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House of Representatives

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. DEAL of Georgia).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
July 21, 1998.

I hereby designate the Honorable NATHAN DEAL to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NEWT GINGRICH,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. 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 25 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 9:50 a.m.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) for 5 minutes.

URGING THE PRESIDENT TO WORK WITH CONGRESS TO SAVE THE CENSUS

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the increasing partisanship of the White House over their embattled Census plan. Last week the White House made two comments that demonstrated how far they will go to get their way.

First, they announced their intention to shut down a huge part of government over the Census, and later in the week the Vice President made some racially divisive and inaccurate comments.

Let me begin by making the majority position on the Census very clear. We want to save the Census from failure. The General Accounting Office and the Commerce Department's own Inspector General have warned that the Clinton administration is risking a failed Census plan. Their plan is too complicated and relies on unrealistic assumptions and timelines. We cannot allow the Census to fail. The 2000 Census will cost about $4 billion, and we cannot risk that kind of money on a plan that probably will not work.

What Republicans want to do is work with the administration to save the Census. We have some very specific problems with the administration's plan. Experience has shown that sampling used on a large scale just is not accurate enough for a Census.

In 1990 the Census Bureau tested sampling and compared it to the actual enumeration. For cities and towns with populations under 100,000, the actual enumeration, that is, counting everyone, proved to be more accurate and reliable. So we do not believe we should spend $4 billion on a plan that has failed its only test. That does not seem to make much sense.

Another major problem is the deletion of Americans from the official Census count. Again, when they tried this in 1990, 1.46 million Americans were removed from the sampled Census. Under the Clinton Census plan, it will happen again. It is wrong to use statistics to remove individuals from the Census count. Because statistics is an imprecise science, real Americans who exist will be removed from the count, and cities and towns all across America will lose representation.

If Members are concerned about the undercount, as I am, then they have to be equally concerned about a Census that removes real people from the official count. They, too, would be undercounted under sampling.

We are concerned that the administration is moving forward without the consent of Congress. They simply ignore the fact that the Constitution gives Congress the responsibility to direct how the Census is conducted. Much of the Census is about trust. The American people have to trust the outcome of the Census or else it is worthless.

If the administration ignores Congress, they will guarantee a failed Census. They need to work with us so all Americans have faith that the process was inclusive and open.

That is why I was disappointed to hear last week that President Clinton wants to shut down the government over the Census. He wants to sign a bill that provides 6 months of funding for the whole Commerce Department, the whole State Department, and Justice Department, so he can have leverage over the Census.

Can Members believe the President wants to take cops off the street to get his way over the Census? Can Members believe the President wants to hold U.S. foreign policy hostage to the Census? Why would he want to shut down the Border Patrol over the Census? It is irresponsible, and goes against his 1995 statement when he said, ''It is wrong, deeply wrong, to shut down the government while we negotiate.'' Work with Congress, Mr. Speaker, and we will have a better Census.

I was, along with many of my colleagues, saddened by comments made by Vice President GORE at the annual NAACP convention. He told the participants that the Republicans ''don't even want to count you in the Census.'' These outrageous comments do nothing to unite America, and do nothing to help save the 2000 Census from failure.

Congressional Republicans are prepared to make an unprecedented effort to count all Americans. We have provided more money than the President

☐ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., ☐ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.
Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

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requested so we can do a much better job of counting minorities. I hope the administration stops trying to divide America over the Census, because that will not lead to a more accurate Census, and it certainly will not increase trust in the Census.

Mr. President, work with Congress. I ask the President to stop holding the rest of government hostage to getting his way on the Census. Stop trying to divide America against one another. Work with Congress, and together we can save the 2000 Census.

THE WELL-BEING OF AMERICA'S FAMILIES DEPENDS UPON THE HEALTH OF OUR SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES

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, the goal of those of us here in Congress should be to be a full partner for the American people, who really care about the essentials. They want their children to be safe when they go out the door to school in the morning, they are concerned about the family's economic security, and they want them to be healthy, physically and environmentally.

This well-being of our families depends upon the health of our schools. There are some in Congress who would turn their back upon the historic responsibility that the Federal Government has had with education, claiming that this is exclusively a State or a local responsibility. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Federal Government has always played a major role in education, starting from the Land Ordinance Act of 1785 through the GI bill to school lunches today.

There are three critical areas that we must address here in this Congress: assistance for the children who are the most difficult and expensive to educate; the reduction of gun violence, so that families can have peace of mind when the children go to school; and the promotion of computer skills and access that are so essential for success in today's world.

Congress mandated, appropriately so, in the 94th Congress that there would be special education access for children with severe learning disabilities, but along with that mandate came a promise of 40 percent funding from the Federal Government, appropriately, for these children are the most difficult and expensive to educate. Yet, we are contemplating only 9 percent Federal funding in place of that 40 percent commitment.

In the area of gun safety, we have seen example after example across this country where carnage has erupted on our schoolyards. Yet, at the same time, this Congress has a number of bills before it that are designed to reduce the incidence of gun violence. So far, not one has been scheduled to come to this floor.

Finally, in the area of Internet connection, that promise was to be made through the mechanism of the E-Rate, a heavily discounted fee that would be available particularly to inner city schools, rural schools, but all American schools and libraries would benefit, to some degree. This was the promise of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and yet this promise has yet to be fully implemented. Indeed, today there are some in Congress who are threatening to repeal that provision, leaving behind the most needy children from the information superhighway.

There is no reason for us to shrug our shoulders, no excuse for inaction. We know the problems. We in Congress have made the commitments. We currently have the strongest economy of a generation. Indeed, some of my friends in the Republican leadership feel we have so much money that they feel comfortable contemplating a $1 trillion tax cut over the next 10 years.

I would suggest that, first and foremost, we tend to knitting by first fully funding our commitment to special education; by passing commonsense legislation to reduce gun access, the cap laws that would mandate safe storage and responsible gun ownership; and finally, keep our commitments to our schools and libraries by fully funding the E-Rate. Americans and their children deserve no less from this Congress.

FOLLOWING THROUGH ON THE COMMITMENT OF THE HOUSE TO ELIMINATE THE MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

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

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, earlier this summer this House made a commitment to eliminate the marriage tax penalty. I thought this morning that I would talk about why it is so important that we follow through on that commitment, and follow through on that commitment with a series of simple questions that I hear in the South suburbs and the South Side of Chicago, the area that I have the privilege of representing.

That is, do Americans feel that it is fair that our tax code imposes a higher tax on married working couples? Do Americans feel it is fair that 21 million married working couples pay, on average, $1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married? Do Americans feel that is fair that this couple pays higher taxes than an identical couple that lives together outside of marriage? Do Americans feel it is fair that our tax code actually provides an incentive to get divorced, because the only way today to avoid the marriage tax penalty is to get divorced and to file that paperwork?

That is wrong. It is unfair. Frankly, really, it is immoral that our tax code punishes society's most basic institution for 21 million married working couples; that is, $1,400 in higher taxes.

Let me give an example of a south suburban couple from Illinois that suffers the marriage tax penalty. The gentleman in the couple is a machinist at Caterpillar. That is where they make the big heavy earth-moving equipment in Joliet. This machinist makes $35,500. If he is single, under our tax code he files and, of course, with the standard exemption and deduction, he is in the 15 percent tax bracket.

He meets a schoolteacher, a schoolteacher in the public schools. She has an identical income of $35,500. If she stayed single, just like her machinist fiance, she would be in the 15 percent tax bracket. Under our tax code, if they choose to get married, they will file jointly. When they file jointly, because they combine their income, and their combined income is $61,000, that pushes them into a higher tax bracket. They are now taxed in the 28 percent tax bracket just because they are married, producing an almost $1,400 marriage tax penalty just because they are married.

That is wrong that this couple, just because they choose to get married, pay higher taxes. If we think about it, what is the bottom line, here? We propose the Marriage Tax Elimination Act which puts a working married couple like our machinist and schoolteacher on parity with an identical married couple that lives outside marriage.

In 1996 this House of Representatives led the way by working to provide an adoption tax credit to help families provide a loving home for a child in need of adoption. In 1997 this House led the way in convincing the President and the Senate that we should provide a $500 per child tax credit which will benefit 3 million Illinois children. That helped families. Of course, this year we can help families again by strengthening marriage and no longer punishing marriage.

Let me share how we propose eliminating the marriage tax penalty. The Marriage Tax Elimination Act, H.R. 3734, is very simple. It is legislation which essentially doubles relief for working married couples by doubling the standard deduction from its current level of $4,150 to $8,300, and also doubling the income tax threshold, which of course you file in the 15 percent if you are single, and just over 24,000, doubling that to a little over 49,000.

So when you are single and you choose to get married, your tax essentially doubles. Your rates are double the income. That brings fairness to the tax code. That is a very simple way of eliminating the marriage tax penalty under the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, doubling the standard deduction, doubling rates, so married taxpayers are not punished just because they are married. That is a simple solution.