

requested so we can do a much better job of counting minorities. I hope the administration stops trying to divide America over the Census, because that will not lead to a more accurate Census, and it certainly will not increase trust in the Census.

Mr. President, work with Congress. I ask the President to stop holding the rest of government hostage to getting his way on the Census. Stop trying to divide America against one another. Work with Congress, and together we can save the 2000 Census.

THE WELL-BEING OF AMERICA'S FAMILIES DEPENDS UPON THE HEALTH OF OUR SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, the goal of those of us here in Congress should be to be a full partner for the American people, who really care about the essentials. They want their children to be safe when they go out the door to school in the morning, they are concerned about the family's economic security, and they want them to be healthy, physically and environmentally.

This well-being of our families depends upon the health of our schools. There are some in Congress who would turn their back upon the historic responsibility that the Federal Government has had with education, claiming that this is exclusively a State or a local responsibility. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Federal Government has always played a major role in education, starting from the Land Ordinance Act of 1785 through the GI bill to school lunches today.

There are three critical areas that we must address here in this Congress: assistance for the children who are the most difficult and expensive to educate; the reduction of gun violence, so that families can have peace of mind when the children go to school; and the promotion of computer skills and access that are so essential for success in today's world.

Congress mandated, appropriately so, in the 94th Congress that there would be special education access for children with severe learning disabilities, but along with that mandate came a promise of 40 percent funding from the Federal Government, appropriately, for these children are the most difficult and expensive to educate. Yet, we are contemplating only 9 percent Federal funding in place of that 40 percent commitment.

In the area of gun safety, we have seen example after example across this country where carnage has erupted on our schoolyards. Yet, at the same time, this Congress has a number of bills before it that are designed to reduce the

incidence of gun violence. So far, not one has been scheduled to come to this floor.

Finally, in the area of Internet connection, that promise was to be made through the mechanism of the E-Rate, a heavily discounted fee that would be available particularly to inner city schools, rural schools, but all American schools and libraries would benefit, to some degree. This was the promise of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and yet this promise has yet to be fully implemented. Indeed, today there are some in Congress who are threatening to repeal that provision, leaving behind the most needy children from the information superhighway.

There is no reason for us to shrug our shoulders, no excuse for inaction. We know the problems. We in Congress have made the commitments. We currently have the strongest economy of a generation. Indeed, some of my friends in the Republican leadership feel we have so much money that they feel comfortable contemplating a \$1 trillion tax cut over the next 10 years.

I would suggest that, first and foremost, we tend to knitting by first fully funding our commitment to special education; by passing commonsense legislation to reduce gun access, the cap laws that would mandate safe storage and responsible gun ownership; and finally, keep our commitments to our schools and libraries by fully funding the E-Rate. Americans and their children deserve no less from this Congress.

FOLLOWING THROUGH ON THE COMMITMENT OF THE HOUSE TO ELIMINATE THE MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

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

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, earlier this summer this House made a commitment to eliminate the marriage tax penalty. I thought this morning that I would talk about why it is so important that we follow through on that commitment, and follow through on that commitment with a series of simple questions that I hear in the South suburbs and the South Side of Chicago, the area that I have the privilege of representing.

That is, do Americans feel that it is fair that our tax code imposes a higher tax on married working couples? Do Americans feel it is fair that 21 million married working couples pay, on average, \$1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married? Do Americans feel that it is fair that this couple pays higher taxes than an identical couple that lives together outside of marriage? Do Americans feel it is fair that our tax code actually provides an incentive to get divorced, because the only way today to avoid the marriage tax penalty is to get divorced and to file that paperwork?

That is wrong. It is unfair. Frankly, really, it is immoral that our tax code punishes society's most basic institution for 21 million married working couples; that is, \$1,400 in higher taxes.

Let me give an example of a south suburban couple from Illinois that suffers the marriage tax penalty. The gentleman in the couple is a machinist at Caterpillar. That is where they make the big heavy earth-moving equipment in Joliet. This machinist makes \$35,500. If he is single, under our tax code he files and, of course, with the standard exemption and deduction, he is in the 15 percent tax bracket.

He meets a schoolteacher, a schoolteacher in the public schools. She has an identical income of \$35,500. If she stayed single, just like her machinist fiancé, she would be in the 15 percent tax bracket. Under our tax code, if they choose to get married, they will file jointly. When they file jointly, because they combine their income, and their combined income is \$61,000, that pushes them into a higher tax bracket. They are now taxed in the 28 percent tax bracket just because they are married, producing an almost \$1,400 marriage tax penalty just because they are married.

That is wrong that this couple, just because they choose to get married, pay higher taxes. If we think about it, what is the bottom line, here? We propose the Marriage Tax Elimination Act which puts a working married couple like our machinist and schoolteacher on parity with an identical married couple that lives outside marriage.

In 1996 this House of Representatives led the way by working to provide an adoption tax credit to help families provide a loving home for a child in need of adoption. In 1997 this House led the way in convincing the President and the Senate that we should provide a \$500 per child tax credit which will benefit 3 million Illinois children. That helped families. Of course, this year we can help families again by strengthening marriage and no longer punishing marriage.

Let me share how we propose eliminating the marriage tax penalty. The Marriage Tax Elimination Act, H.R. 3734, is very simple. It is legislation which essentially doubles relief for working married couples by doubling the standard deduction from its current level of \$4,150 to \$8,300, and also doubling the income tax threshold, which of course you file in the 15 percent if you are single, and just over 24,000, doubling that to a little over 49,000.

So when you are single and you choose to get married, your tax essentially doubles. Your rates are double the income. That brings fairness to the tax code. That is a very simple way of eliminating the marriage tax penalty under the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, doubling the standard deduction, doubling rates, so married taxpayers are not punished just because they are married. That is a simple solution.