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 misspend 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 married, 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

on the side of families when it comes to taxation policy.''

With the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, married, working couples will receive the same tax treatment as singles. Couples will be allowed to choose the tax filing status that makes the most sense for them. The Congressional Budget Office reported that more than 21 million couples suffered a marriage tax penalty averaging $1,400, and some exceeded $20,000.

''For most Americans $1,400 is a lot of money,'' said Hodel. ''That is money that a young family can use to buy clothes for their children, invest in a college savings account or make repairs on a home. The bottom line is it's their money, and a government that truly values families will let families keep it.''

INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM,
Arlington, VA, September 12, 1997.

Hon. DAVID MCINTOSH,
Hon. JERRY WELLER,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR GENTLEMAN: The Independent Women's Forum urges Congress to put the tax code where its rhetoric is, and eliminate marriage penalties. Serious steps to reform tax laws would mean real liberation for women, those who work and those who may have to in the future.

Marriage taxes can impose a nearly 50% marginal tax rate on second earners, most of whom are wives and mothers. This is state sponsored discrimination against women, the unintended consequences of which is to discourage women from entering the labor force. If Congress is sincere in improving the lives of American women and their families, it will eliminate tax loopholes that choke their paychecks. Real support for the family begins with tax reform.

Sincerely,

BARBARA J. LEDEEN,
Executive Director for Policy.

AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM,
Washington, DC, September 5, 1997.

Hon. JERRY WELLER,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

Subject: End the Marriage Penalty Now!

DEAR MR. WELLER: Americans for Tax Reform supports the Marriage Tax Elimination Act offered by Representatives Jerry Weller (R–IL) and David McIntosh (R–IN). We believe that married working couples deserve the same tax treatment as singles. Now is the perfect time for action because the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is anticipating an earlier than expected fiscal surplus.

For many Americans, the average marriage tax is approximately equal in value to half a year of car payments. With an extra $1,400, a couple might be able to send a child to the school of their choice. The bottom line is that the marriage tax is very real to many working couples in this country.

In fact, many working Americans are so skeptical of real tax relief that they have expressed doubt the Taxpayer Relief Act, which became law on August 5, 1997, would provide them with any real relief of their tax burden. Giving them the opportunity to choose to end their marriage tax penalty will go a long way in restoring their confidence in the process and tax reform. The Marriage Penalty Elimination Act would allow couples to select the filing status that makes the most sense to their personal finances.

Americans for Tax Reform supports the efforts of the Sophomore Republican Class lead the march towards tax relief for working American couples. We support efforts to enact the Marriage Tax Elimination Act for America's working couples. We would like to thank you and Davis McIntosh in particular for your efforts.

Sincerely,

GROVER G. NORQUIST.

HEALTHY PRACTICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, during the past several years, the American Health Foundation, which is based in New York City, has led the charge to reestablish National Child Health Day. Initially proclaimed by President Coolidge back in 1928, this day had unfortunately fallen from our national calendar before being taken up by this foundation. In an effort to bring Child Health Day back on to the calendar, Congressman JOHN PORTER and I recently invited Members of Congress to attend a bipartisan luncheon here in the Capitol which was hosted by the American Health Foundation. While focusing on children's health and healthy behavior is something we should do every day, Child Health Day has the potential to focus our Nation's attention on this issue like never before.

Beginning on October 6, which is National Child Health Day, families across this country are encouraged to make the healthy practices pledge. This pledge consists of five healthy habits that our children can learn at a young age and which can create the foundation for healthy adult lives.

I have been working to take the message of Child Health Day back to my home State of Massachusetts, and on October 6, Massachusetts will proudly unveil the first and only State report card on children's health modeled after the American Health Foundation's national publication. This report is being put together by a team of local volunteers to quantify our strengths and weaknesses in the area of children's health so we can see what we have done right and address those areas where we can improve.

While we have several events planned in my district that will address both children's health and early childhood development, these efforts will be wasted if people do not take the message of keeping children healthy into their homes and to their own families.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a couple of minutes today to share this pledge that has been put together with my colleagues, and I urge all of those parents who are watching here today to agree to sign this pledge. As my colleagues can see, the five items here are not impossible to achieve, and they could make a lasting difference to the lifelong health of our children.

First, have a healthy breakfast. While those of us caught up in the rat race seem to rush around more today than ever before, there is no reason to leave for work without making sure that our kids have the nutrition they need to start their day. Let us show our kids that we care about this issue and make certain that we at least take the time to sit down with them for a healthy breakfast at least at a minimum 1 day a week.

Second, stop smoking. Children learn by example. Ninety percent of today's smokers became addicted while they were still children. If one personally cannot kick the habit, try to make it a habit not to smoke in front of your children or grandchildren.

Third, engage in physical activities. Watching television is the No. 1 after-school activity for American 6- to 17-year-olds. Childhood obesity is on the rise to the point where some 25 percent of our children are believed to be overweight. Let us make a pledge to teach our children the value of exercise. Supporting our children in sports or just getting out the door and taking a walk will teach our children the importance of healthy physical activity.

Fourth, live and play safely. In my own State of Massachusetts, some 40 percent of parents do not buckle their children in the car. Every day, buckle up. Put your children in the back seat with their seatbelts snugly fastened, secure rear-facing infant seats in the back seat, and have our children wear helmets when biking and in-line skating, and teach them the importance of sunscreen and proper sunglasses. We all know these few steps can really help save lives. We need to commit ourselves to making them a central part of enjoying the outdoors with our kids.

Finally, we need to teach kids to take care of their teeth. Prevention here is so simple. In 1987, some 27 percent of our kids had untreated tooth decay. The number of children who do not brush regularly is staggering. Again, we are the ones who need to set a good example for our kids. Let us make a point to show our kids how important good oral hygiene really is.

Mr. Speaker, although these tips require some effort and planning on our part, their long-term benefits will lead to the better health and full development of our children. Child Health Day gives us an important opportunity to lead the way toward healthier lives for our children. I urge my colleagues to join with me in reestablishing October 6 as a day for us to celebrate our national commitment to our kids.

PROBLEMS WITH FAST TRACK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. STUPAK] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this afternoon to talk about fast track. Recently the President has requested fast track authority from the United States Congress to extend