To summarize, Mr. Speaker, this bill, H.R. 2116, provides new direction to address veterans' long-term care needs; expands veterans' access to care; closes gaps in eligibility laws; and establishes needed reform to improve the VA health care system. Our veterans population is in need of this reform.

''COMMUNITIES CAN!'' COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DOGGETT) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. DOGGETT. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to draw the attention of the Congress to five communities that are being nationally recognized today for making particularly effective use of public dollars on behalf of families who have children with or at risk of special needs. Considering all of the different funding sources, the many different rules and regulations from various Federal departments that exist, these communities have found ways to make government more efficient, more flexible and more responsive to families with these young children.

This year, Communities Can!, a growing national network of communities dedicated to serving children and families, including children with or at risk of special needs, is announcing its 1999 Communities Can! Communities of Excellence award winners. They are: Fremont County, Colorado; Goldsboro, North Carolina; Augusta, Maine; and Mile City, Montana; as well as Livingston County, Michigan.

Communities Can! is endorsed by the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council for Early Intervention, which is cosponsoring these awards. These communities have been chosen as award winners for demonstrating exemplary efforts in meeting the following very important goals:

First, all young children and families in need of services and supports are effectively identified early and easily brought into the community's system for delivering services and supports.

All young children and families will receive regular, ongoing and comprehensive services and supports that they need.

There is a way to fund the services and supports needed by these young children and their families.

And services and supports for young children and their families are organized in the way that families can easily use them.

Finally, they ask the families what they need and involve them in the decision-making process at all levels and determine the specific services that will be most beneficial to their real-world concerns.

These communities are being honored for their accomplishments this morning here in the Capitol Building, and I know that many of my colleagues will be participating to celebrate this very important event.

Congratulations to each of these communities, and congratulations to Communities Can!, because it is demonstrating that every community in this country can make a difference in the lives of young children with or at risk of special needs. It can assure that each of them is able to achieve to the full extent of their potential.

ELIMINATION OF THE MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. STEARNS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, this year House Republicans have several goals. We want to strengthen and make our schools safer. We want to strengthen Social Security by locking away 100 percent of Social Security revenues and surpluses for retirement security. Republicans want to pay down the national debt, and Republicans also want to lower the tax burden for middle-class working families.

I believe this year, as we work to lower the tax burden for middle-class families, that we should focus on making our Tax Code simpler and making our Tax Code fairer to families. And let me raise a series of questions today that really illustrate what I believe is the most unfair tax, and that is the tax on marriage.

The marriage tax is not only unfair, it is wrong. Is it right that under our Tax Code, married working couples pay higher taxes than two single people living together outside of marriage? Do Americans feel that it is fair that 28 million married working couples pay on average $1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married? That is right. Under our Tax Code today, a husband and wife who both are in the work force pay higher taxes than two single people living together with identical incomes. Mr. Speaker, that is wrong.

Let me give an example here of what it means. As I pointed out earlier, there are 28 million married working couples paying on average $1,400 more in higher taxes. Here is an example of a South Chicago suburban couple. I represent the south suburbs of Chicago. If we take a machinist who works for Caterpillar in Joliet and a schoolteacher in the local public schools of Joliet, and they have a combined income of $62,000, the machinist makes $35,500 and as a single individual when he files his taxes, if we subtract the personal exemption and the standard deduction, he pays a certain amount of taxes. But if he chooses to marry, and his schoolteacher wife with an identical income, and when they are married they file their taxes jointly, their combined income of $62,000, when he subtracts the standard deductions and exemptions under our current Tax Code, this machinist and his schoolteacher wife making $62,000 a year pay the average marriage tax penalty of $1,400.

Now, there are those, particularly on that side of the aisle, who believe that this is no big deal. That is money that we have to spend in Washington. Back in Joliet, $1,400 is 1 year's tuition in Joliet Community College; 3 months of day care in the local child care center; and, also several months' worth of car payments.

The Marriage Tax Elimination Act, which I am proud to say has 230 cosponsors, a bipartisan majority of this House, we propose to eliminate the marriage tax penalty for all Americans. Under our legislation, we double the standard deduction for joint filers to twice that for single filers. We double the brackets so that those who are married filing jointly can earn exactly twice what a single filer can make and be treated fairly under taxes.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is the Marriage Tax Elimination Act would eliminate the marriage tax penalty for this machinist and this schoolteacher wife who are married in Joliet, Illinois. Eliminating the marriage tax penalty is really an issue of fairness and will help simplify the Tax Code.

What is the bottom line? The Marriage Tax Elimination Act puts two married people on equal footing with two single people. That is fair, and that simplifies the Tax Code. I am proud to say I was part of this Congress when Republicans succeeded in passing into law the Adoption Tax Credit to help loving families find a home for a child in need of adoption. We accomplished that as part of the Contract With America in 1996. And we followed up in 1997 by enacting into law the centerpiece of the Contract with America, the $500 per child tax credit, which benefits 3 million Illinois children. That is $1.5 billion that will stay in Illinois rather than coming to Washington. And, of course, I believe the folks back home can better spend their hard-earned dollars back home than we can here in Washington.

Mr. Speaker, we can build on that helping working families by working to simplify our Code, by working to bring fairness to our Tax Code, by eliminating what is the most unfair tax of all, and that is the tax on marriage.

Let us stop taxing marriage. Let us pass into law the Marriage Tax Elimination Act and eliminate the marriage tax penalty once and for all. Let us make the elimination of the marriage tax penalty the centerpiece of this year's tax cut.

HOPE FOR PEACE IN ERITREA AND ETHIOPIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. SNYDER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 3 minutes.