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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. STEARNS).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
July 19, 1999.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CLIFF STEARNS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, 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 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

THE REPUBLICAN AGENDA

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 a very, very diverse district. I represent the south side of Chicago, the south suburbs in Cook and Will Counties, industrial communities like Joliette, LaSalle, a lot of cornfields and farm towns. When one represents such a diverse district, city, suburbs and country, one listens for those comments and concerns, issues and problems and questions that link the city and the suburbs and the country.

I have often heard, over the course of the last 4½ years that I have had the privilege of being in this House, a very common message, and that is the common message of working together and solving the challenges that we face; that they want us here in the Congress to work together, solve the challenges that we face, and I am pretty proud in the last 4 years how we have met that challenge that the folks back home have given me: balancing the budget for the first time in 28 years, cutting taxes for the middle class for the first time in 16 years, and, of course, reforming our failed welfare system for the first time in over a generation. Those are all big accomplishments, big accomplishments that came from a committed effort in this Congress over the last 4 years to change how Washington works to make Washington more responsive to the folks back home.

As a result now, that success, particularly in balancing the budget and cutting taxes, we have an economy that is doing better than we anticipated. Nine years, since 1991, we have been enjoying economic growth. Tying that in with a balanced budget, we now have projected $3 trillion surplus of extra money over the next 10 years. That is a lot of money when we think about it, because our Federal budget is only $1.7 billion.

Well, as we work on the Republican agenda this year of good schools and low taxes and a secure retirement, we have the challenge before us of what to do with the extra money, what to do with the surplus; and of course, historically in Washington they always want to spend it on new government.

But if we look at the markup of that money, most of it is Social Security. I am really proud that the Republican budget does something that the folks back home have told me that we should do for a long time, and that is the Republican budget stops the raid on Social Security that has gone on for 30 years. Republicans put a stop to it this year. In fact, in doing so, we set aside two-thirds of the surplus of extra tax revenue for retirement security, meaning we use those funds to shrink Social Security and Medicare so that they are there for 3 generations from now, and that is the centerpiece and the purpose of the Social Security and Medicare lock box.

But under our budget by doing that, we take the so-called surplus and we set aside two-thirds of the surplus for Medicare and Social Security, one-third for tax cuts, because we believe that if we look at the tax burden today on families, and I often hear whether I am at the union hall or the VFW or the local chamber or the coffee shop on Main Street or the grain elevator out in the country, folks are frustrated by the tax burden being so high.

In fact, since 1985, the tax burden on individuals has gone up. In fact, it has doubled since 1985, and a portion of our economy, the gross domestic product that now goes to the Federal Government in taxes is the highest level ever in peacetime history. Mr. Speaker, 21 percent of our economy is now consumed by the Federal Government in the burden of taxes.

Not only do people back home tell me that they feel taxes are too high, but they are frustrated with how complex and complicated and also how unfair our tax code is. They bring up real concerns about issues such as the marriage tax penalty.

And I have Shad and Michelle Hallihan here, a young couple, two schoolteachers in Joliette, Illinois, who just got married. In fact, they are expecting a baby any day now. Well, because they are married and both work, their combined incomes when they file jointly as a married couple pushes them into a higher tax bracket. That is called the marriage tax penalty.

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