

young men were exposed to tobacco for the first time when they entered the military service. Free cigarettes were provided to them and thus a habit was started during that time of service.

We must ensure that any man or woman who became addicted and consequently developed health problems due to the consumption of tobacco must be given the health care they were promised when they enlisted to serve this country.

My bill would establish a trust fund to be known as the Veterans Tobacco Trust Fund, providing that if a tobacco settlement is enacted, then \$3 billion would be credited to the trust fund. The funds would be made available to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish medical care and to conduct medical research, rehabilitation research, and health systems research related to tobacco addiction.

□ 0915

I also want to clear up an issue which has caused a great deal of consternation among the veterans and here on the House floor. I am referring, of course, to the recent vote we had on H.R. 2400, the Transportation Equity Act.

First, let us be clear on how this evolved. This was proposed by the Clinton administration in the fiscal year 1999 budget, VA budget, in which the President requested that VA disability benefits for tobacco-related illnesses be repealed. I opposed the President's proposal and its inclusion in H.R. 2400, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st century. I voted for the Obey amendment that sent H.R. 2400 back to conference and to instruct the conferees to remove the language reducing service-connected disability compensation to veterans for smoking-related illnesses. Unfortunately this motion was defeated.

I also joined the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP), chairman of our Committee on Veterans' Affairs, in sending a letter to the Speaker and to the minority leader, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT), voicing strong opposition to any provision that would offset veterans' benefits to pay for other programs.

Regrettably, we were not successful in our effort to prevent the administration's proposal to repeal VA disability compensation benefits for tobacco-related disabilities from being passed in part of H.R. 2400. However, we did prevail in providing benefit increases for veterans going to college on the GI bill, severely disabled veterans needing modifications for automobiles or their homes, and widows of veterans who died from service-connected disability.

As chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, I am committed to finding the funds to compensate the VA for the cost of providing health care for them, including smoking-related illnesses. That is why I developed the Veterans Tobacco Trust Fund Bill, so that funding will be made available should a na-

tional tobacco settlement be enacted into law.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in my efforts to help our Nation's veterans and sponsor my bill.

ADOPT A RELIGIOUS PRISONER IN VIETNAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) is recognized during morning hour debates for 3 minutes.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my colleagues to participate in the Adopt a Religious Prisoner in Vietnam Campaign, sponsored by the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church of Southern California. Religious believers around the world often suffer abuses, including beatings, tortures, extended incarceration and, yes, even death at the hands of their government, unless their leaders intervene.

As Members of Congress, it is our responsibility to highlight the ongoing repression against religion in Vietnam and the plight of many clergy members and lay leaders who are being detained because of their faith. Reports show that the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church continues to be suppressed. All religious activities and ceremonies are prohibited. Assembly of more than three persons is forbidden, and all assets and properties are being confiscated.

Religious expression is a fundamental right of all people, both here and abroad, and I believe that we should do all we can to affirm this principle. For too long, imprisoned people of faith have been forgotten. With Members of Congress adopting prisoners, we can successfully advocate for religious prisoners suffering persecution at the hands of the Vietnamese government. I adopted Mr. Tran Huu Duyen and Mr. Nam Liem to raise awareness among U.S. decision-makers and the public about religious repercussion in communist Vietnam. What crimes did these men commit to suffer such hard prison sentences?

Mr. Liem is a 58 year old Buddhist priest who practices religion at a small family temple in Vietnam, and since 1975 he has been arrested and detained by the communist authorities over 50 times for having refused to abandon his religious practice. To date, he has not been released from prison.

After the Communist takeover, Mr. Huu was arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the people's government, for participating in a political party that was affiliated with the church. Mr. Huu is last known to be in a labor camp in Xuan Loc and, despite his 78 years of age, he is still forced to do hard labor 8 hours a day.

By adopting these prisoners, Members of Congress can generate constant pressure on the Vietnamese authorities to release these religious leaders from detention and to truly respect freedom of religion.

SPENDING BY GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRATS

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

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, the Washington Times reported last week that Carol Browner, head of the EPA, had led a junket to Paris at a cost of \$60,000 to the American taxpayers. Of course, surely this was done to go to some very vital environmental meetings.

Well, no. This trip was made so she and some of her friends could go to the World Cup soccer games, a \$60,000 vacation at the expense of the taxpayers for Carol Browner, our environmental administrator. Five-thousand-dollar first class round trip airfares, \$300-a-night hotel rooms and then, of course, as is so often the case with this administration, they cannot take these fancy trips without big campaign contributors.

One guest on this trip was Hassan Nemazee, an Iranian American. Hassan Nemazee has contributed at least \$125,000 to the Democratic National Committee in recent years and no telling how much to individual Democratic candidates or other committees. Democratic fund-raisers have now sold nights in the Lincoln bedroom, Commerce Department trips, even nuclear technology in return for campaign contributions. You have to wonder how much they will try to make out of the upcoming or the next Olympic games in Australia.

On another and even more wasteful topic, a GAO report released last month said the cost of the space station has now gone up to \$96 billion, over five times the original cost estimates. Today the publication Congress Daily says, "Recent reports from the GAO and the Cost Assessments and Validation Task Force on the space station have left even its biggest supporters acknowledging that problems with costs and Russian participation need to be addressed."

Also Congress Daily reports in the article today that the space station will likely be 2 years behind schedule, with each one month of delay costing \$100 million. Congress Daily reports today that the space station will likely be 2 years behind schedule, with each month of delay costing \$100 million for a program that is already over five times its original cost estimate.

Each day, every day here in Washington we hear about horrible examples of waste, fraud and abuse.

A few months ago it was reported that there was \$23 billion, \$23 billion with a "B," in waste and fraud in the Medicare program, \$23 billion. The entire State of Tennessee, our entire government in Tennessee does not spend that much in a year and a half for education and everything else that the State does. It does not spend as much

as the Medicare program has wasted in just one year.

We recently were told about the National Park Service spending \$584,000 per home to build 18 houses, 18 houses for its employees in the Yosemite National Park. One of these homes cost \$700,000; \$584,000 for homes for employees of the National Park Service.

It is amazing, Mr. Speaker, what Federal bureaucrats can justify or rationalize for themselves. The American people should realize that any money they send here to Washington to our Federal Government will be spent in the least economical, least efficient, most wasteful way possible. It is amazing, Mr. Speaker, what government officials and bureaucrats will do when they are spending other people's money.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from California (Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD) is recognized during morning hour debates for 4 minutes.

Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD. Mr. Speaker, we must never forget a time in our country when American workers were forced to toil in appalling conditions, earning pitifully low wages, a time when men, women and, yes, even our children labored under hazardous conditions even during 12 hour work days without breaks or sick leave. If they were injured or dared to complain about these injustices, they risked losing their jobs.

Today, thankfully, we have a minimum wage, an 8 hour workday, sick leave, health and safety protections, workers' compensation and unemployment insurance, overtime pay, Social Security, pensions and the right to organize.

These hard-won protections may never have been realized without the heroic efforts of organized labor. For it was organized labor that led the campaign to provide free public education to all our Nation's children. And it was organized labor that was a leader in helping to pass landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Pay Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act and the Age Discrimination Act.

As a result, all Americans benefited. That is why, Mr. Speaker, when a ballot initiative in California threatened labor's very existence, voters stood with our unions. On that June 2nd election day, approximately 25,000 volunteers walked precincts and staffed phone banks, turning out California voters in record numbers, and they defeated Proposition 226, the so-called paycheck protection initiative.

The defeat of this antiworker initiative is not only a triumph for California workers but for working families across America.

By defeating Proposition 226, California voters sent a resounding message that the voices of working families will

not be silenced. And so will the rest of the country when similar initiatives around the country and in Congress are introduced, because each day every American benefits from the legacy of labor's invaluable achievements.

Mr. Speaker, Americans have a duty to preserve not only these hard-won gains but labor's ability to advocate for working Americans today and in the future.

THE YEAR 2000 PROBLEM

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

Mr. METCALF. Mr. Speaker, right now it is about 6:30 a.m. on the West Coast. Imagine if you are waking up and for some reason the power is off and your alarm did not ring. The toaster will not work and the TV will not turn on. The faucet and shower are not working either. Your car pool did not show up and the phone will not work to call in late. Even your cell phone is not working.

The streets are a mess because the street lights are out and, as you stop at the bank, your cash machine says your balance is zero. Beyond that, your flight to Chicago has been canceled. In fact, all flights are canceled, and you finally realize that it is going to be a really bad day.

The year 2000 problem is real. In less than 15 months, we will face a different world. Not only will it be a new millennium but the effect and power of computers running every part of our lives may be more real than ever imagined.

□ 0930

Simply put, the year 2000 bug or Y2K, as it is called, if not corrected could, at worst, lead to catastrophic scenarios and, at best, to major inconveniences.

This body has held hearings on this issue. Research studies have been written. The media has been heralding Y2K. Yet, even though we have seen this problem on the horizon for many years, most governmental agencies are not even close to being compliant regarding the myriad of possible commuter mishaps that will come at midnight on December 31, 1999.

The gentleman from California (Mr. HORN) has done excellent work in his report on Y2K. His findings and his grading system of the public sector are troubling. Yes, he graded the Federal agencies just like students. His findings and his grading of the public sector are very troubling.

Over all, the administration gets an "F" for Y2K preparedness. As a teacher in my life before Congress, I can relate to a grading system. First, students do not like to have their grades waived in front of the class, let alone the whole Nation, but like careless students who procrastinate, a test is in place to check on progress.

Frankly, I found the grades for the recent test of the gentleman from California (Mr. HORN) for Y2K compliance

for government agencies clearly abysmal. Since the taxpayers are the financial supporters of these agencies, I think it is appropriate to take a look at a few grades.

The Department of Defense, which oversees the largest nuclear arsenal in the world, run in large by computers, gets a "D". The Environmental Protection Agency, this famous organization which monitors the cleanliness of our water and air, gets a failing "F".

The Department of Education, the agency that should be setting a good example for students, is getting an unsatisfactory "D" in computer compliance. The Department of Energy, regulating everything from nuclear plants to hydroelectric dams is failing miserably with an "F".

The Department of Transportation, the agency that has direct oversight over the Federal Aviation Administration and their control of the skies and airplane traffic, is getting an "F". This really concerns me. I fly a lot. These are just a handful of the grades.

While some progress is being made, serious vulnerabilities still remain. The administration with its departments and agencies must be able to provide the American people with a sound plan to deal with Y2K. The unfortunate truth is that the final test is coming in 18 months. If we fail, we cannot just go back and retake the class. We can only live with the circumstances.

ALL AMERICANS BENEFIT FROM ORGANIZED LABOR

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MASCARA) is recognized during morning hour debates for 2 minutes.

Mr. MASCARA. Mr. Speaker, I rise to praise the hard work and efforts that organized labor has given to this country during the past century. These organized groups of men and women from all walks of life are the backbone of the economic foundation of this great country.

Some may argue that the creation of our great American middle class just happened. No. It was built on the backs of working men and women who belong to labor unions. All workers, including nonunion and white collar workers, were given the same benefits fought for by workers who organized and participated in the collective bargaining process.

All Americans benefited. They benefited by having better wages, safety in the workplace, health care benefits and pensions. These benefits, as well as improved working conditions, are now under assault in this country. All workers in this great Nation should join together this week and support a day to make our voices heard.

We must protect the strides we have made during the last half century. We must never go back to the days of deplorable working conditions. Never.