

SAVE WORKING FAMILIES AND SENIORS TAX RELIEF PACKAGE

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

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce a tax relief package for middle class taxpayers. I collectively call them the "Save Our Working Families And Seniors" tax relief bills. The three bills, the Middle Income Senior Tax Relief Act, the Equal Indexing for Seniors Act, and the Middle Class Medical Tax Relief Act, would reduce the tax burden for middle class taxpayers.

These taxpayers see their paychecks and retirement income dwindle because of the unfair way the Tax Code treats Social Security income and health care costs. My bills would put some of their hard-earned money back into their pockets and into their savings accounts.

The Middle Class Medical Tax Relief Act would lower the exclusion percentage of medical deductions from 7½ percent to 5 percent for singles with incomes of less than \$60,000 per year and couples with incomes of less than \$75,000 per year. Thus, a family whose income was \$50,000, would be allowed to deduct all medical expenses above \$2,500 instead of those above \$3,750, as is now the law. Surely, middle class taxpayers need this tax relief.

Almost every year government employees receive a cost of living increase to adjust their pay for inflation. But retirees' tax liability is not indexed for inflation, so those who work or are seeing a return on their investments they made for their retirement years must pay an ever-increasing percentage of their income on taxes. My bill, the Equal Indexing for Seniors Act, would index for inflation the amount of income each year that a senior can earn before their Social Security can be taxed.

And middle income seniors, who earn just a bit more in a year, would not suddenly find their percentage of Social Security benefits taxed jump from 50 to 85 percent. My third bill, the Middle Income Senior Tax Relief Act, would increase the threshold for couples to \$54,000 before 85 percent of their Social Security benefits are taxed. Taken together, these two bills ensure that taxable income thresholds will rise with inflation.

We, as a Congress, should not discourage seniors from working or earning a good return on their retirement investments, nor should we exclude people who have a modest amount of health care expenses from itemizing them.

Madam Speaker, that is why I encourage my colleagues' support of the three bills that form my "Save Our Middle Class Families And Seniors" tax relief package.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentle-

woman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN addressed the House. Her remarks will appear herein after in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CONGRESS SHOULD ACT QUICKLY TO HELP TURN AROUND SCHOOLS IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, I have just come from a hearing on school vouchers, and I appreciate that I was given the opportunity to participate in the hearing because the hearing involved only the District of Columbia. I am left to wonder why the majority does not bring a voucher bill forward for the people of the United States of America, but picks only on one jurisdiction, the one that has voted at the highest rate—89 percent—against vouchers.

I want to thank the Catholic Archdiocese as well as others who support charter schools for coming. The gentleman from California (Mr. RIGGS), chairman of the committee, is the major sponsor of the RIGGS-ROEMER bill which brought the House together on both sides on the notion of school choice involving public charter schools.

I am very appreciative of the Washington Scholarship Fund. It is a private group that has put its money where its mouth is. It has not walked up and down the halls of Congress lobbying to get Congress to spend money which it knows the Congress is not going to be able to spend, but has simply come forward with the money on its own and now has raised money for scholarships in the District, for kids who want to go.

I want to thank Arlene Ackerman, who is the new chief academic officer. She is a piece of work. She is already doing it, not just talking it. Our kids will be reading the equivalent of 25 books each next year.

I asked her what she could do with the \$7 million in the so-called vouchers bill, and here is what she had to say. She would use that money this summer to send 20,000 kids to summer school so that we can end social promotion in the District of Columbia. She is going to do it one way or the other anyway. She does not have the money to do it now.

The credibility of those who are pressing vouchers is severely strained when, in fact, we can do something that will make a huge difference in the District of Columbia this very year with that \$7 million. When that vote comes on the floor of the House, however, it comes with the certain knowledge of the leadership that the President has already announced that he would veto a voucher bill.

So why are they bringing it? The bill comes with the certain knowledge that such a bill would be met with a lawsuit and an immediate injunction, because there have been two or three vouchers passed in the States and each and every one of them has been enjoined by the courts. So what is the majority trying to do? They come crying crocodile tears for my kids. If they mean it, they should give us the \$7 million so that we can end social promotion in the District of Columbia.

Instead, they have dangled free money before some poor kids in the District of Columbia. They are playing with my constituents because they know that this free money will not come out of here. They did the same thing with our ministers last year. They got them to sign on for some free money for scholarships for the District of Columbia.

But have they told my constituents there would be a veto and that the free money would never come out of the halls of this House? Have they told my constituents there will be a lawsuit, and that every such voucher bill that has been brought in the United States of America has been halted by an injunction?

Who are they playing with? Who are they fooling? Do they care about youngsters in the District of Columbia? They should prove it. They should put their money where their mouths are. It is time to stop talking about the schools of the District of Columbia. There is something they can do about it. Stop raising expectations among poor people in the District. The Congress is back again. The bill is fast becoming a cruel hoax.

I asked the two parents who testified before the committee this morning, whether they knew that they would not qualify for the vouchers if the vouchers were in fact passed by this House, because they are already in private schools? And they did not know that, my colleagues.

Please help me. The children of the District of Columbia are as desperately off as my colleagues claim. The schools are indeed as bad as the schools in all of the large cities of the United States. My colleagues can do something about it. We are not the Congress' burden, we are not the Congress' responsibility, but we seek a partnership to quickly bring these schools up and to give these kids what they deserve. They deserve much more than they have gotten from the District.

My colleagues' critique of the schools is well placed, but it will mean nothing unless they also step up and do something. And what my colleagues can do this summer is to begin quickly in the short-term to turn around a school system that has brought nothing but condemnation on this floor and in the District.

The difference between the District and my colleagues is that the Congress controls billions of dollars. With only \$7 million, we can get a bill that would