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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, 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 leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

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

PROVIDING PERMANENT TAX CUTS

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today to draw attention to an issue that so many in this House have worked on over the last several years and that is an issue of fairness.

Over the last several years we have asked a basic question. Is it right, is it fair, that under our tax code a married working couple, where both the husband and wife are in the workforce, pay higher taxes than if they chose not to get married? That is an issue I was so pleased and when this House under the gentleman from Illinois' (Mr. HASTERT) leadership and with the leadership of the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMAS) of the Ways and Means Committee, that we succeeded as part of what is now known as the Bush tax cut, succeeded in passing legislation which eliminated the marriage tax penalty for almost 43 million married working couples who on average paid $1,700 more in higher taxes.

Let me give my colleagues an example of a married couple from Joliet, Illinois. This is Jose and Magdalena Castillo. They are laborers in Joliet, Illinois. They have a combined income of about $85,000. Their marriage tax penalty prior to the Bush tax cut was about $1,125 that Jose and Magdalena paid in higher taxes just because they are married. I also want to introduce their children, Eduardo and Carolina Castillo, and their benefit of the Bush tax cut from the doubling of the $500 per child tax credit as well. Of course, that was $500. We raised that to $1,000.

Here is the issue. Unfortunately, there are some arcane rules over in the other body which may require that the Bush tax cut sunset in the year 2011. What that means is in a few years, elimination of the marriage tax penalty and the $1,000 per child tax credit that the Castillo family benefits from will be eliminated, which means that their taxes will go up. Taxes go up $1,000 per child, as well as at least $1,125 a year when the marriage tax penalty elimination expires.

We had a very, very important vote, an important vote that was important for families like Jose and Magdalena Castillo on this House floor 2 weeks ago, and that vote was on making the Bush tax cut permanent. What that vote was all about was whether or not to impose a tax increase on over 100 million American taxpayers who benefit from the Bush tax cut, because if we fail to make the Bush tax cut permanent, which lowered rates for all taxpayers, which provided opportunities to set aside more in an IRA and a 401(k) and an education savings account, eliminated the marriage tax penalty for 43 million company couples like Jose and Magdalena Castillo, and also wiped out the death tax so we can keep the family farm and the family business in the family and in business when the founder passes on.

Unfortunately, as I said earlier, it is going to expire, and unfortunately, our friends on the other side of the aisle overwhelmingly on the Democratic side voted to increase taxes by opposing efforts to make permanent the Bush tax cut. That is why I think it is very, very important that we put a human face on those who would suffer and be hurt by Democratic efforts to raise taxes once again, by either suspending, eliminating or preventing the permanency of what we now call as the Bush tax cut.

As I said earlier, there are 43 million couples like Jose and Magdalena Castillo who benefit from the marriage tax penalty relief in the Bush tax cut, and in this case, Jose and Magdalena also benefit from $1,000 per child tax credit which helps families with children. They would also lose that if we fail to make the Bush tax cut permanent.

It is often said, and those who argue against cutting taxes always say, that if someone pays taxes they are rich. We know that over 100 million Americans benefit from the Bush tax cut. Some of those who really truly benefited are 3.9 million Americans who no longer pay Federal income taxes because of the Bush tax cut that we moved through this House of Representatives, thanks to the leadership of the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT), and if the Democrats succeed in rescinding or repealing or preventing the permanency of the Bush tax cut, 3.9 million Americans, including 3 million Americans with children, will once again be placed back on the tax rolls. Voting against permanency of the Bush tax cut is a tax increase.

Let me go back to the issue which I first raised at the beginning of my remarks, and that is the whole issue of fairness. The tax code is complicated, and prior to the Bush tax cut, the complications of our Federal income tax forced 43 million Americans like Jose and Magdalena Castillo to pay higher taxes just because they are married.

What caused that is Jose and Magdalena are each in the workforce, they each work as laborers, and when

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someone gets married, they file their taxes jointly which pushes them into a higher tax bracket. We fixed that in the Bush tax cut. Let us make marriage tax elimination permanent.

My hope is before the end of this year that our friends in the other body as well as our friends on the other side of the aisle will work with us to help couples like Jose and Magdalena Castillo.

PROVIDING A PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOOZMAN). Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I came to the floor today to talk about prescription drugs, how little this Congress is doing to provide a prescription drug benefit and how this body is doing even less to control the cost of prescription drugs, but I feel compelled to comment on the previous speaker's comments.

It is always nice to put a nice-looking family's picture in front of TV viewers and in front of this Congress and this Chamber and in front of the gallery to show how we care about people in this country, but the picture that he should have put in front of the voters, in front of the viewer, in front of this body is a picture of Ken Lay of Enron which got literally hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks as a result of the Bush administration's fervor for cutting taxes overwhelmingly for the rich and his fervor for protecting every corporate interest in the country and his fervor for giving tax giveaways, tax breaks to all of the biggest corporations in the country.

Six months ago this Congress gave $5 billion to the airlines in tax breaks, and in this case, in airlines, simply subsidies and in terms of just dollars from the Federal Treasury, but did nothing for laid-off workers. Similarly, the Bush tax program that my friend from Illinois just mentioned as he put the picture of a nice working-class family, that tax benefit goes overwhelmingly to the richest people in this country.

Last year 100 million people, he said, in America benefited from the tax cut. That may be true. People got a check for $300, but 43 percent of all the tax benefits from the Bush tax cut goes to the 1 percent richest people in this country. Eighty percent of the benefits go to the 10 percent wealthiest people in this country.

What does that say? It says that Congress last year and last week, as it did it again, made a choice. They made a choice. Do we give tax cuts to Ken Lay and Enron and United Airlines and the biggest corporations and the richest individuals in this country, or do we provide a prescription drug benefit to 15 million senior citizens who have no drug coverage? We made a choice. The Republicans in this body last week and last year made a choice. Do we cut taxes on the richest people in the country, on the largest corporations in the country and a few dollars from the rest of us, or do we pass legislation that provides money for education?

On issue after issue after issue, this Congress made the choice. It sides with corporate interests, on the chemical company on arsenic legislation. It sides with the insurance companies on privatizing Medicare. It sides with Wall Street in privatizing Social Security. It sides with the oil industry in writing environmental policy. It sides with Enron when writing energy policy. That is a choice. The choice is do we do what is right for the great majority of Americans or do we take the side of the wealthiest or the biggest corporations and the wealthiest individuals?

That picture, notwithstanding that my friend from Illinois put up, the fact is that that family may have gotten a little bit of money back in tax cuts, but that family will not be eligible for a prescription drug benefit because Congress, as they get older, because Congress will not do anything about prescription drugs because the money is not there. I repeat, Congress made the choice last week and made the choice last year, do my colleagues want a prescription drug benefit for the elderly or do they want to give tax cuts to the richest people in the country and the largest corporations in the country? Do they want to fully fund the education programs in this country that Congress says it wants to fund or do they want to give those tax breaks again to the wealthiest people? Do they fund our Medicare system which cuts payments for home healthcare, which cuts doctors' fees too much, which cuts hospitals, especially city hospitals in intercity and rural hospitals, or do they want to fund them properly or do they want to give away tax breaks to the richest citizens?

That is the choice we make here every day. That is the difference between Republicans and Democrats. Do we move forward and provide prescription drug benefits, provide for education, provide for Head Start, provide for food safety inspections, provide for strong environmental laws, or do we do the bidding of corporate America on issue after issue after issue? Give them the big tax breaks, weaken environmental laws, weaken food safety laws, weaken laws that protect the American public?

That is the choice we make. That is the choice that Congress made that was wrong in the last year and that the President and the administration has made. That is wrong. That is why we need to correct it.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 44 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m. today.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. CULBERSON) at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

Preserved in Your grace, O Lord, at times we may seem at a standstill. But momentary inactivity may mean a fermenting of resolve.

Lord, grant to the Members of the House of Representatives a patience to listen to deepest convictions buried within the heart and their delegation. Inspire a practical wisdom that is wrapped in the art of timing.

Help all of Your people of this great Nation grow in perseverance. Deliver them from headline success, pollster popularity, and personal insecurity. Strengthened by faith in You, may quiet and stronger commitments prevail and produce enlightened options born of creative repression. Let yesterday's setbacks and compromise only store up energy for tomorrow's leap forward.

By taking one step at a time, may every American persevere in pursuing higher goals than those found in immediate satisfaction. May we prove faithful in seeking Your plan for us before reaction to every circumstance, now and forever. Amen.

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.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. COBLE) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. COBLE led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

> I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

TRIBUTE TO THADDEUS STEVENS

(Mr. PITTS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, on this day 136 years ago, one of the predecessors from my congressional district, a man named Thaddeus Stevens, stood in this Chamber and introduced the 14th