Again, about 6 million of them a year inappropriately choose that filing status when they should not, and it causes great problems to them and to the IRS. In fact, the IRS gets over a million calls a year just about filing status. At any given time, there are 18 million people who might be subject to audit because they choose the wrong filing status. Being subject to audit, especially to lower-income taxpayers, is devastating, and so we are trying to help those people.

It also expands the 1040EZ and the 1040A by allowing taxpayers with up to $100,000 in taxable income, rather than $50,000, and who have interest payments, to be able to use these shorter forms.

What is the difference? The normal tax forms takes on average 28.5 hours to fill out. The 1040EZ, 3.5 hours. That is a huge time savings for Americans who do not have enough time to do the things that they want to do, to take that time away from filling out taxes. Again, it is a tremendous savings of money and time.

Yes, the IRS may be looking at this, but they have not done it, and it is the right thing to do, so let us do it. It has not been adjusted since 1982.

Finally, getting rid of some of these deadwood provisions is extremely important, cleaning up the code for individuals because people make mistakes based on these inaccurate provisions in the code. We have gone through it using the Joint Committee on Taxation, professional analysis, to determine what is appropriate and what is not.

This is good government legislation. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to strongly support this.

Mr. SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, our honorable chairman mentioned maybe we should rename the act because we had been criticizing it, and maybe call it the ''Taxpayer Rationalization Act.'' Well, I had already proposed calling it the ''All Sizzle and No Steak Taxpayer Act,'' and certainly we would accept that moniker.

The honorable chairman indicated that we are unfairly criticizing the bill, but I might mention, we are only criticizing it because it is wrong. Adding ''single'' to the ''head of household'' is just simply incorrect. If it was so simple, we would not have to be debating and talking about it so much.

In fact, the Tax Code contains 1.4 million words, 10,000 of which have been added since the gentleman from California (Chairman THOMAS) got into the majority, and now we can make that 10,001 words, as we add the word ''single,'' although it certainly is incorrect.

I feel that in looking at this we have to clarify what the bill does and does not do by asking ourselves certain questions and asking the author certain questions about the intent of the bill.

The questions would be: Does the bill deny the tax benefits of head of household status to a married woman whose husband has abandoned her and the kids? And the answer to that would be ''no.''

Does the bill deny tax benefits of head of household status to a married man who is legally separated under the laws of a State of this Nation, who has custody of the children? And again the answer would be ''no.''

So if the provision does not apply only to single taxpayers, what does the provision do other than add confusion by using the word ''single,'' which is inapplicable.

Finally, I am curious about the other provision of the bill, which would require the IRS to change the short forms to allow taxpayers with higher incomes, up to $100,000, to use the forms. My questions are: Does the code need to be amended, added to, to change how tax forms are printed and formatted? And the answer would be ''no,'' they have authority to do that under the current law.

And do the experts at the IRS and the Treasury think that these forms that we currently have should be changed? And I think obviously not or that would have been done.

Now, possibly some of these issues could have been addressed if we had gone through the regular order and process of the House, as was mentioned by the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN). The rules are there for a purpose. Possibly if we had gone through the Committee on Ways and Means to consider this bill, these issues could have been addressed. We could have renamed the bill the ''All Sizzle and No Steak Act.'' We could have made sure that the word ''single'' was inserted if it was accurate, and not inserted if it was not.

But again, the rules are there for a purpose. We did not follow the rules, and we find ourselves here today in this confusion. So again this legislation may be marginally helpful, but why miss an opportunity for real tax simplification?

Since 1994, the majority has enacted 42 new public laws with 3,533 changes to the Tax Code contained in those more than 10,000 additional pages of complex public laws. That averages 360 changes a year with no serious efforts made to provide simplification. The Tax Code currently contains about 1.4 million words. The Tax Code has more than 4,700 pages. The Tax Code content has grown by at least 15 percent since the majority took over in 1994. It has grown 15 percent. The Master Federal Standard Tax Reporter used by accountants and lawyers is more than 60,000 pages. Since 1994, that manual has increased by 2,000 pages.

Today it takes average, middle American families 7.5 hours longer to fill out their tax return than it did in 1994, an increase from 11.5 hours in 1994 to 19 hours today. That is a full day's work for most Americans. And what do we do to simplify? We add the word ''single.''

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield for the purpose of making a unanimous consent request to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. RAMSTAD).

(Mr. RAMSTAD asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. RAMSTAD. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Tax Simplification for Americans Act.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Tax Simplification for Americans Act.

As American taxpayers know too well, the tax code is incredibly complex and compliance is all to expensive. Americans spend 3 billion hours per year filling out tax forms and keeping tax records. The cost of complying with the code is a whopping $85 billion per year. That's 3 billion hours and $85 billion that could be put to much productive uses in America.

This bill will offer taxpayers some meaningful relief from complexity. about 1.6 million people will be able to fill out simpler tax forms—1040A and 1040EZ—rather than filling out the 1040 form with all its schedules, which takes about 28.5 hours to complete.

The bill would also end the confusing use of definitions regarding a taxpayer's age. It also clarifies the "head of household" definition, which will help taxpayers prevent errors in filing status. In addition, the bill gets rid of a number of outdated and unnecessary provisions in the tax code.

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of work to do in the area of simplification, but this bill is an excellent start. It will mean real help to real people.

I urge my colleagues to support this important bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. PORTMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4841, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MILITARY HOUSING IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2004

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4879) to increase the military housing private investment cap.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4879

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE

This Act may be cited as the ''Military Housing Improvement Act of 2004.''

SECTION 2. INCREASE IN MILITARY HOUSING PRIVATE INVESTMENT CAP

Section 2883(g)(1) of title 10, United States Code, is amended by striking ''$850,000,000'' and inserting ''$1,350,000,000''.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. HUNTER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 4879, the Military Housing Improvement Act of 2004. We have spent the last several hours debating points of order and budgetary implications of a provision in the Military Construction Appropriations Act to address the housing privatization program. H.R. 4879, I am pleased to say, goes straight to the heart of the matter by raising the cap on the housing privatization program by $500 million, enough to permit DOD to continue the program through fiscal year 2005.

As Member after Member has pointed out today, the Military Housing Privatization Program has been an unqualified success. By leveraging the interest of private sector developers and property managers, housing privatization improves and manages military family housing better, more quickly, and at lower cost than our traditional military construction model.

To date, the housing privatization program has leveraged a government cash contribution of only $500 million to build approximately $5.6 billion in housing construction. Furthermore, privatized housing is a tremendous improvement over existing DOD housing facilities.

□ 1615

Privatized homes are often equipped with new appliances, built to modern standards, well-maintained, and are parts of communities. This is in stark contrast to the patchwork of poorly maintained housing for which DOD is known.

Despite the success of the housing privatization program, a legislative cap will soon bring a halt to the program by preventing DOD from entering into new privatization contracts after November 2004. The FY 2005 National Defense Authorization Act contains a partial fix to this problem. It eliminates the cap in fiscal year 2006. However, it leaves a gap between November 2004 and October 2005 during which DOD would be unable to sign any privatization contracts that would count against the cap. As a result, most projects DOD plans to begin in fiscal year 2005 would be delayed until October 2005. This would affect approximately 24,000 family housing units at at least 16 installations nationwide.

H.R. 4879 addresses this problem by increasing the cap on the program by $500 million, enough to allow DOD to proceed with its privatization program through FY 2005. The program is a success. I urge my colleagues to join with me in ensuring that it continues by supporting this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume. My fellow Missourian, Mark Twain, once said, ''The more you explain it to me, the more I don't understand it.''

I have no idea why we are considering this bill, because all the majority had to do was not raise a point of order on the appropriations bill. I do not want to say this is a cynical gesture, but it is. We are considering this bill because the majority is not serious about taking care of the troops and their families. 24,000 families will do without because the other bill will have a point of order raised on it. All they had to do on the other bill, the appropriations bill, was not to raise a point of order and 24,000 military families would have their housing in 2005.

I appreciate the fact that our friends in the majority are taking the issue seriously, but it appears to me that this is going around Robin Hood's barn to do what could be simply done by not raising a point of order.

While this stand-alone bill is fine on its merits, it is going to die in the Senate. It will go nowhere. What we wanted to do was raise the privatized housing cap in the Military Construction Appropriations Act. That is legislation that the Senate cannot ignore. And all we had to do was just not raise the point of order and those young families would have their housing.

I cannot argue against the words of this measure, but we should not be deceived. This is a ruse to avoid dealing with the privatized cap on an issue in a must-do piece of legislation. The details of the cap issue have been discussed at length by others, and I raised the issue during the rule on the other appropriations bill. Let me just say that because the Committee on the Budget refused to accommodate bipartisan requests on both sides of the aisle by the Committee on Armed Services, the Defense authorization bill bowed to CBO scoring. As a result, we could not fix the problem until 2006. Consequently, 24,000 military families do without.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOUNG).

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I want to extend a very warm thanks to the gentleman from California for bringing this bill to the floor. He is a devoted patriot and devoted to the men and women who serve in our military, and he has proved that so many times. What he does today by expediting the consideration of this bill, the military folks I think will appreciate him and express that appreciation in many ways. The gentleman from Missouri again is absolutely correct. This is a total bipartisan effort not only on the part of the committees but the House, the administration, the President, the Department of Defense. Everybody. It is really a shame that we have to ask the gentleman from California to bring this bill up basically out of order. But since there is the threat of not allowing the appropriations bill to include this issue on military family housing, this is the only other way to get to it.

But here is the problem. This bill will pass today with a big vote, but that is the end of it. It is never going to pass. It is never going to become law. We are never going to see it anywhere. The appropriate way to do this is on that appropriations bill that we were talking about all morning and that we will come back to later this afternoon. That is the right way to do it and get it done.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. I yield to the gentleman from Missouri.

Mr. SKELTON. I thank the gentleman for agreeing with me.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. The appropriations bill is a must-pass bill. It will pass eventually. I cannot say when. We are going to pass it. I cannot say when it might get final passage, considering the other body has to deal with it; but the appropriations bill has to pass as all appropriations bills have to pass, or the government shuts down. We have not let that happen for a long time, and we are not going to let it happen now; but it is a shame that we have to use, as the gentleman from Missouri said, the round robin way to get to this when we could have had it done and over with and on the way to the Senate if we would have just passed this bill the way that the committee wrote it with the bipartisan support of everybody involved, except the Committee on the Budget.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY).

Mr. OBEY. I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, we are not legislating here today. We are engaging in a giant game of charades. Let me explain. The gentleman who just spoke, the gentleman from Florida, is the senior Republican on the Committee on Appropriations. I am the senior Democrat on the Committee on Appropriations. We are absolutely as one on this issue. I totally agree with everything the gentleman just said. What I would like to do is to repeat what he said in a slightly different way to drive home the point that he was making.

What has happened, Mr. Speaker, is that the Committee on Appropriations brought to this floor earlier today the military construction bill which contained a provision which enabled us to improve military housing for thousands of young military families who are sacrificing more than anybody else in this country because of the Iraq war.

When we did that, the chairman of the Committee on the Budget made known his unhappiness with that action because it technically breached the previous budget resolution which the Committee on the Budget had pushed through this House on an earlier date. So the chairman of the Committee on the Budget made known his intent to eliminate that provision by making a point of order against it when it was before the House. That meant that that action would effectively deny that improved military housing to somewhere between 23,000 and 50,000 additional military families.

So now what is happening is this. Because evidently some people are uncomfortable with their being politically exposed on that issue, we now have seen the authorizing committee ask to bring this bill to the floor which purports to accomplish the very same thing that was accomplished by the appropriations committee. The only reason that this is allowable under House rules and the appropriations bill was not is because the gentleman's ability to make a point of order lies only on a bill which has been reported from a committee. This provision that is before us was never considered by the committee and so, therefore, it is exempt. So it is a procedural loophole which is being used by the Committee on the Budget in order to force this House to go through this outrageous charade, and the net result is what?

The result will be that the bill now before us will not pass. We have absolutely no guarantee whatsoever that it will be passed in the Senate. So this is probably on a short track to nowhere. Meanwhile, the one bill that we know will pass, the military appropriations bill, will now fall victim to a point of order that will be lodged by the gentleman from Iowa. The result is the only vehicle which is guaranteed to pass will no longer contain the provision helping military families. A vehicle which is not going to go anywhere will contain that provision that does not help anyone.

The bill that is before us today is not a substantive fix. It is a political fix. It takes care of a few people's political problems, but it does not solve the problem of the military families. This is an outrageous charade. I welcome the action of the gentleman from California and the gentleman from Missouri in at least trying to do what they can to help these military families get the housing assistance they need, but we would not have had to go through this if we had simply allowed the Committee on Appropriations to proceed with its bill; and even though we are allowing this committee to take this action today, there is no guarantee whatsoever that this action will produce one additional decent house for a military person in this country. The only guarantee is to vote for the military construction bill with that provision.

Right now this entire issue is in the hands of the gentleman from Iowa. If he wants to effectively deny military families that decent housing, he will proceed to object to the provision in the military construction bill. I do not think we are going to fool anybody with the charade that is being participated in by bringing this bill to the floor.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, on that optimistic note, I yield myself such time as I may consume. Let me just address my friend who just spoke and all Members. This bill does have meaning because every time the full House manifests its will and gives a good majority vote, a good solid vote, that is a very important boost to the process. I would just tell the gentleman that we are going to make sure that by the time the smoke clears and the dust clears in this process, we are going to have these 24,000 units released for construction. It is important to everyone. I might say, also, and I appreciate my friend from Florida and all the great work he has done on this, and all the members of the Committee on Armed Services, that we do have this problem fixed from 2006 on. It is this gap, this bridge this year that we need to fix.

I might mention to my colleagues that the gentleman from Iowa is the author of this provision. I think that bespeaks of his good intentions to get this problem taken care of.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE), chairman of the Committee on the Budget.

Mr. NUSSLE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the very distinguished chairman of the Committee on Armed Services for yielding me this time. There is no one in this body who has worked any harder than he has in making this issue resolved, getting it to resolution. I appreciate his willingness to expedite this bill that I introduced today in order to help deal with the problem.

To those who are suggesting that this bill goes nowhere after it passes unanimously today, I just ask them, why? I see them shaking their heads, but why is it that the other body would stop military families from receiving this benefit? And why is it that the other body would oppose the Department of Defense authorization, as we hear is occurring? Why are they stopping everything? For our defense needs, our intelligence needs, our military families, everything is stopped. They have not even been willing to vote on a budget.

I ask the Members, is that a problem? Of course it is. Do we break our rules? Do we bust our budget in order to do that, in order to fix it? I would suggest no. You have the right to overrule that. You have the right to vote differently. I would suggest you do that if that is how you feel. But then do not come to the floor and lecture the Committee on the Budget about how the budget process is broken. Do not come to the floor and lecture the American people about deficits and national debts and tell me time and time again during the budget debate itself how when you are in a hole, you stop digging. I believe if I had a nickel for every time that speech was made, we could probably resolve the national debt and the deficit, because when you are in a hole, you stop digging.

How could you do that? Today the Committee on Appropriations brought to the floor a bill that busts the budget by $1.2 billion instead of looking throughout the rest of their budget, the rest of their appropriations allocation of $821 billion, to find enough money in order to meet the needs of our military families.

□ 1630

So they came to the floor and for the very first time since Republicans took the majority, violated a rule, bringing to the floor an appropriation bill that busted their allocation called 302(b), which I understand most people watching do not pay any attention to.

Yes, these are arcane rules, but the reason that we have these rules is so that we can try to get a handle on spending. And, no, it is not just for military families. I ask Members to look through that $821 billion and they will find many places that are less important than our military families. That is why this bill needs to be supported. We need to pass it, and we need to put pressure on the other body that stands in the way of all progress for our military, passing the Department of Defense authorization, passing appropriation bills.

We are not even going to pass the Military Construction appropriation bill before the election. I will bet my colleagues on that one. Will we do what is called a CR? Probably. But do my colleagues think we are going to pass that before this election? Do my colleagues think we are not going to have CR and CR and CR? If it is such an important priority, where are these people rushing to get this done?

So I want to commend the gentleman who is the very distinguished chairman of the Committee on Armed Services who has jurisdiction over this issue, who has been working on this, who is bringing this bill today to the floor and deserves the ability to continue to work on this and not put it in an appropriation bill when it does not belong there, and it busts the budget.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY).

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

I would simply ask the gentleman, does he mean that even though his party controls both Houses of the Congress that they are not going to be able to pass a Military Construction appropriation bill, one of the 13 bills that must pass this Congress before we adjourn; and yet he believes that the Senate somehow will miraculously pass this bill which has nothing else going for it?

Give me a break. I do not mind if the gentleman wants to fool himself, but

do not think he is fooling me with this action.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. OBEY. I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Wisconsin has been a Member of the House Committee on Appropriations longer than anyone else on that committee. Help me out. If the provision in the appropriations bill busts the budget and this bill that we talk about today has the identical effect and it does not bust the budget, can the gentleman explain to me how that works?

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, the only way the gentleman from Iowa can get away from this is that the rule he is citing applies only to a bill that is reported from committee. This action is not reported from committee, so he gets around the very rule he professes to be supporting.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say that we have obviously a difference of opinion as to how we get this particular measure forward, how we move it forward. We have got people of goodwill on both sides.

I have recommended today, even though we are the authorizing committee, that we give up some of our turf today and let this thing pass on the appropriations bill. There is obviously a problem with that occurring.

We have got this measure up, which is authored, in fact, by the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE), chairman of the Committee on the Budget, as evidence of the fact that he wants to get this thing to move forward; and I think if we pass this with an overwhelming vote, manifesting that will of the House is going to help this process.

We have got a long way to go before the dust settles on the spending bills this year. We are going to make sure that this problem is solved this year. The exact parliamentary road for that obviously has not been determined, as is, I think, evidenced by the debate that has taken place.

But I would just ask Members from all positions, from all points, who have one piece of common ground, and that is to get this very important housing measure passed, to work together on this thing and move forward.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. HUNTER. I yield to the gentleman from Washington.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I think the chairman is operating in totally good faith, but the way to move forward is to support the Military Construction appropriations bill, which came to this floor on a bipartisan basis.

The subcommittee wanted this problem solved. We solved it in the full committee with the help of the gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOUNG) and the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY) and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KNOLLENBERG) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS). This thing was worked out.

The reason we are doing this is because of this Congressional Budget Office rule, and OMB, the administration, the Defense Department all want us to do this. Why can we not figure out a way to do this today? Why do we have to wait for months when we could get this thing done?

He makes all kinds of excuses, but we might be able to put this into another bill and maybe it will go into the CR if it passes the House.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time from my very good colleague, and I just remind him that no objection has been heard yet on the MILCON bill, and I would just would ask the gentleman, the chairman of the Budget Committee, to look at this as a very extraordinary situation, because it is an extraordinary situation in that we have a very unusual scoring application by CBO that is not endorsed by OMB and not, obviously, endorsed by us and does not make good sense. That is that the entire economic implication of this 24,000 units is being scored at one time, and that is a very unusual thing; and secondly, that we have a very unusual circumstance with this being the centerpiece of quality of life for our military folks.

So let me just suggest to my friend that we all have a job in this House and that the Committee on the Budget has undertaken to follow their duty, their obligation, in the manner they best see fit; and I would suggest to the gentleman that talking with them and working with them on this may be the way to get this thing done, and I would hope that the gentleman would talk with the Committee on the Budget.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would continue to yield, I would hope that the gentleman from California would talk to his leadership, too, because his leadership has got to play a role here in giving some guidance to senior Members, because they are in charge of the House, because they are the majority party.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, let me remind the gentleman that neither of us belongs to organized political parties. We are Republicans and Democrats. But I just want to remind the gentleman, too, that we are stretched between two cross-strains which are very familiar to this House. One is the strain and the discipline that is required for fiscal discipline. And we all know that, and I think we have to give some credence to the Committee on the Budget chairman's statement, because the chairman of the Committee on the Budget does stand here and he does take fusillades from both sides about spending money and about not having rules. On the other hand, we then have these extraordinary circumstances in which we beat up on the Committee on the Budget chairman for sticking with those rules.

And I told the gentleman that my position is, even though we own the turf on this as the authorizing committee, we think it is so extraordinary and so compelling we are willing to give up that turf and pass it in this particular bill.

But I would recommend to the gentleman that he talk with the members of the Committee on the Budget and remember that they have an obligation, too, and try to work through that obligation.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. HUNTER. I yield to the gentleman from Washington.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, this is a good program, too. That is the point we want to make. This is working, and it is not costing the taxpayers money. We are using the payments to work with the private sector. This meets all the tests of a great program.

The other thing is, this is not mandatory. I mean, in other words, we can get out of this program. If the military does not need the housing, then the private sector will take the project over and operate it. That is why I am wondering why this big scoring rule when, in fact, we are not putting real money into this, we are just giving a guarantee, and that way we get the housing done and it is much more effective than military construction.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, let me respond to the gentleman because I think all of us were disappointed when we saw what I think is a very unusual ruling, that this is all to be costed up front, and that was a highly unusual ruling which I think is erroneous.

On the other hand, it has put us where we are. And what we have got to do is work through it, and I think we are going to work through it.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

My recollection, during the earlier debate on the rule on the appropriation bill, was that my friend and my colleague and chairman of the Committee on Armed Services, during his very eloquent speech at that time, urged the gentleman from Iowa not to raise the point of order.

So I ask this question, Mr. Speaker: In order for us to have 24,000 more family units under the privatization program, the only thing that has to happen under the appropriation bill would be for the gentleman from Iowa, the chairman of the Committee on the Budget, not to raise a point of order.

So I ask the gentleman from Iowa, will he insist on raising the point of order on the appropriation bill?

Mr. NUSSLE. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. SKELTON. I yield to the gentleman from Iowa.

Mr. NUSSLE. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will insist on that.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, he will insist on raising the point of order.

Mr. Speaker, we just saw 24,000 military families getting their just housing delayed for a long time.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE).

Mr. NUSSLE. Mr. Speaker, I would say to the gentleman from Missouri, I have even been told today I was shooting at Santa Claus. Somebody came to the floor and said I shot Santa Claus today. My goodness, I have been accused of a lot of things, but shooting Santa Claus and personally, individually, one Member stopping 24,000 families from getting that housing, let us review the record.

If this was so important, would my colleagues not think that the Committee on Appropriations, in their base bill as it was reported to the subcommittee, do my colleagues not think that in that base bill they would have written this procedure in? It was not done. It was not done. In fact, it was done as an amendment at the committee.

So I understand that this is now a pretty important priority for a number of reasons. Some of it is politics. Some of it is expediency. Some of it is probably due to the fact that we have a body across the Rotunda that does not appear to be getting much accomplished. There is a lot of that that probably makes it very difficult. But that does not mean that we bend our rules, we break our rules here in the House in order to proceed.

There is not one family today that loses their housing as a result of a point of order on the House floor. My goodness, if that was the case, there would probably be a lot more Members down here doing a lot of points of order on a lot more issues.

What needs to be done is, priorities need to be made. We need to within the bills determine what is important, and I would stack up military housing to just about anything else in most of these bills that come to the floor called appropriation bills.

People want to talk about priorities? These are the priorities, and the gentleman from Missouri is as strong as the gentleman from California in understanding that. But I am, too, and every Member of this body is, too. And I appreciate the leadership that that gentleman from Missouri makes every day for our men and women. But we have many leaders who make that same sacrifice, and I do not count myself in the back seat to any one of them.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. DICKS).

□ 1645

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to the distinguished chairman that it was because the chairman of our subcommittee, who has worked so hard on this, asked us to do this in full committee. We did not raise it in subcommittee. We had a long discussion about it. The gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KNOLLENBERG) asked us to hold up and do it in full committee. So the committee on a bipartisan basis agreed to that strategy.

This was not because it was not a big priority. It has been a big priority all year. So the gentleman from Iowa, the chairman of the Committee on the Budget, is misinformed on this subject.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS).

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, in my 14 years in the House, the introduction of this bill this afternoon is the most cynical charade I have ever seen. This bill, they did not even know what bill number to put on this. They had to mark out one bill number and put another. They had to hand write part of this. What a sorry way to deal with the needs of 24,000 military families, the need to get better housing.

I think it is interesting that the gentleman from Iowa, the very person who within the next couple of hours is going to kill our opportunity to solve a military housing crisis, is at the moment trying to get us to pass a bill that a few hours ago had not even been introduced.

It is also interesting that the same gentleman who introduced this bill, that says this is the solution to our military housing problem, then spoke on the floor just a minute ago saying the other body cannot pass anything.

What reason do we have to believe that this is going to go anywhere? It is probably to go in a trash bin of fig leafs. And that is exactly what this is, and that is what bothers me more than anything. When the House Republican leadership this morning could have stood up for our military families, who deserve better housing, especially during a time of war, they were not only AWOL, they broke arms on the floor of this House for 25 minutes to see that Members voted for a rule that would get us into exactly the quagmire we are in at this moment. Shame on them for doing that.

Now the House leadership, when the issue is no longer providing new housing for military families, the issue is far more important than that, a much higher priority than that. It is how do we pass a fig leaf today so that Members of Congress are not embarrassed, 212 of them who voted to get us into the position we are in today? One Republican Member could have added to that vote saying to the Speaker, I am going to put military families' interests today above my loyalty to you, and we would not be here.

We can solve this problem. We do not have to pass this fig leaf that is going nowhere. We ought to simply bring back up the military construction appropriations bill and pass it by unanimous consent, a bill that was put together on a bipartisan basis.

But, unfortunately, the same leadership that turned its back this morning on the Air Force Association, on the Association of the U.S. Army, on the Military Officers Association of America, and on the National Military Families Association, the same leadership that turned their back on these groups that wanted to really help military families to better housing, that leadership is now saying, gee, we could not do that this morning, but we can pass a fig leaf bill.

Why can they pass a political fig leaf for Members of Congress, but cannot do something over the last 6 months that we have been asking to help military families get better housing?

This is a sad day for all the servicemen and -women in our country who sacrifice for our Nation. I am proud to represent 40,000 of those great servicemen and -women at Fort Hood in my district. What we ought to do is pass a military construction bill. Let us put military families first, not fig leafs for politicians first.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 minute to remind my friend that the same Republican leadership that he has criticized so heavily is the Republican leadership that passed concurrent receipt, where retirees can receive their checks and disability checks; has urged and has passed the survivor benefit program, which laid in state for years; has increased the equipment supply from an average of about $45 billion a year under the Clinton administration to an average of about $70 billion a year for new equipment for our troops in the field; and supplied the ammunition, force protection and, surveillance they have been so sorely lacking the last 15 years.

I would remind my friend, this should not be a blame day; this should be a day in which we all work and move forward. I think that every vote that one takes on an issue, one can call this a fig leaf vote if one wants, but I would remind my friend that every vote that we take on an issue is an important vote.

I would just tell my friend from Texas, at the end of this year when the dust clears on this process, which is obviously affected by the political season, we are going to have legislative vehicles come down the track and get across the finish line. This problem is going to be fixed.

If my friend wants to ask me to take the floor with him at the end of this session and we will prove up, I will be happy to tell him now, I will give him my word, this problem is going to be fixed.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOUNG).

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from California (Chairman HUNTER) for the good work that he does and the strong support he is giving us on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I want to correct one thing said earlier on, that nothing is getting done, that the national defense bill is not working and this is not happening and that is not happening on national defense. The national defense appropriations bill has been passed by

the House, has been passed by the Senate, has gone to conference; and, as a matter of fact, it has been filed and we would be considering it right this minute if it had not been for the fact we are having to deal with this issue.

As we deal with this issue, we are spending a lot of time; and that is okay, because the issue is extremely important. But I have to keep asking myself over and over again, and I can usually come up with the answer: What is the difference in doing it on the appropriations bill or doing it on a freestanding bill? The effect is the same.

The chairman who is going to raise the point of order on the appropriations bill is the author of this bill, so I have a hard time understanding what the problem is. I do not know if there is a good answer to that. But no matter how we do it, it is going to have the same effect.

If we do not do it, we are going to have many people who are looking forward to having decent housing for their military families that are not going to get it any time soon. That is the big issue.

Now, when it was suggested that someone was shooting Santa Claus, I said that earlier in debate. I said, let us not have these kids in Iraq and Afghanistan who are planning to have their families in decent housing, let us not let them think Santa Claus is going to be shot today. Let us not be the Grinch that stole Christmas.

Let us do what we have to do; let us do what is right. If we are going to do it later, why not do it now, while the vehicle is before us? There are a lot of questions that I really cannot get answers to in my own mind.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. I yield to the gentleman from Wisconsin.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I simply would like to say there is no financial difference whatsoever between these two approaches. The only real difference is the one being proposed by the gentleman from Iowa probably will not become law, and the other one will.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, the gentleman is exactly right.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The time of the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) has expired. The gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) has 6½ minutes remaining.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES).

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, it is a sad day today. I do not know if anybody else is as ashamed as I am that we are going through this kind of a process. When I think back at the times I have visited Iraq, five times that I have visited in Iraq, and I sit across the table, whether it is for breakfast, for lunch or for dinner, with the soldiers, they look at us and they have a trust that we are going to do the right thing. They look at us, and they know that we are going to represent their best interests.

In my district at Fort Bliss, Texas, there are about 2,500 military families that have been looking forward to getting a benefit from this program that we are talking about here. We were looking forward to it.

It is clear to me that what we are doing here today is a lot of political CYA and nothing substantial apparently is going to come from it. Shame on us for not having the guts to stand up and do what is right for our military families, and shame on us for passing emergency legislation, supplemental bills, that give $20 billion, $21 billion, whatever that figure is, to reconstruct neighborhoods, give garbage trucks and all of these other things in Iraq, when we cannot even do the basic thing for our military families.

So here we are in this situation here, where we are talking about what a great job our military is doing, how proud we are of them and how we consider them heroes; and at the same time, we cannot find a process to give their families who are sacrificing beyond what most of us can imagine, who are sacrificing, we cannot give them decent housing.

Shame on us. We call this the people's House? We ought to be ashamed of each and every one of these machinations that we put ourselves through.

So it is a sad day for me. It should be a sad day for all of us. But, most of all, as I look at my watch and it is sometime after midnight in Iraq, those soldiers are putting their lives on the line for us for everything that we hold dear. We ought to have enough guts to do whatever it takes to find the money, to ensure that the money is there.

I will tell you very honestly, I do not have the knowledge of the intricacies of the budget and all of these other things that my honorable colleagues have, but I do know one thing: do not run a sham on our military families. That is all they care about. All they want to know from us is, as they look in our eyes, that they can trust us, that we are going to deliver for them like they deliver for us every day. Shame on us.

Mr. Speaker, at Fort Bliss in my district, nearly half of the NCOs attending the Sergeant Major's Academy live in beautiful recently built homes. The other half live in what is affectionately referred to as "Bedrock." While there is something nice about returning home to a neighborhood where your neighbors are Barney and Fred, it's not the neighbors that make this area of family housing on Fort Bliss resemble Bedrock—it's the fact that despite noble efforts by the folks at Fort Bliss, the houses are in poor shape and look like they were built in the Stone Age.

About 2,500 military families at Fort Bliss were looking forward to living in new or improved homes, thanks to the Military Housing Privatization Initiative (MHPI) that is scheduled to start this year. The Army's arm of this program, the Residential Communities Initiative (RCI), aims to eliminate inadequate housing on Army bases by 2007 through the construction of new homes, the improvement of current structures and the incorporation of community features such as recreation centers into military posts. At Fort Bliss, this means that "Bedrock" will be a thing of the past.

MHPI is an extremely cost-effective measure because contractors pay the up-front costs and recover their investment through rental payment. MHPI also stimulates local economies by providing job opportunities in the construction and maintenance of homes and facilities. Unfortunately for the 2,500 military families at Fort Bliss and for thousands of other families across the country, MHPI is threatened by a funding cap which will be reached in November of this year.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today, I stood on the floor of this House to urge my colleagues to vote against the rule for the FY05 MilCon appropriations. The rule would have stripped a provision from the bill to ensure that the MHPI program would continue. The passage of that rule almost ensures that this important provision will be eliminated from the appropriations bill. The bill now before us, H.R. 4879, contains language that is nearly identified to the military housing privatization provision in the MilCon appropriations bill. This bill is basically a face saving measure by the Republicans. This suspension bill that increases the housing cap does not keep out faith with our men and women in uniform. If the provision is in the MilCon appropriation bill, it will be committed to Conference and the Senate must deal with it. If, on the other hand, it is passed as a Suspension, the Senate is under no obligation whatsoever to consider the measure, and we have no idea if it will ever see the light of day—in short, the odds that it will become law are dramatically decreased. Mr. Speaker, this bill is a cynical gesture and a slap in the face of our brave men and women of the armed services. Our men and women in uniform and their families deserve the very best—and adequate housing is the least that we can provide for them. Unfortunately, this bill falls far short of ensuring that they will get the housing they so need and deserve.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ORTIZ).

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, when we look at the issue today, it is very simple. It is so simple. Private industry is putting a lot of money out so that our soldiers and their families can have adequate housing.

But let me look at the other side. When the pilots that we train, when the helicopter pilots leave, when the tank drivers leave, do you know how much it costs to train them? Private industry, my friends, they do not put one penny into that. It comes strictly from the taxpayers.

We know that a lot of the more senior members of the military are coming out, because the terrorist environment is blooming and they are getting out of the military so that they can get better paying jobs, and we are forcing them to leave the military because their families do not have adequate housing.

I have talked to helicopter pilots, and they tell me that they get calls in

Iraq about the plumbing in their homes not working, about the electricity having been shut off because of the wiring.

Mr. Speaker, let us do something that we need to do now and support our soldiers. It will take millions and millions of dollars when those senior members of the military get out, because their families do not want them to stay in the military because they do not have adequate housing.

Mr. Speaker, I promised the soldiers that we were going to correct that. Now I feel kind of embarrassed that we could not deliver to them what they need. I feel like my colleague. I am ashamed that we were not able to help our soldiers, those who are being wounded, those in the different hospitals.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, we pride ourselves in this body, I know my chairman and I pride ourselves, in working for and supporting the troops. But supporting the troops is more than a bumper sticker. We are the one body in the United States of America that can speak, and speak with authority, and make good things happen for those families and those soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines.

I hate to turn the news on in the morning, because I hear so many Americans have either been wounded or killed or both in the far reaches of Afghanistan and Iraq.

□ 1700

Those St. Louis families, we are not going to take care of them. We are going to do it by insisting on a technical point of order on the appropriations bill. That is not right. So let us vote for this. I will support this suspension measure. I, of course, do so with reluctance because we could solve the problem so easily on the appropriations bill by just doing nothing.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my strong support for the bill under consideration here today. But I am disappointed that we could not address this issue in the military construction appropriations bill.

The military construction bill includes not just funding for the construction of much needed facilities but also funds dedicated to constructing housing for our troops and their families. These funds are needed to construct new housing to replace existing housing that is in poor condition—where failing electrical systems and leaky roofs risk the safety of our military families. These funds are needed to build new houses on military bases where there are not enough homes to meet the demand of our military families—where the waiting time for a home can be over a year, where young enlisted families must live far from the support the base community provides. And these funds are needed to remodel and refurbish homes that are in disrepair—where families live without proper air conditioning in the summer or with poor heating in the winter.

In order to meet these pressing needs in the best and quickest way possible, we have worked with private industry to speed relief to military families. But today some here in Congress want to put a halt to the very successful military housing privatization program—not because they want to harm military families, but because they want to argue about the legislative process.

I believe that there is a time and a place for a debate about budget process to occur—that time is not now. Not when we have military families living in substandard housing. And not when we have hundreds of thousands of fathers and mothers serving in hostile environments around the world.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote to support our military families by supporting the privatized housing program that has been so successful in bringing needed relief to these hardworking families.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4879.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

PERMITTING 5-MINUTE VOTES AFTER FIRST VOTE IN NEXT SERIES NOTWITHSTANDING INTERVENING PROCEEDINGS

Mr. TIAHRT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that during the next series of postponed votes, ensuing votes after the first vote may be 5-minute votes notwithstanding intervening proceedings attending the swearing in of the new Member-elect from North Carolina.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Kansas?

There was no objection.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will now put each question on which further proceedings were postponed earlier today in the following order:

Conference report to accompany H.R. 2443, by the yeas and nays; and

on the motions to suspend the rules and pass

H.R. 4840, by the yeas and nays; and

H.R. 4879, by the yeas and nays.

The first electronic vote will be conducted as a 15-minute vote. Remaining electronic votes will be conducted as 5-minute votes.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2443, COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION ACT OF 2004

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The pending business is the question of agreeing to the conference report on the bill, H.R. 2443, on which the yeas and nays are ordered.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the conference report.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 425, nays 1, not voting 7, as follows:

[Roll No. 404]

YEAS—425

Abercrombie
Ackerman
Aderholt
Akin
Alexander
Allen
Andrews
Baca
Bachus
Baird
Baker
Baldwin
Ballenger
Barrett (SC)
Bartlett (MD)
Barton (TX)
Bass
Beauprez
Becerra
Bell
Bereuter
Berkley
Berman
Berry
Biggert
Bilirakis
Bishop (GA)
Bishop (NY)
Bishop (UT)
Blackburn
Blumenauer
Blunt
Boehlert
Boehner
Bonilla
Bonner
Bono
Boozman
Boswell
Boucher
Boyd
Bradley (NH)
Brady (PA)
Brady (TX)
Brown (SC)
Brown, Corrine
Brown-Waite, Ginny
Burgess
Burns
Burr
Burton (IN)
Buyer
Calvert
Camp
Cannon
Cantor
Capito
Capps
Capuano
Cardin
Cardoza
Carson (OK)
Carter
Case
Castle
Chabot
Chandler
Chocola
Clay
Clyburn
Coble
Cole
Conyers
Cooper
Costello
Cox
Cramer
Crane
Crenshaw
Crowley
Cubin
Culberson
Cummings
Cunningham
Davis (AL)
Davis (CA)
Davis (FL)
Davis (IL)
Davis (TN)
Davis, Jo Ann
Davis, Tom
Deal (GA)
DeFazio
DeGette
Delahunt
DeLauro
DeLay
DeMint
Diaz-Balart, L.
Diaz-Balart, M.
Dicks
Dingell
Doggett
Dooley (CA)
Doolittle
Doyle
Dreier
Duncan
Dunn
Edwards
Ehlers
Emanuel
Emerson
Engel
English
Eshoo
Etheridge
Evans
Everett
Farr
Fattah
Feeney
Filner
Flake
Foley
Forbes
Ford
Fossella
Frank (MA)
Franks (AZ)
Frelinghuysen
Frost
Gallegly
Garrett (NJ)
Gephardt
Gerlach
Gibbons
Gilchrest
Gillmor
Gingrey
Gonzalez
Goode
Goodlatte
Gordon
Goss
Granger
Graves
Green (TX)
Green (WI)
Greenwood
Grijalva
Gutierrez
Gutknecht
Hall
Harman
Harris
Hart
Hastings (FL)
Hastings (WA)
Hayes
Hayworth
Hefley
Hensarling
Herger
Herseth
Hill
Hinchey
Hinojosa
Hobson
Hoeffel
Hoekstra
Holden
Holt
Honda
Hooley (OR)
Hostettler
Houghton
Hoyer
Hulshof
Hunter
Hyde
Inslee
Isakson
Israel
Issa
Istook
Jackson (IL)
Jackson-Lee (TX)
Jefferson
Jenkins
John
Johnson (CT)
Johnson (IL)
Johnson, E. B.
Johnson, Sam
Jones (NC)
Jones (OH)
Kanjorski
Kaptur
Keller
Kelly
Kennedy (MN)
Kennedy (RI)
Kildee
Kilpatrick
Kind
King (IA)
King (NY)
Kingston
Kirk
Kleczka
Kline
Knollenberg
Kolbe
Kucinich
LaHood
Lampson
Langevin
Lantos
Larsen (WA)
Larson (CT)
Latham
LaTourette
Leach
Lee
Levin
Lewis (CA)
Lewis (GA)
Lewis (KY)
Linder
Lipinski
LoBiondo
Lofgren
Lowey
Lucas (KY)
Lucas (OK)
Lynch
Maloney
Manzullo
Markey
Marshall
Matheson
Matsui
McCarthy (MO)
McCarthy (NY)
McCollum
McCotter
McCrery
McDermott
McGovern