bankruptcy and there is a demonstrable ability to repay some of the debt, even if not all of it, even if only a small proportion of it, that that moral obligation is in the forefront, they should be given the opportunity and, yea, they should be mandated to repay some of that debt.

So we have a formula that would go into place; and when we determine that after all the bills are lined up and a person's ability to pay is gauged, if we determine that, indeed, some, maybe 20 percent, of the total outstanding bills could be paid in 5 years, over a period of 5 years, then that individual should go into what we call Chapter 13 in order to enter into a plan whereby they can begin to repay some of the debt that they have built up over the years.

Now, many will blame the rash of credit cards that seem to be floating around and that, therefore, we ought to have credit companies withhold those credit cards so that the people will not be overcharging and overdebting themselves. But we do not know if that is the answer or not. We will be looking into that. Is there a predator creditor in the picture? If so, we have to make sure that that does not happen.

But, by and large, it is still a question of personal responsibility. If I am given five or six credit cards, does that mean I have to use all of them, exhaust the limitations of all of them and knowingly put myself into debt? And, if I do, should I then be excused from paying the debt because of the temptation of having four or five plastics in front of me?

These are the questions that we have to pose and we have to answer as judiciously as possible in the forthcoming weeks. The way we have planned this is to end this debate.

ELDER ABUSE IN THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, over the past few weeks there have been several news reports about one of the most rapidly growing crimes in our communities. In fact, the Los Angeles Times and the Orange County Register have both reported a rise in physical and financial abuse against senior citizens.

As our population continues to grow older, we must be prepared to face the reality of these horrible crimes. As leaders in our communities, we must be prepared to deal with this growing problem of elder abuse.

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All too often seniors are taken advantage of in their own homes. Many perpetrators see senior citizens as easy targets who are both vulnerable and oftentimes unable to defend themselves. It is our responsibility to help protect our elders from these criminals and to ensure that they feel safe within their own homes. I have been working closely with the local agencies, law enforcement agencies and the FBI to develop legislation that will effectively protect senior citizens from abuse.

H.R. 3181 does this. H.R. 3181, the Older and Disabled Americans Criminal Protection Act, authorizes shared housing agencies to run background checks on potential caretakers. Shared housing agencies give seniors the opportunity to remain within their own homes by matching them with a caretaker who cares for them in lieu of rent. Unfortunately, shared housing agencies do not have the proper tools to help ensure the safety of these senior citizens. H.R. 3181 gives shared housing agencies the proper mechanism to run State and FBI background checks on potential caretakers before placing them in the home of a senior citizen. The local police departments in my district along with the FBI have commended H.R. 3181 as a proactive effort to prevent crime. They recognize the growing problem of elder abuse and realize that my bill attacks these crimes by lessening the chance that they will ever occur. As people grow older, remaining in their homes should increase their level of comfort and security, not threaten it. I urge all of my colleagues to join me in this effort to protect our loved ones and to battle the growing problem of elder abuse. It is our responsibility to give our communities the proper tools to battle crime. Cosponsor H.R. 3181 and protect our senior citizens.

SOCIAL SECURITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I am going to talk for a few minutes about putting Social Security first. The challenge is, what the President can do and what Congress might do to give a higher priority for saving Social Security.

For review, this is a pie chart of Federal Government spending for this year. As we see, one of the largest pieces of the pie is Social Security that takes 22 percent of the total Federal budget. Social Security right now, sends out $660,000 a minute in Social Security benefit payments. But by 2030, we are going to be spending almost $6 million a minute for Social Security benefit payments. An 866% increase.

That represents part of the problem. The fact that there are relatively fewer workers paying their Social Security taxes to finance these increasing benefits represents the other part of the problem. It is probably one of the most challenging problems facing Congress and the White House. Yet politicians in Washington have avoided dealing with this very important issue because of the potential political demagoguery. We have to deal with the hard facts of how we are going to make Social Security continue for those that are now retired, for those that are going to retire in the near future, as well as our kids and our grandkids.

Let me just give my colleagues a quick review. In 1935, the Social Security system was devised and passed into law. It has always been a pay-as-you-go program. In other words, existing workers pay in their taxes and those taxes are immediately sent out in benefit payments to existing retirees. So it is sort of a Ponzi game, sort of like a chain letter. Early retirees made out very well. Taxes started out as 1.5 percent of the first $3500 of payroll. Now it is 12.4 percent for the employee and the employer's share for the first $65,000. Over the year we have continued to increase taxes on workers. In fact these taxes have been increased 36 times since 1971.

This next chart shows the dilemma for Social Security. The red part represents how much in debt Social Security is going to be in the future. If nothing is done, eventually Congress must provide an additional $400 billion a year to cover promised benefit payments. This little blue blob on the top left is the short-term surplus that is in the Social Security trust fund. Congress supposedly fixed Social Security in 1983. What they did is substantially increase taxes on workers. But this fix was short-lived. By 2011 there will again be a cash shortage. Dorcas Hardy, a former Social Security Administrator, is estimating that we are going to run short of money as early as 2005. But even in the scenario of 2011, what does Congress do to come up with the money to meet their obligations of paying back the $600 billion borrowed from the trust fund. Well, Congress can cut spending someplace else, they can increase taxes like they have been doing for the last 40 years every time Social Security was a little shy. They can borrow more money from the public and disrupt some of the downward pressures on interest rates that we have achieved so far.

I think it is important, and just for a minute, allow me to say that we do not have a balanced budget. We are not going to have a balanced budget this year, next year, any year for the next 5 years of the President's budget, because every year all the surplus coming into the Social Security trust fund is used to balance the budget. So every year, the national debt increases between $120 billion and $170 billion. Every year. That is how much more the national debt is going to increase. I think it is interesting to note that one of the dilemmas of this Congress is the fact that now 15 percent of the budget is required to pay interest on the debt. So if we can pay some of that debt back and start paying down that debt, we reduce interest cost. Let me just briefly run through these charts.

Because we have increased taxes so often on workers, this chart shows how many years you are going to have to live after you retire in order to get the money back you and your employer put in. If you retire after the year 2006, you have to live 26 years after you retire just to break even. It is a serious problem. We need to deal with it.

ON THE INTRODUCTION OF LEGISLATION TO ALLEVIATE THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WORKER SHORTAGE

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

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow I will introduce a package of 5 bills to help our economy address the critical shortage in information technology workers. We are fortunate to live and work in a time of economic growth and expansion. Unemployment is low and production is up. But we cannot take these good times for granted. We have to continue to take those measures necessary to sustain our thriving economy.

One of the hazards that could derail our economic engine is a growing shortage of skilled workers. Too many firms across the country are facing serious difficulties in hiring workers with needed skills. This shortage, which has been estimated to be as high as 190,000 employees nationwide, is especially restricting the growth and development of our Nation's information technology industry, which is the vanguard of our national economic boom. This shortage of skilled workers is costing our economy over $10 billion a year in lost revenue.

But high tech firms are not the only ones suffering from this workforce shortage. When asked about the main barriers to expansion and competitiveness, companies across the country in many different industries point to the difficulty of getting skilled workers.

While the current low unemployment rate contributes to this problem, its roots are more fundamental. In the new economy, skill requirements are going up in many industries, even so-called low-tech industries. More than half of the new jobs created require some education beyond high school. The percentage of workers who use computers at work has risen from 25 percent to 46 percent, nearly half, in the last 10 years. States such as Colorado, Maryland, Rhode Island, Washington have all recently released reports highlighting the pressing need of employers for skilled workers.

Standard supply and demand economics will not address this shortfall. Most firms, but particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, have limited capacity to engage in significant and sustained workforce development efforts. Managers and owners of most firms are simply too busy running their business to develop training systems. Firms lack information on the type of training they need and where to get it. And, unless their competitors are willing to invest in training as well, such an investment will increase the relative cost of their products above that of their competitors.

So there is a natural inclination not to be the first ones to invest in training. And so when confronted with a shortage of skilled workers, most firms try to hire workers from other companies. Competition for skilled employees is so high that companies are offering irresistible packages, including signing bonuses, long-term bonuses, finder's fees, to lure trained employees away from firms who have invested the time and money to train them. Just across the Potomac River, SRA Technologies, a fine firm, a technology firm in my district, offers a $10,000 bounty to employees for every trained worker who signs on as a result of their recommendation. But we are not increasing the supply sufficiently, which is the real long-term solution to this problem.

As the United States enters its unprecedented seventh year of growth, attributed in part to the dynamic expansion of the technology industry, Congress must move to remove barriers to technology industry expansion. My legislation addresses the worker shortage and the need to provide additional training through a number of approaches.

The first bill creates Regional Skills Alliances. Modeled after the successful Manufacturing Extension Program, this bill would provide Federal support to encourage companies to participate in consortia which would address their industry's specific skill needs. The Federal involvement in this program amounts to one-third of the cost. Every dollar in Federal support will be matched by a dollar in State and local government support and a dollar in direct industry support, so that the competitive pressure not to be the one to take the initiative on training is relieved.

The second provision allows the Secretary of Labor to establish Regional Private Industry Councils. PICs play a constructive role in addressing the workforce needs within a State. But these organizations are State organizations and not formed to address problems that may cross State lines. To remedy that situation, my legislation would allow the Secretary of Labor to certify and fund regional PICs that address regional problems. They would be funded directly by the Secretary of Labor to ensure that they do not detract from existing State programs.

The third bill would offer employers who train employees for information technology jobs a tax credit for 50 percent of the training costs up to $2,500 per year per employee.

The fourth bill would ensure that the Federal Government's investment in training is well spent by allowing these Private Industry Councils to reward bonuses to training providers with a high percentage of placement. This will help establish a more outcome-based system to ensure that training providers emphasize placing their students in jobs. My bill would amend JTPA to allow funds to be used for bonuses for the most successful training providers.

It would also allow high technology professionals to more easily immigrate to the United States so that we are not exporting jobs abroad but are paying American workers at home. It is a good and necessary package of legislation. I urge my colleagues' support for it.

TAX REFORM

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

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to suggest that we can increase take-home pay and improve retirement security in America by leading our country to a new level of freedom and opportunity for every American worker and taxpayer. I am not talking about raising the minimum wage. I am talking about reducing taxes further, especially on working-class Americans, those who are on modest incomes, those who have fixed incomes because they are wage earners and salaried workers. The first step in reducing taxes, as the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER), who preceded me here in the well, suggested, is to eliminate the marriage penalty in the Tax Code. Then we should go on to pass the Middle Class Tax Relief Act and the Taxpayer Choice Act, both introduced by the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE), which would have the effect of raising the income levels for the 28 percent tax bracket. That would put more working Americans in the lowest tax bracket, the 15 percent tax bracket, and for those who are already in the 15 percent tax bracket, we would increase the personal exemption. The effect again, more take-home pay for working-class Americans.

Let me be clear about one thing. I think I speak for almost all House Republicans when I say this. If the President has money for more social spending, then we have money for tax cuts. But also let me be clear about one other thing. That is we cannot have, we should not have, tax relief without real tax reform. We have to stop the IRS collection abuses. The best way to do that is to end the IRS as we know it. That is why I and many House Republicans have signed a pledge, a written pledge, and we have cosponsored legislation to sunset the Tax Code by the year 2001. This is a death sentence for the Tax Code and we hope would move the country in the direction of a fairer, a flatter, a simpler Tax Code and a tax system, one that is hopefully based on a single rate of taxation. But we do not have to wait until the year 2001. What