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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 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 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 Florida [Mr. GIBBONS] for 5 minutes.

VOTE "NO" ON H.R. 1270

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to address this Chamber as well as all America on an issue that is extremely important to all of us, and that is the issue of nuclear waste.

In a recent advertisement, in fact, an advertisement paid for by the nuclear energy lobbyists, it appeared in the Congressional Daily, dated September 22, 1997, and I quote, "Thanks to nuclear energy, the air in Maine and New Hampshire is cleaner." The ad goes on to say, "Since nuclear powerplants don't burn anything to generate electricity, they do not pollute the air."

Well, Mr. Speaker, if nuclear energy is as environmentally safe an energy source as they claim it to be, then why do they not store the wastes associated with those nuclear energy plants in their own States?

Why not keep that nuclear waste safely stored at nuclear powerplants throughout the country, as this claim advertises, and let me say, generating electricity with nuclear energy produces a small amount of used nuclear fuel. Today this used fuel is safely stored at 109 nuclear powerplants throughout the country.

The headline, Mr. Speaker, should read, "Thanks to nuclear energy, innocent people all across this country will be put at risk as 80,000 tons or more of nuclear waste is transported through their communities."

Mr. Speaker, the American people should say thanks, but no thanks. I urge my colleagues to understand the facts, that as nuclear waste is transported through their communities, Americans are put at risk, and I urge them to get the facts on nuclear waste. I urge them to vote "no" on H.R. 1270.

Mr. Speaker, I include for the RECORD the ad from National Journal's CongressDaily.

THANKS TO NUCLEAR ENERGY, THE AIR IN MAINE AND NEW HAMPSHIRE IS CLEANER

Nuclear energy provides electricity to millions of people in Maine, New Hampshire and throughout America, and because nuclear plants don't burn anything to generate electricity, they don't pollute the air.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE WASTE?

Generating electricity with nuclear energy produces a small amount of used nuclear fuel. Today, this used fuel is safely stored at 109 nuclear power plants throughout the country. However, the government has the legal responsibility to dispose of this waste beginning January 31, 1998.

H.R. 1270 would move used nuclear fuel to a single, engineered storage facility at a remote desert location. It's a common-sense strategy that will ensure nuclear energy continues to provide electricity to Maine and New Hampshire and nationwide for years to come.

H.R. 1270: Act Now On Nuclear Waste Disposal.

PROVIDING FLEXIBILITY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN ISSUES OF TRANSPORTATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). 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, I recently returned from a weekend visit

to the metropolitan areas of Seattle and Miami, where I had an opportunity to visit with a wide array of individual citizen activists, academics, journalists, government officials, health professionals, people who are struggling with a variety of issues to make their communities livable.

I was struck, Mr. Speaker, by the fact that those conversations were identical in those two communities, separated by our continent, and in fact would be indistinguishable from conversations that I have in my own hometown of Portland, OR.

They are wrestling with notions of public safety, affordable housing, water resources, open space, how to make the most out of scarce land use resources, and, most of all, the defining issue they felt was one of transportation.

It was a timely series of conversations, Mr. Speaker, because we are now dealing with the reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act. Six years ago the Federal Government entered into a new era of partnership with ISTEA, a new way of thinking about transportation, of providing flexibility and community involvement.

Stories from all across America attest to the success of this visionary process. We are now about to begin the next stage with the reauthorization.

Congress has the opportunity to build upon this solid foundation. I am concerned, Mr. Speaker, that we in Congress not be bogged down on some of the details that are not unimportant, that seem to be swirling about the issue. We need to be aware of the questions regarding donor and donee States, and continue to make progress toward more equitable and fair distribution.

We need to be aware of the conflicts between individual motorists and the trucking industry, understanding their issues as well.

But it is critical that we not be engaged in some sort of zero sum game,

□ 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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where we look at roads, rail, air and water as being somehow set off against one another. That way of thinking should be a thing of the past.

Our goal is how do we make the pieces fit together. If, for instance, a community has determined that a rail line might be far more cost effective to provide transportation capacity, the Federal Government ought not to stand in the way of their making that decision. If a community determines that sound land use planning and arranging the land uses in a thoughtful way is the most cost effective alternative to building another freeway, the Federal Government should not stand in their way.

Tomorrow in the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure we begin the markup of H.R. 2400, the so-called BESTEA. It is a good bill, and it is in fact getting better. It is critical that we keep our eye on five essential elements:

No. 1, we deal with an adequate funding level. These resources are, after all, trust funds that the American people have paid through user fees. We have a responsibility to make sure they get the resources they need.

No. 2, we need to make sure that the enhancements that have meant so much to communities across the country are protected and encouraged.

No. 3, we need to expand the community input in the decisionmaking process, which has unlocked creativity across the country.

No. 4, we must continue to encourage the careful planning. We can ill afford to mispend these resources, when in fact we find out that improperly spent they can actually make the problems worse.

Most important, we must work to promote a balanced transportation system to get the most out of the money, the land, and our existing infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to pay careful attention to this next stage in the most important environmental and economic development legislation of this session.

MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY MUST BE CHANGED

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, it is my privilege to represent Illinois' most diverse district. I represent part of the city of Chicago, the south suburbs in Cook and Will Counties, bedroom communities like Morris, where I live, at the center geographically of our district, and also rural communities and cornfields. Even though it is a very, very diverse district, as a local legislator I always look for the things that are in common throughout this district.

Clearly the election results in 1996, which reelected a Democrat President

and a Republican majority in Congress for the first time in history, clearly gave us a message, a common message, that we should work together in a bipartisan way to solve the challenges that we face.

We have answered that challenge just in the last several months with the first balanced budget in 28 years, the first meaningful tax relief for middle-class families in 16 years, and extending the life of Medicare for 10 years. Those are bipartisan victories, and clearly the middle-class working families are the winners.

Now as I travel throughout the diverse district that I have the privilege of representing, when I listen at my town meetings, VFW and local union halls and the grain elevators, there is a common concern that is getting louder and louder all the time, and that is the issue regarding the marriage tax penalty.

Let me explain why the marriage tax penalty is a common concern to so many working middle-class families with a couple of questions. Do Americans feel that it is fair that our Tax Code imposes a higher tax on married couples than on nonmarried couples? Do Americans feel it is fair that the average married working couple pays almost \$1,400 more in taxes than a working couple with identical incomes living together outside of marriage?

I think not. I know that the taxpayers and middle-class families that I represent think not. The marriage tax penalty is not only unfair, but it is wrong.

□ 1245

It is immoral. It is immoral that our Tax Code punishes our society's most basic institution, the institution of marriage. According to the Congressional Budget Office, 21 million American couples, married couples, suffer the marriage tax penalty.

Let me give an example of an Illinois couple from my district who has a combined income of \$61,000. Of course, the marriage tax penalty results, because a married couple usually files jointly so their incomes are combined, and of course that pushes them into a higher tax bracket.

Now, the couple that I have here as individuals, after we factor in their personal exemptions and standard deduction, would be in the 15-percent tax bracket if they filed as singles, but because they filed jointly as a married couple, they are pushed into the 28-percent tax bracket.

What this means for this Illinois working couple is a marriage tax penalty of \$1,378. That is wrong. That is unfair. It is unfair that a married couple pays higher taxes just because they are married. Our current Tax Code punishes working Illinois married couples, middle-class families, with an average marriage tax penalty of almost \$1,400.

Think about what that means for this Illinois family. This Illinois working couple who just happens to be mar-

ried, like 21 million American couples. That extra \$1,400 is a significant portion of a downpayment on a home. It is several months' worth of car payments. It is tuition for their child to go to a local parochial school or for a child who they themselves as adults go to local community college. That is wrong, that is unfair.

What we propose to do with the enactment of the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, H.R. 2456, is to give working couples the power to choose which filing status makes sense for them. They would have the opportunity under the Marriage Tax Elimination Act to choose to file jointly or as singles, whichever is to their financial advantage. And as two singles, this couple here from Illinois could benefit from greater standard deductions, of course, but they would also get the full advantage, the full advantage of the lower tax rates. In this case each individual would pay in the 15-percent tax bracket rather than the 28 percent. It is a fair solution to the marriage tax penalty.

It is similar also to what the State of Virginia has already done, a case where the States are always ahead of the Federal Government, where there is one form or two columns for each individual and the couple to file singly, and, of course, they avoid the marriage tax penalty.

What is the bottom line? The Marriage Tax Elimination Act puts a married working couple on an equal tax footing with working singles. Thanks to this Congress, in 1996 we helped working middle-class families with the adoption of the tax credit, this year with the child tax credit. Our legislation deserves bipartisan support, and I ask for bipartisan support.

Mr. Speaker, I include for the RECORD data in support of the Marriage Tax Elimination Act.

CHRISTIAN COALITION CALLS FOR END TO MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

SUPPORTS MARRIAGE TAX ELIMINATION ACT

CHESAPEAKE, VA.—Christian Coalition President Don Hodel announced that the pro-family grass-roots citizens action organization would fully support the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, introduced today by Reps. Dave McIntosh and Jerry Weller in a press conference on Capitol Hill.

Elimination of the marriage penalty was first called for by the Christian Coalition in its Contract with the American Family, unveiled in May 1995. This proposal was also included in the American Dream Restoration Act of the 104th Congress, which was approved by the House of Representatives on April 5, 1995. Under current law, many married couples pay more in taxes than they would if they remained single. Hodel called, again, for an end to the marriage tax penalty two weeks ago while announcing the Coalition's top legislative priorities for this Fall, which included additional family tax relief following the victory over the \$500 per child tax credit recently signed into law.

"Government, by taxing married couples at higher rates than singles, has, for too long, been a part of the problem," said Hodel. "At a time when family breakups are so common, the Congress should pass legislation to encourage marriage and ease the burden on families trying to form and stay together. This legislation places government