They are wrong. The electoral revolution of 1994 lives today. Each of us in the Republican majority should stand proud and tall, knowing that if American people had not given their trust to us in 1994, and renewed it in 1996, our economy would not be surging, our budget would not be balanced; we would not have had the first tax cut in 16 years, and the stock market would not have more than doubled in just three years. Each of us in the Republican majority can take pride in the new-found hope and confidence of our Nation.

I stand here not to boast of our accomplishments, but to thank the American people for their well-placed trust, and I pledge to them that those of us in the Republican majority will put the needs of families first, always. You see, families do come first, for me, and for the Republican majority.

This afternoon I am proud to say that when I cast votes in this session of the 105th Congress to reduce taxes on the American family, to reform government and its overreaching involvement in our lives, and to restore our precious and sacred rights, including the most fundamental of all, the right-to-life, I will think of a new little Kansan named Jason Robert Searl, Jr., because it is his future, along with the future of all our children, that we determine when we vote in this sacred chamber.

He was born just three days before Christ's birthday at 5:18 in the evening at Via Christi Hospital's St. Francis Campus, in Wichita, Kansas. Really, I should not call him little, because he weighed 8 pounds and 10 ounces and was over 20 inches long.

I want to salute and warmly congratulate Chrissy and Jason Searl. I want to thank them for having the courage to take the toughest job in our world, parenting. I pledge to them and all others who place their trust in the Republican majority that we will continue to live up to the promises we made to all of them, including little Jason.

REMOVING FINANCIAL BURDENS PLACED ON FAMILY PHARMACIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BERRY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my colleagues' support for legislation I am introducing with Senator DORGAN to eliminate the regulatory and financial burdens placed on America's family pharmacies by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997.

The Balanced Budget Act contained a provision that required all dealers of durable medical equipment for Medicare to obtain a $50,000 surety bond. Unfortunately, pharmacists were inadvertently included in the surety bond requirement, because some of them do sell small amounts of durable medical equipment such as crutches and other items.

My bill will exempt any licensed pharmacist who owns his or her own business from the bond requirement. It is an unnecessary and costly burden for these professionals, who are already struggling to keep their businesses afloat, particularly in rural areas.

America's family pharmacist is already under siege by drug companies who set prices on pharmaceutical prices. These companies offer reduced or rock-bottom prices to HMOs and other purchasing groups, but do not offer the same discounts to a family pharmacist.

Even if the terms of a recent court settlement are met by the pharmaceutical companies, the family pharmacist in rural areas will likely still not have full access to these discounts.

Who is hurt most by high drug prices? Our pharmacists, increasing numbers of whom are forced to shut down their family-owned businesses in rural areas, and, most important, their patients. It is indeed a crime that here in the world's richest Nation, our seniors must choose between buying groceries and buying prescription drugs.

This legislation will eliminate the costly burden placed upon pharmacies by the Balanced Budget Act, but it will not eliminate the costly burden of the high drug prices that continue to grow by leaps and bounds. I intend to address that issue at a later date.

HANDLING THE SO-CALLED BUDGET SURPLUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, over the President's Day break I had the opportunity to travel the length and breadth of my great State of South Dakota, and during that time I met with senior groups, with business groups, with education groups, with volunteer groups, with student groups, with community leaders, all across my State.

This is the real world. These are real people who are concerned about their future, their children's future, about their children's education, about affordable health care, about retirement and about the deterioration of American values.

Now, there was an aversion as I traveled across the State, I didn't find anybody who was very much in favor of the situation in the Middle East of our going to war there. I heard a lot a lot of interest in getting a transportation bill passed in the very near future, and I also had a lot of skepticism expressed by the people in my State about the budget situation in Washington, the so-called budget surplus, and what might be the right thing to do with that.

And what is the right thing? That is a question I asked as I traveled the State. And the answer I frequently got from the people of South Dakota, according to them, is to use the budget surplus to the extent there is one to pay down, begin retiring our $5.5 trillion debt, to repay the Social Security Trust Fund. Beyond that, there wasn't much appetite for new Washington programs and new Washington spending. Instead, people would like to see those dollars, to the extent there are any additional dollars available, returned to the taxpayers.

Now, in deciding how best to do that, I came up with an idea which is now in the form of legislation, and I have introduced along with the gentlewoman from California (Ms. DUNN) a couple of tax relief bills which I think are consistent with two principles that are very important as we debate tax relief in this country.

The first principle is that we ought to be looking at how we can come up with tax relief legislation that is broad-based. We hear a lot from the White House, from Members even in this body, about targeted tax relief, about Washington picking winners and losers. In my own view, the best way we can deal with the issue of tax relief is to do it in a way that allows everyone in this country to participate from a growing economy and benefit from a growing economy.

So our legislation is based upon the principle that everyone, irrespective of what your status is, whether you are married, whether you have children or any other issue, that you ought to be able to, if you are a taxpayer, have the benefits of tax relief.

The second principle is this: It ought to lead us toward the goal of simplification. As we move to the long-term goal of a new Tax Code for a new century, it ought to be about trying to come up with a way in which we further simplify, rather than further complicate, the Tax Code in this country.

I, a couple of weeks ago, did my own tax return, and I can tell you that even though last summer in the balanced budget agreement we lowered taxes on people in this country, we made the Code even more complicated than it already is.

I think an underlying fundamental principle of any tax relief that we do ought to be moving us toward the goal of simplification. So, in doing that, we came up with a couple of ideas.

The first raises the personal exemption from $2,700 to $3,400. Again, anybody in this country who is a taxpayer claimed as a dependent on a tax return gets the benefit of that tax proposal.

The second proposal actually raises the late rate at which the 28 percent rate applies to taxpayers in this country. It drops 10 million taxpayers out of the higher 28 percent bracket, down to the 15 percent bracket.

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That is significant for a number of reasons: because it gives an incentive to people, to hard-working Americans, to work harder, to produce more, to earn more. Instead of penalizing them by assessing 28 cents out of each additional dollar they earn, it moves them back into the 15 percent bracket.