in his State of the Union address, he mentioned the marriage tax penalty and the need to do something about it. We have an opportunity. Let us keep it bipartisan, let us get the job done, let us bring fairness to the Tax Code and wipe out the marriage tax penalty once and for all.

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RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 11 a.m.

Accordingly (at 9 o'clock and 57 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until 11 a.m.

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□ 1100

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HANSEN) at 11 a.m.

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PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend James David Ford, D.D., offered the following prayer:

O gracious God, whose mercies are without number and whose spiritual nourishment is available without limit, we place before You our petitions and prayers. May our hearts be more sensitive to the needs of the poorest among us, the hungry and the homeless, those abandoned and those alone. May we do what we can to share the wonderful blessings of liberty with those who have no freedom or who suffer from the ravages of conflict.

May Your good spirit, O God, that spirit that brought the world into being and gives light and hope to the world, be and abide with us and all people, now and evermore. Amen.

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THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to clause 1, rule I, I demand a vote on agreeing to the Chair's approval of the Journal.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the Chair's approval of the Journal.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8, rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.