

media. In addition, in Norm Mineta's last year in Congress, Eric also served as his congressional liaison to the Smithsonian Institution's Board of Regents. Starting tomorrow, however, after more than 4½ years of service to our committee, Eric will move to the other body and take up the post of press secretary to Senator JOSEPH I. LIEBERMAN of Connecticut.

Eric has provided great service to our members and staff. Daily he provided a news summary of more than two dozen newspapers, trade periodicals, and major wire services—all arriving on our members' desks before the start of every hearing or markup. He also organized news events in concert with the personal staffs of our members and with the Democratic leadership, and responded professionally and quickly to numerous press inquiries. In the last Congress, he led our way along the information superhighway by instituting our site on the World Wide Web. In addition to his communications expertise, his political counsel and information strategy have been very much appreciated.

On his own time, Eric also worked for the best interests of our Democratic Party and for our national interests abroad. He distinguished himself with senior positions at the last two Democratic National Conventions—serving as manager of press information center operations in Chicago last year.

Overseas, Eric embarked on a unique association with the United States Information Service whereby he undertook four month-long trips to Australia in as many years to lecture on American Government, the Congress, our elections, our news media, and civil rights. As a voluntary visitor working with USIS, he has visited just about every university on that continent and spoken with numerous journalists, business leaders, government officials, and students.

Amidst all this, Eric has also found time to dabble in the arts. Last year, he signed a contract with the Farber Literary Agency of New York, which is representing him on a novel he has written about Hollywood and politics. Through much of the 1980's, Eric founded and led an independent effort to restore the 1963 motion picture "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World." That effort gained Eric a touch of national fame and a greater appreciation for America's cinema heritage. He has been active in the effort to preserve some of our Nation's remaining motion picture palaces of the 1920's and 1930's.

Mr. Speaker, many people come to work in this institution for as many reasons as there are staff positions. As a teenager, Eric was greatly influenced by watching the Watergate hearings. While at George Washington University, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa while working half-time at the State Department, Eric knew then that he wanted to work in Congress to help communicate the Nation's business to the world. As I said, he began to do that 10 years ago, and has done so with consummate skill and impeccable integrity.

For all his hard work, dedication, and counsel, I ask that all of our colleagues join with me in thanking Eric for his great service to this House, particularly to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and to our Nation. We wish him well now and in the future.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2014,
TAXPAYER RELIEF ACT OF 1997

HON. DAVID E. SKAGGS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 1997

Mr. SKAGGS. Mr. Speaker, I am voting for this conference report. Its provisions for education and tax relief for families with children, in particular, will make a difference in the lives of millions of hard-working Americans.

Many of the worst aspects of the House-passed bill, which I opposed, have been removed or improved, and the bill includes many other provisions that will benefit our country. So, on balance, I have decided that it deserves to be supported. That said, it is not without faults. It includes some things that I don't like, and there are other things that I would have liked to have seen included.

To begin with, the bill deserves support because it will help make education more affordable for millions of our people. It includes tax credits for the tuition costs of college students as well as graduate students and workers who are continuing to pursue lifelong learning. It will allow people who have gone into debt to finance their educations to deduct some of the interest charges on their student loans.

In addition, the bill extends until June 20, 2000, the tax exclusion for employer-provided educational assistance. I would have preferred making this permanent, but this is a great improvement over the House bill, which extended the exclusion only for the rest of this year.

Further, this bill dropped the pernicious section of the House-passed bill that would have taxed tuition discounts earned by graduate students who serve as teaching assistants and the tuition discounts provided to families of school employees. That very shortsighted and unwise provision was one of the worst features of the House bill, and I am very glad that the conferees did not include it in the conference report.

The conference report also will help our schools and colleges in several important ways. It will encourage corporations to donate up-to-date computer technology and equipment; will give a tax credit for purchases of bonds issued by local governments where the business community is also assisting the schools; and it will repeal the limit on qualified 501(c)(3) bonds used by colleges, universities, and other charitable institutions.

The environment also will benefit from the conference report. Unlike the House-passed bill, the conference report includes tax incentives to help accelerate the cleanup of contaminated areas in economically distressed areas. This so-called brownfields provision has great promise for improving both the environment and the economy in these areas.

Science and health will benefit as well, because the conference report extends expiring research tax credits and makes permanent the tax credit for research and development of so-called orphan drugs that are desperately needed, but for which the potential market is relatively small.

And the conference report's provisions related to Amtrak provide a foundation upon which it may be possible to build an improved and financially sound national rail passenger system.

Also, of course, there are some provisions that will benefit families in more general, less-targeted ways. For me, the most positive is the \$500 child credit, which will provide a significant financial boost to the country's most hard-pressed working families. Its benefits will be distributed reasonably fairly—especially as compared with the original House-passed bill, which would have excluded many of the low-income working families to whom this credit will be most helpful.

The conference report's changes in estate taxes are also better than those in the House-passed bill, because they focus more directly on family-owned farms and businesses, as well as phasing in what's essentially an inflation adjustment to the basic tax-exemption amount.

The capital gains provisions are improved but still troublesome. They of course are inherently much more beneficial to those with the resources to make large-scale investments than to those of more limited means.

Also, in combination with other provisions like those involving IRA's, they have the potential for making this balanced budget tax bill the cause of renewed and greatly increased deficits in a few years. For me, this is a serious prospect. I recall Senator Howard Baker's description of Reaganomics as a "riverboat gamble", and I recall that the payoff of that tax-cutting spree was trillions of new national debt.

I am not eager for another spin of that roulette wheel, and if I was convinced that the risk this time was as great as it was then, I would not support this bill. But this is a more modest bet, and a more carefully-drawn bill. I do think that we have learned from that experience, and I think President Clinton and his administration were able, in the negotiations that produced this conference report, to notably reduce the odds on repeating it. In short, while there's still a serious risk of renewed deficits, they've been lessened—and can be avoided if we will recognize them and are ready to take corrective actions in the future in the way Democrats did in 1993.

Mr. Speaker, I did not come early or quickly to a conclusion about this bill. But I have decided that its strengths outweigh its weaknesses, and its promises outweigh its risks—and my vote is for its passage.

WELFARE TO WORK

HON. STEVE LARGENT

OF OKLAHOMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 1997

Mr. LARGENT. Mr. Speaker, last year Congress passed historic welfare reform legislation, establishing a program which combines social responsibility with economic opportunity. By setting work requirements and offering incentives to employers hiring workers from the welfare rolls, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, provides the help needed to lift individuals out of poverty and off the welfare rolls.

While the average stay on welfare is only 2 years, the typical recipient at any one time has been receiving benefits for 8 years. The Welfare Reform Act, by setting a 5-year maximum time limit for receiving welfare payments, will end long-term abuse of the welfare system,