

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

(Mr. HORN addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. ALLEN addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

BANKRUPTCY REFORM

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

Mr. GEKAS. Mr. Speaker, very soon now the Chamber will be witnessing the great debate possibly of this year, namely, that which will be conducted on proposals for bankruptcy reform. Everyone in the country knows that a strange thing is occurring out in the economic world. While all the figures and all the reports as to the economy seem to be favorable with an expanding economy, more jobs, inflation kept under wraps, interest rates being held constant, all these excellent factors are occurring, while at the same time, Mr. Speaker, an astounding number of bankruptcies have been filed.

In 1997 alone, 1,400,000 new bankruptcies were filed. That is a monumental increase from the year before and even a greater disparity from that which has occurred in the last several years. What does it mean? If indeed the economy is improving and yet we have these bankruptcies, something is wrong.

We have witnessed now efforts to meet that crisis head on. And the bankruptcy reform bill which we have created and which is making its way through the Committee on the Judiciary even now and will reach the floor, as I said, shortly for our full debate on the floor carries two vital principles with it, which principles are at this core of what we are attempting to do.

One is that we will make certain that every individual American who becomes so overwhelmed with debt that he and his family cannot survive if he has to meet those obligations that he has incurred, we want to accommodate that individual and make sure that the family will have a fresh start. That is one principle, the fresh start.

On the other hand, the other principle is that in those cases where an ability to repay some of the debt is demonstrated, we must make every effort to produce a plan and to accommodate that individual in a way that some of that debt can be repaid.

Those are the two principles: A fresh start for those who need it and an accommodation for repayment of some of the debt where the possibility of repayment is sound.

What has happened, though, is that we hear rumors and innuendos about what we are attempting to do. But I must tell my colleagues that the cost of individual bankruptcies to the American public is something that has to be laid on the record. We are not simply talking about the loss to the lenders or the creditors who will not be repaid when someone goes bankrupt. That in itself is a loss. But when we interpolate that as to what it means to the consumers, we will recognize that when someone does not pay his debts, and the supermarket with which we are so familiar has had debt on its books and is not repaid, what happens? The prices for consumer goods have to increase, so the rest of us are picking up the cost by increased prices of what has happened in that bankruptcy.

Number 2, the interest rates that are so correlated with the lending and the credit establishment of our country are hurt when people file bankruptcy, especially in these record numbers. And so, we will see that those of us who require credit and want to seek a bona fide lender for a mortgage or an automobile will find that the interest rates are hurt by the fact that they were not able to retrieve bad debt in previous bankruptcies.

Moreover, we lose as taxpayers. We learned during the testimony that we have conducted in several hearings in the last month that when taxing authorities like States and municipalities are themselves named in a bankruptcy and do not have the ability to recover, then they have a shortfall in the revenues in their municipality, in their neighborhood, in the county courthouse, and in the State coffers, meaning that the rest of us have to make up the difference with increased tax payments and revenues. So we pay all the way around.

But what I want to emphasize in our plans for our reform measure is that we are going to do everything we can to help small businesses, to help the family, to make sure that support payments that are forthcoming from a breadwinner are not dischargeable in bankruptcy. That is, we want to make sure that the families that receiving support payments will continue to receive those support payments whether or not the individual goes bankrupt. And the entire country will be better off once we reform the bankruptcy system.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. HUTCHINSON addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

THE LOUDEST VOICE

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

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by talking and taking a moment to talk about two groups that are not widely discussed on the floor. The first is Mother Jones, and the second is USA Engage.

Mother Jones, or "MoJo," is a national magazine of investigative journalism focusing on political reporting. Ken Silverstein wrote an article in the June 1998 issue of Mother Jones detailing the creation of USA Engage. This group hired Washington lobbyist Anne Wexler to try to make sure nothing gets in the way of promoting international trade with countries around the world whose governments are renowned for brutal fear-biased repression of their own people. The human rights records of those countries are made more dismal by widespread torture, terror, imprisonment, persecution and killing of those that do not walk the line.

According to MoJo, some of America's largest businesses have given their proxy to USA Engage to deal with these countries having a history of repressing their own people. I know these companies are run by good and decent people who are probably not aware of the range of activities in which the Wexler Group is intensely involved on behalf of USA Engage. I am sure that their stockholders and customers are not aware of them and would be shocked and angered if they were.

According to the magazine, Anne Wexler has assembled a daunting army for her assault on Washington that includes a former U.S. Trade Representative, former Members of Congress, a former close staffer of the President, the former law firm of the State Department official who heads up the committee charged with reviewing proposed sanctions, and others. And look at what they have accomplished: Instant access to Congress and the ear of the State Department officials charged with assessing human rights violations; pro-trade studies from pricey and prestigious think tanks; the matching-up and contact of religious groups and leaders interested in human rights around the world by business reps thought to have special influence or sway.

MoJo quotes human rights advocate Simon Billenness, talking about the important role economic sanctions played in ending South Africa's apartheid regime. "If USA Engage had succeeded with these tactics during these apartheid years, Nelson Mandela might still be in prison." I recognize these companies can hire whomever they choose, but there are consequences.

Look at what they are doing. Look at the real issue. We are talking about companies that are committing the very worst atrocities on their own people simply by believing in God. In Sudan, starvation is the weapon of choice, spiced with high-altitude bombing, mass murder, and selling their own people into slavery. In Sudan, over the past decade, about 1.1 million people have been killed or allowed to starve, and I have been in the south and I have seen it.

In China, Catholic bishops and priests and Protestant lay ministers and Buddhist monks and nuns as well as many Muslims are jailed for years and years. And their jails are not patterned after those in this country. Starvation, torture, filth, and darkness are the steady diet. The fate of the prisoner is up to the whim of the guard. Brutal working conditions and brutal hours are the norm. Sometimes death is the only friend they can hope for.

Tibet is in danger of losing its religion, its culture, its language, even its identity. It has already lost thousands of Buddhist monasteries and too many monks and nuns. And I have been to Tibet and have seen this.

In Iraq, the Kurds have been used for target practice and guinea pigs for toxic killing. And MoJo talks about the track record of Burma and Nigeria. The victims of these outrages and more are Anne Wexler's targets. When they and her other well-connected friends are successful in changing a legislative clause here and writing the Dear Colleague letter, do they think about the Catholic bishop starting his third decade in a brutal Chinese prison? Do they think of the young boys on the slave block in southern Sudan?

I know these are harsh thoughts, but we are dealing with harsh dictators and regimes. What we do here matters. And the content of legislation has real impact around the world. Please think about this. Did these companies mean to give Anne Wexler this much power? If one is a government official working on these matters, does he think what his actions mean to those who have no one looking out for them? And if one is a Member of Congress, does he remember when Anne Wexler and company stops by that no one is speaking for those on the other end, those in Sudan, those in prison, those in slavery, those in Iraq, those Catholic bishops in prison, those evangelical pastors in prison in China, and the monks and Buddhist nuns in prison in Tibet?

Mother Jones or "MoJo" is a national magazine of investigative journalism focusing on political reporting. It is named after and in the spirit of the legendary Mary Harris (Mother) Jones who was one of the most effective organizers of her time. Before passing on at the ripe old age of 100, this spirited mother of four effectively led fights against child labor, and on behalf of coal miners and other labor groups during the early years of this century.

Perhaps the worst thing they have done with their access is to deliberately misstate the

moderate nature of the Freedom from Religious Persecution bill. At its root it calls for withdrawal of non-humanitarian taxpayer subsidies to hardcore persecuting countries and gives the president total discretion to maintain the subsidies.

In the end, however, Members will read bill and understand its moderate character and people in the pews will hear that this bipartisan effort gives the persecuted people of the world a voice.

□ 1845

Anne Wexler is the only voice. But she should not be the loudest voice.

Perhaps the worst thing they have done with their access is to deliberately misstate the moderate nature of the Freedom from Religious Persecution bill. At its root, it calls for the withdrawal of all nonhumanitarian taxpayer subsidies to hard core persecuting countries and gives the President total discretion to maintain these subsidies.

ILLEGAL DRUGS

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

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, this is probably one of the biggest signs in the history of the House to be used in a special order, but I think it addresses one of the biggest problems that we as a Nation and we as a Congress face today. The theme of this sign that we have here today is Drugs Destroy Lives.

This particular sign is actually part of a billboard and a message that we developed in my central Florida area. We have 20 of these billboards up right now in central Florida. We have more going up, to let our young people know that indeed drugs destroy lives, to let our citizens know that drug abuse will affect their lives and destroy their lives.

We have a tremendous problem in not only my district but throughout the United States. That is why we are trying to create public awareness again among all of our population, particularly our young, to do something about that. That is why we in Congress today, and many Members from our side of the aisle and some from the other side of the aisle have joined together under the leadership of our Speaker to make drug abuse and illegal narcotics a number one priority of this Congress and of this Nation and our communities.

You may say, why? Let me just tell you a little bit of why I am here with this message and why we are here with this billboard and we are going to spread this message across our land.

Since 1992, and these are incredible statistics, drug use among teens has skyrocketed by 70 percent. I heard the Speaker of the House say today as we launched our major congressional initiative that in the 1980s under President Reagan and then under President

Bush, drug abuse and misuse dropped and dropped and dropped because we had a public awareness, we had a Just Say No, we had a commitment and a leadership from Washington and from every level, a focus on doing away with the narcotics problem and illegal drugs in our society, and it worked.

But since 1992, 1993, and some of the actions of this administration, we have seen that trend turn around and now skyrocket with drug use among teens increasing by some 70 percent. The latest statistics show that half of the high school seniors think it is easy to obtain cocaine and LSD. These are the most recent statistics. Eighth grade use of drugs has increased 150 percent since 1992. Again a dramatic figure. Today the latest figures are that 25 percent of our high school seniors are current users of illegal drugs.

This is a scourge across our whole land. We have a tremendous problem. Some of it is a result, quite frankly, of policy of this administration. I do not want to get into all the details of what took place in the past, but one of President Clinton's first actions on taking office was to gut the Office of National Drug Control Policy, our Drug Czar's office. The statistics and the facts are these. He cut the staff from 146 individuals, staff positions, to 25.

In his first year, President Clinton cut \$200 million from drug interdiction efforts in the Caribbean and another \$200 million from alternative crop production and crop eradication. That means he took the bulk of money out of the programs that were the most cost-effective in stopping drugs at their source, in stopping drugs where they only cost a few cents, a few dollars.

I serve on a committee that overviews this national drug policy, and we have seen that the most effective dollars can be spent where drugs are produced and grown in their source countries. We know that all of the cocaine and the heroin and some of these other products are coming both through Colombia, the cocaine, 100 percent of it is coming from Peru, Bolivia and Colombia, so why not target the source?

We here in Congress are launching a program this week and today to stop drugs at their source. We are also launching a program that we think will help everyone by again bringing attention to this problem; not only bringing Federal resources such as we have done in central Florida, creating a high intensity drug traffic area, bringing every law enforcement mechanism together in central Florida and other communities, but across this whole land we are going to ask for accountability, responsibility, tough enforcement.

We have started in my local community with this theme. We have a high intensity drug traffic area from Daytona Beach all the way through Orlando and over to Tampa. We have organized State, local and Federal forces. We are going to today launch a real