I would like to just briefly, for the benefit of my colleagues, point out some of the budget considerations that make this an awkward and inappropriate time here in February to take up the marriage tax penalty legislation.

This pie chart shows the available surplus according to the last estimates or projections from the Congressional Budget Office. The total surplus over the next 10 years, if there is an absolute freeze on spending, is projected to be $1.8 trillion. Now, this is a happy state of affairs. It is a surplus without using the Social Security Trust Fund and the money that is accumulating there.

Of this surplus, over $1 trillion would be used if we simply continued the programs that we have had, with the caps but with adjustments for inflation. So this leaves us with a more modest surplus, which is actually around $837 billion. And this again is over a 10-year period of time. It would be the green and the orange portions of this pie chart.

Now, a portion of even that $837 billion is not necessarily as easily available as we would like to think, and that is because we have certain tax provisions which are set to expire. And if they are to be extended, and we have routinely extended these tax provisions for the benefit of taxpayers in our society; and if we consider the farm aid legislation, which is expected to be passed this year and succeeding years, as it has been in previous years, about $230 billion, or more than 25 percent of the $837 billion, would be used for those tax benefit pieces of legislation and for farm aid legislation. This leaves us with the green portion, about $607 billion.

Even that has a certain duplicitous character to it because it fails to recognize that about $200 billion of the green portion is actually a surplus that is being generated in the Medicare trust fund.

Now, we have all taken a fairly solemn pledge that we will not go into the Social Security Trust Fund to finance government expenditures or to finance tax reduction that Social Security has to be protected from that type of invasion. But I submit that if we are hearing from our hospitals and other health care providers at home, we are preparing ourselves to make a parallel commitment to the Medicare program. Medicare is financially more precarious than Social Security, and we certainly have thousands and thousands of health care providers around the country that have been sharing with us the struggle that they are going through with the cutbacks that have been made in financing Medicare.

So I would submit that there are several hundred billion dollars there that is also unavailable. So what I would urge my colleagues to do is to make sure that we responsibly deal with the marriage tax penalty legislation so that we do not somehow handicap ourselves in developing a proper budget.

ELIMINATING THE MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MCINTOSH) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Mr. Speaker, my topic today will be exactly the topic that the gentleman prior to me spoke about, the elimination of the marriage tax penalty. And, in a way, I am glad he came and spoke to us about that, because the point he made is we have to do this within the context of a balanced budget. But he talked about a surplus of $1.8 trillion over the next 10 years. The bill that is being marked up today in committee, which is a bipartisan bill, the Weller-McIntosh-Danner Marriage Penalty Elimination Bill, that will impact that budget only by one-tenth of that projected surplus, or $180 billion.

So I say to my colleagues that I disagree with the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. MINGE). We must move forward now, in fact, we should have done it yesterday, to eliminate this marriage penalty in our Tax Code.

Now, there are organized lobbies for all the other things he mentioned. There are organized lobbies for payments to hospitals, payments to farmers; there are organized lobbies for tax credits to businesses; there are organized lobbies that petition us daily to spend money on all of that reflected on his pie chart. But there are no organized lobbies here in Washington saying protect families from having to pay an additional burden on their taxes.

I want to thank my cosponsors, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) and the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. DANNER), for helping me to create the bipartisan momentum so that this Congress now can finally do something for those families. We do not have to wait. We should not wait. We know what needs to get done.

Now, let me share with my colleagues during this hour some of the complex parts of this marriage penalty, and then I want to also introduce some of our friends and colleagues who have been supporters of it. But I want to start this with a reflection of 3 years ago. Three years ago this month I received a letter that changed my career in Congress. It was a letter from a constituent of mine talking about how the marriage penalty affected her and urging me to do something about it. And that changed my priorities on what I was going to fight for here in Washington, and I have been fighting to eliminate that marriage penalty really ever since I got that letter.

So I want to share with my colleagues now, 3 years later, what a young lady from my Congressional District, a young lady named Sharon Mallory, wrote to me that got me thinking about our priorities here. She said, ''Dear Representative McIntosh: My boyfriend, Darryl Pierce, and I have been living together for quite some time. We would very much like to get married. We both work at the Ford Electronics in Connersville.'' It is a factory there. ''We both make less than $10 an hour, however, we try to work overtime whenever it is available, and also Darryl does some farming on the side.''

1400

So my colleagues can see Sharon and Darryl are your typical middle-class working family. She goes on to say, ''I can't tell you how disgusted we both are over this tax issue. If we get married, not only would I forfeit my $900 tax refund check, we would be writing a check to the IRS for $2,800. This amount was figured for us by an accountant at the local H&R Block office in New Castle.

''Now, there is nothing right about this. After we continually hear government preach to us about family values. Nothing new about the hypocrites in Washington.'' As my colleagues can see, Sharon had some harsh words for us here, ''Why don't we do away with the current tax system? It is old and outdated, antiquated.

''The flat tax is the most sensible method to use, and no one is being penalized; everyone would be treated the same. I don't understand how the government can ask such questions as are you single? Are you married? Do you have any dependents? Employers, bankers, realtors and creditors are forbidden by law to ask these questions. The same should apply to the government.''

This is what really got my attention, I have to share with my colleagues when I read this letter, ''Darryl and I would very much like to be married. And I must say it broke our hearts when we found out we cannot afford it. We hope some day, some day, the government will allow us to get married by not penalizing us, Sharon Mallory and Darryl Pierce.''

As I said, that letter changed my life, because it changed the priorities that I have in working here in Washington. I brought Sharon and Darryl out here to a hearing a few years ago. They shared with my colleagues the penalty that is stopping them from getting married. They shared with the Speaker the plight they had. He became a cosponsor of our bill.

My fondest hope is when I return home after this session of Congress I can get together with Sharon and Darryl and say we did it; we eliminated the marriage penalty tax for you and married couples all over this country.

Now, let me introduce a gentleman who has been waiting very patiently today to join us in this special order, a colleague of mine who has a lot of experience and wisdom about how this process works.

I yield to the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. SKEEN) to talk about this issue.

(Mr. SKEEN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SKEEN. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Indiana for yielding to me to speak in support of H.R. 6, the Marriage Tax Penalty Relief Act of the year 2000.

Americans, I think, have spoken loud and clear on this issue. I have heard from several of my constituents in Southern New Mexico who feel that the current tax on married couples is blatantly unfair.

During their marriage ceremony, couples say ''I do'' to a lifetime of love and devotion, not higher taxes.

The institution of marriage is the foundation of our country's past, its present, and its future. It is hard to imagine our Nation having a tax code and structure which unfairly taxes those who get married and have a family. That is not right, and it is very unfair.

It is time to end the marriage tax penalty. In fact, our current Tax Code punishes working couples by pushing them into higher tax brackets, taxing the income of the second wage earner at a much higher rate than individuals who are unmarried.

On average, this penalty amounts to almost $1,400 per year, more than enough to pay for a ROTH or Education IRA account, buy a family computer with an Internet highway ramp, pay some mortgage payments on the family home, or buy important necessities for the family home such as clothes and food.

This unfair tax most often hits middle-income Americans, people who earn from $25,000 per year to $75,000 per year.

In the State of the Union message to Congress last week, the President proposed abolishing this tax over the next 10 years. Folks, our families cannot wait that long.

Mr. Speaker, by acting now, we will prevent even more working couples from being punished in the future. By acting now, we will help working couples keep more of their own money, each year helping American families make their dream come true.

By acting now, it will end this unfair tax which penalizes married couples.

I have already added my strong support to the Marriage Tax Penalty Relief Act of 2000. I call for all of my colleagues to support this bill as soon as it reaches the floor of the House of Representatives.

We can do no less to right this wrong. I thank the gentleman for the time he has yielded and for the interest he has shown in letting young people be young people, but married, and for strengthening this country.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I thank the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. SKEEN) and thank him for his support of this bill. It means a lot to me.

Mr. SKEEN. It is a pleasure.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Mr. Speaker, let me also yield to a colleague of mine. Although, we are on opposite sides of the aisle, and that sometimes means you do not get to work closely together with each other, but someone who I have come to admire greatly. We shared an office down the hall from each other.

I know in her heart she cares about people. She cares about families. She has been good enough to join us as one of the lead cosponsors on this bill, making it a strong bipartisan bill.

I yield to the gentlewoman from Missouri (Ms. DANNER).

(Ms. DANNER asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. DANNER. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank my colleague for the courtesy of asking me to be the Democrat lead cosponsor. I am pleased to be able to do that because I feel very strongly about this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I know that other speakers have talked about this issue, we have heard several already, about the benefits of eliminating the marriage tax penalty.

Today, I would like to share with my colleagues and with the public Missouri's experience, my home State's experience, and, indeed, Missouri's leadership on this issue.

My colleague, the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. SKEEN) mentioned marriage and taking the vows. When the minister utters that phrase ''for better or worse,'' although the couple does not realize it at the time, that phrase applies to how they are going to file their State and Federal income tax. Obviously, they are thinking of something else at that moment in time. But that will come home to haunt them, I am afraid, ''the better or worse'' with regard to the tax issue. For some taxpayers, it is better than for others.

These are the couples who file in a State which, like my home State of Missouri, permit married couples to file separately on the same tax form.

Despite the loss of revenue that has been mentioned before when people are not paying in as singles but paying in as a married couple, once again, my State of Missouri has consistently been able to refund money to those who pay State income tax.

Missouri is known, I think many of my colleagues know, as the ''Show Me'' State. And I think it has shown the Federal Government that there should be and is fairness and equity in the way our State income tax system addresses the issue of taxes levied upon married couples.

Married couples filing in Missouri have two options. They can file jointly or separately, using whichever option imposes the least amount of taxes upon their income. That is, I think, as it should be.

Many years ago, Missouri's General Assembly, where I served proudly as a State senator for 10 years, so I know a bit about Missouri's General Assembly, gave couples relief from the marriage penalty; and last year our State still provided income tax payers with a refund.

I believe that the Congress can and should do no less than to afford those who pay the Federal income tax the same option that Missourians have, to file a tax return that causes them the least amount of taxes to be paid.

Once again, I thank my colleague. It is a pleasure to join with him in this very, very worthwhile piece of legislation, a piece of legislation that he and I and literally hundreds of our colleagues who have signed onto H.R. 6 know will benefit the people that we serve.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Missouri (Ms. DANNER) for her leadership on this.

There were a lot of skeptics when we first started. Does it make a difference? How can we fit it into the budget with our other priorities? And she was instrumental in helping us build a bipartisan body of support for that and convincing many of our colleagues that this needs to be a priority.

I suppose I am quite confident that her leadership on that helped this year with the President's support for Congress doing something to eliminate the marriage penalty, and that is important that we get everybody behind this.

Ms. DANNER. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I was very excited about in the State of the Union address was the fact that the President did include that. And so, it shows you, it shows me, it shows our colleagues that we have some mutual interests there and that what we have to do is bring these two bills, his ideas and our ideas, to some kind of a mutual agreement that we can all support.

And I have been reading several things lately that indicate to me that the executive branch is very, very willing to work with those of us in the legislative branch to accomplish that purpose.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for her comments, and her participation helps enormously.

I know what it is like to be working in an executive branch and to wonder if a Congress controlled by the other party is doing what is right or trying to do something that gets a political advantage. And I think when they see leadership from someone of her stature and her caring on the same political side, they realize that this is what is good for Americans, it is not about politics; it is what is good for Americans.

So her leadership in that way will bring a lot towards getting this bill passed, and I thank her for that.

Ms. DANNER. Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to work with my colleague on this.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Mr. Speaker, let me share with my colleagues and folks who may be watching. They may ask themselves, how did we get into this position of having a marriage penalty tax. Surely, Congress never voted to suddenly start taxing marriage. And to be honest, it happened very quietly, very subtly that people did not really focus on around here.

For 30 years now, there have been two things in the Tax Code that ultimately effectively created that marriage penalty tax. The first is that there is a difference in the amount they get as a standard deduction.

If they are two single people, both of them earning a living, living together, not living together, they get a standard deduction that is about $4,200. We would think that would double, so it would be $8,500. If they get married, they only qualify for a standard deduction of $7,100. So there is a $1,400 difference in the amount they get as a standard deduction off their taxes. That means they end up paying more taxes when they get married.

The second way that this marriage penalty has crept into our tax system is through the bracket creep. If they are both earning, say, $30,000, the gentleman may be a carpenter who earns $30,000 and he marries a young lady who is a teacher who is earning $30,000, they both pay as single people in the 15 percent bracket. That is how much their tax burden is, 15 percent of their income after they adjust for the deductions. If they get married, they get thrown into a higher tax bracket because then they are making $60,000 together.

And because those brackets are not doubled, where if they are two people they get twice as much before they get kicked into the next bracket, they effectively pay a higher rate on their combined income just because they are married. Those are the two major ways in which our Tax Code ends up inflicting a marriage penalty tax.

Now it affects 40 million families in this country. It affects them on average by asking them to pay $1,400 more just because they are married.

Let me share with my colleagues what does our bill do, what H.R. 6, the Weller-McIntosh-Danner bill, does to relieve that marriage penalty.

First, it immediately equalizes that difference on the standard deduction. So that, beginning in 2001, if they are a single person, their standard deduction is $4,250. If they are married and filing jointly, they get double that for two people. No difference, no marriage penalty in the standard deduction starting immediately.

Second, it phases in a gradual increase in the 15-percent bracket cutoff. So that when they are married, they do not ultimately get thrown into a higher tax bracket, at least for that 15-percent level.

That, by the way, helps all taxpayers. Because we all pay some of our income at 15 percent. If we make more, we pay the rest of it at a higher rate.

The third thing it does is it increases the beginning point of a phase-out of the marriage penalty for those working families that are at the low end of the scale and they are getting earned income tax credit.

What it essentially does is, say they are a single dad and they are working in a low-income wage, minimum wage, and they are a single mom also making minimum wage, if they start a new family together, they will give up what the Government helps them with earned income tax credit. And a lot of times they go from receiving an earned income tax credit to paying more in income taxes.

1415

So it is a true burden on those who can least afford to pay it. Our bill gives them an extra $2,000 of leeway in that program on the earned income tax credit.

Mr. Speaker, I notice that one of our colleagues who has been a strong supporter of eliminating the marriage penalty and sits on the important committee to help us make sure we can afford to do that in the rest of the budget is with us.

I yield to my good friend and colleague the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON).

Mr. KINGSTON. I thank the gentleman from Indiana for yielding to me. I want to commend him on his work for what he is doing. It is amazing that in this society where our government has all kinds of rules, regulations and taxes to encourage and to discourage certain behaviors, that here we have really a frontal assault on married couples all over America, saying that if you get married, we are going to penalize you. If you want to just live together, it is no problem, we will not increase your taxes.

It is ridiculous when we think about the importance of marriage as an institution for our economic stability, for our social stability, really as a way to continue the race, if you will, marriage is a profound institution. Here we are talking about two potential plans. One plan basically almost gives you a car payment, a monthly car payment, $210. The kind of bombs that I drive, you cannot even get financing on, but if you could $210 would certainly pay for it. The other one is good for maybe 3 months' worth of house payments, to say to a married couple, we want to help you and here is one worthy place because you are going to need a house, to put that money, that makes sense. Serving 28 million people versus 9 million people. I think that it is proper for us to aggressively try to help as many married couples as possible and not try to take the Washington approach where, yes, if you vote for this lesser plan, you can leave Washington and you can go back home to the Rotary clubs and the Kiwanis clubs, the folks in your church and synagogue and say, ''Oh, yeah, I'm a strong supporter of the marriage tax penalty,'' because technically you can. But there is an old expression we used to say in the Georgia legislature, it is like holding up a little fish and saying, ''Hold still, little fish, I'm not going to do anything but gut you.'' That is what the administration and the Democrat proposal does. Yes, it is a marriage tax penalty relief bill but it basically guts the entire intent of it. It does not help a broad spectrum of people and it does not give any real help to those it can. It is ironic that those who a few years ago were laughing at our $500 per child tax credit, saying what is that going to do to help people, now want to have full election-year bragging rights on a $210 tax credit. It does not make sense. I plan to support the legislation that the gentleman from Indiana is cosponsoring. I encourage him to keep up the good work.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Mr. Speaker, let me share with the gentleman from Georgia and my colleagues the chart that I have next to me that really shows the differences between the President's proposal and our Republican congressional proposal. Let me say at the outset, I was happy that President Clinton put that on the agenda in the State of the Union address, because now we have gotten over the threshold question on both sides of the aisle, of do we do anything to help married families. For a long time, there was resistance for doing anything about this. So it is a step in the right direction that President Clinton has come forward with this proposal. But I think we could do much better.

On the left-hand side of this chart, we see the details about President Clinton's marriage penalty plan. It is $45 billion in tax relief over 10 years. The Republican plan is four times that, $180 billion in tax relief. To put that in context, as the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. MINGE) pointed out, over those same 10 years, we have 10 times that, or $1.8 trillion in projected surplus. So this is a drop in the bucket when we are dealing with the surpluses we are expecting here in Washington.

The second line shows that the total relief is limited, it is capped in the President's proposal to $210 per couple. That is less than half of that $500 per child tax credit that we passed, and much less than half of the total burden that the average married couple will pay when they are hit with a marriage penalty.

The Republican plan gives relief up to $1,400 per couple, roughly seven times the President's does if you are at that maximum level.

The third point is that if you look at what the President has done, he has eliminated just one of the two major causes of the marriage penalty. His proposal is to double that standard deduction, eliminate that first problem we talked about. But he does nothing about the brackets, and the fact that you get thrown into a higher tax bracket when both the husband and the wife are working and earning income. He also does not do it right away. He phases it in over that 10-year period. Our proposal is to eliminate that standard deduction problem immediately, so that in 2001, there is no difference, if you are married or if you are single, everybody gets the same standard deduction. Then we go beyond that and we start to tackle that problem of

the differences in the tax brackets, so that over the 10-year period, we have equalized the difference in the 15 percent tax bracket. That is the tax bracket that most working middle-class Americans have to pay. Right now if you are a working-class family where you are earning $30,000, the husband is, and the wife is earning another $30,000, you would stay in that 15 percent bracket if you were divorced or if you were single, two individual people, but the minute you get married, part of your income gets thrown into that higher bracket, the 28 percent bracket. You start to be treated as somebody in the upper middle class would be taxed. And so we would phase out that difference and allow everybody to have relief from that tax bracket creep.

The fourth point on the chart shows who would be helped by this. Under the President's plan, only those individuals who use the short form, or the 1040–EZ form, would benefit. By the way, they do not benefit by very much at the beginning. Ten years from now, they get the full benefit when that standard deduction is equalized. Our proposal helps all families who are hit with the marriage penalty, whether you use a short form, an EZ form or whether you deduct. A lot of homeowners have to deduct, because that is the only way that they can take that deduction for interest on their mortgage. Under the President's plan, they do not qualify for any kind of marriage penalty relief. Under our plan, they would get equal treatment. And then the bottom line there shows how many people would be benefited by the two plans. Under President Clinton's plan, only 9 million Americans would be affected by this.

I am not saying that is bad. We need to help those 9 million Americans, and I am delighted that the President has put this on the table in his State of the Union address. But our plan goes way beyond that. We help three times the number of Americans who are married, earning a living, trying to save for the future for their children. The reason I brought this chart out here is it is easy to see for me, by far, the best plan is the one that we are going to be producing on the floor of this House, the Weller-McIntosh-Danner bill that the committee is marking up. We need to step back and look at this and say, Let's do something real. Let's not do a kind of cheap thrills, down-and-dirty version where we get political credit. Let's do something that helps people who are being hit with this marriage penalty.

What does all of this mean for the average family? We talk about budgets of $1.8 trillion, we talk about an impact of a bill of $180 billion over 10 years. But what does it really mean for an average family in this country? The average family with two incomes, when our bill is fully in force, will have $1,400 more in income. That is 3 months of child care. That is a semester of tuition at a community college. It is 4 months of the typical car payment. It can buy school clothes and supplies for children. It can pay for a family vacation. It helps with escalating health insurance premiums. For some families it lets them keep a down payment. I got some e-mails from people who told me when they were first married, they had saved two or $3,000, and then they did their taxes and suddenly found they had to pay all of that in extra income taxes and so their savings account that they had saved up hoping that they would be able to afford a down payment on a house as a newly married young couple suddenly was not there for them anymore. This tax relief will make a big difference on the bottom line for the average American family.

The marriage penalty is particularly bad for women. I often think of it as the women's discriminatory tax provision, because what happens is for many women in our society, they begin with a career, and then at some point in their life, they start a family. They make a choice. Some people do not have this choice but many make the choice of scaling back, or stopping working for a period of time to raise their children. When their children are old enough, they may want to go back into the workforce and have a chance once again to pick up their careers. Today if they do that and this marriage penalty tax is on the books, they get hit effectively with a 50 percent marginal income tax rate, because all of that tax comes out of that additional income.

The demographic statistics from CBO show that almost three-quarters of America's families are two-earner couples. Obviously a record number of women are deciding to pursue their careers and enter the workforce. It is wrong that we have a tax provision, an antiquated tax provision that penalizes and discriminates against women who want to contribute to their family income.

The marriage penalty is also disproportionately burdensome for minorities. African Americans are particularly devastated by the marriage tax. The marriage penalty occurs when both spouses work and make roughly the same income. Women in black families have historically entered the workforce in much larger numbers and earn a much larger percentage of the household income than society as a whole. In fact, 73 percent of the married black women are breadwinners and black women contribute approximately 40 percent of their household income. That is a much higher percentage than the typical family in our society. They are paying more taxes when they are married and contributing to that family income. Our legislation will bring fairness back to that, so that minorities will not be hit with this unfair marriage penalty tax.

One of the things that people ask me is, ''Will it make a difference? You have talked about needing the strength in families and one of the reasons you bring this bill to the House floor is so that we can strengthen families, but does it make a difference? You cannot tell me that $1,400 really makes a difference in what people do in their family life.''

I wish that were the case. Statistics show that financial difficulty is the number one reason for breakdowns of families in our society.

I want to share with my colleagues an e-mail that I received. I have received over 1,000 of them since we started 3 years ago on this crusade to eliminate the marriage penalty tax. This one came from a young man from Virginia, a young man named Tom Flynn. I will share with my colleagues what he had to say about this:

''I am a very concerned young taxpayer who has been married for just over 2 years.'' He wrote this in 1997. ''I am 26 years old and my wife turns 25 in December. I cannot accurately estimate how much my wife and I have been penalized by the marriage penalty since we just got married. However, judging by the information you have posted on your website, we certainly fit the category of those affected by this outrage. My wife and I will now make approximately $70,000 in combined income. We are trying to save as much as we can but it seems that we just get by paying bill after bill month after month. Regardless, taxes are killing my wife and I and many other young people just like us. We hope to start a family next year. But are afraid to do so because we feel we are not financially ready. When is Congress going to keep its promise and deliver some real tax relief to people like my wife and me?''

One of the things that we also received is an e-mail from a young gentleman, also from Virginia, Andrew Barrington, who described what happened in his life. They, too, had been married a little over 2 years. He goes on to say in his e-mail, ''We grew up together and began dating when we were 18. After dating for 3 years, we decided that the next natural step in our lives together would be to get married. I cannot tell you how much joy that has brought us. But I must tell you that the tax penalty that was inflicted on us has been the only real source of pain that our marriage has suffered. The first year we paid taxes and it was bad, but we were able to get on top of it and pay for those taxes. The second year was more, and more than we could have ever expected, and we are still paying the government monthly for it. It scares us what next year will hold for us as far as taxes are concerned. By the time we finish paying this year's taxes, we will need to start all over again. If last year is any indication, it will only get worse. Thank you for doing everything you can to eliminate the marriage penalty tax.''

1430

I can share with you other e-mails. One young lady wrote to me that her family, which was now a broken family, her marriage that did not succeed,

she thinks the problems started back when they first got married and they did not realize they would get hit with this financial penalty and they started fighting about finances. So she said, ''You know, in a way, the marriage penalty probably was the reason our marriage broke apart.'' It was a sad e-mail to read.

This is something we must take seriously. Strong families are key to the success in our future and our community. It is no coincidence that the marriage penalty went into the books 30 years ago and that we have seen a steady decline in families and the health of families in this country ever since.

For the average American today, the probability if they get married of that marriage succeeding and not ending in divorce is less than 50 percent. Chances are, 60 percent of the time that marriage will fall apart.

The percentage of married couples households has plummeted from 71 percent of all households to just barely over half the households, 55 percent. It is bad for single moms. You see more of them; it is bad for single dads who have this pressure. And I have nothing against single parents.

By the way, my mom raised me and my two sisters and a brother as a single mom when my dad passed away from cancer when I was just 5 years old. I have a lot of admiration for her and women like her struggling to raise their families. But we knew life would have been better if my father would have been there, and I think everybody in that circumstance knows if you can have an intact family, you can do more for your children.

Why put an extra burden in the Tax Code to families who are already struggling to raise children?

Let me share with you what some of the studies show happens when the family breaks apart. It is bad for parents. They have a shorter life expectancy; they have a greater incidence of disease, suicide and accidental mortality. The death rate among men who are non-smokers but divorced is almost the same as married men who smoke, and we recognize around here that smoking is deadly. But in fact the statistics show that for men who are divorced and do not smoke, they are at as great a risk as men who smoke in a married family.

Overall, the premature death rate is four times higher among divorced white men than that amount for their married counterparts. They are in worse physical health. They develop greater incidence of lung disease and psychiatric disorder. They are at lower economic well-being.

Many divorced adults, particularly young mothers, are thrown into poverty. Today, 50 percent of the single-mother families are poor. In stark contrast, only 8 percent of families with a mother and dad are in the category labeled poor. The average income for a single-mother family is $13,000; $13,000 for average families with a single mom raising their children. As I said, I know what it is to be there; and I know the sacrifices those moms are making for those children, because my mom did the same thing for me.

But contrast that to the average income in a married household with a mother and father. The average is $40,000 in this country. Now, it is even more problematic when you look at what is happening to our children, because children from broken families are four times more likely to use drugs; they are three times more likely to commit suicide; and they are twice as likely to drop out of school.

Children of broken families end up being more likely to engage in violent crimes. Seventy-two percent of the young people who end up murdering someone grew up without a father. Sixty percent of America's rapists grew up in homes without a father. Seventy percent of the juveniles in State reform institutions grew up with a single-parent or no-parent family. The influence of good families is critical for these young people.

Again I ask the question, why should we make it harder for those families to stay together by taxing them more when they are married? It is wrong, and we must do something to eliminate that in our Tax Code.

Statistics show that alcohol and drug abuse goes way up. The absence of a father, reports the Study on Fatherhood, from the home, affects significantly the behavior of adolescents, and results in greater use of alcohol and marijuana.

Suicide, 75 percent of the teenage suicides occur in households that have been a broken household.

Poorer school performance, at least one-third of children experiencing a parental separation demonstrate a significant decline in academic performance. Fatherless children, as I mentioned earlier, are twice as likely to drop out of school.

Welfare dependency, over 50 percent of the new welfare cases are due to births of unmarried women. Ninety percent of children on welfare are from homes with only one parent.

So we can see this is having a devastating impact upon our young people, our children. And if it just helps one family to meet the bills they need to pay, to be able to stay together through tough times, if the love that they started out with when a young man and young woman get married starts to dim because they are struggling to pay the bills and struggling to make ends meet, if we can just help one of those families make it through those tough times, to realize that a strong family will bring them numerous joys and stick together and help their children, then this bill would have been worth every penny of the $180 billion in revenue that stays in the hands of the American taxpayer.

By the way, I would share with my colleagues that the American people are with us. There may not be a lot of lobbyists here in Washington beating down our doors saying ''eliminate the marriage penalty tax,'' and there may be a lot of competition for other people for the tax dollars that we collect here, but 85 percent of the Americans polled say the marriage penalty tax is unfair, sixty-one percent think it is extremely unfair, and 80 percent of the Americans favor elimination of the marriage penalty tax.

We need to listen to those voices. They know intuitively that we have to strengthen families in this country. They know intuitively it is wrong for married couples to pay more in taxes just because they are married. They know in their hearts that we must do better and we must eliminate the marriage penalty tax.

I want to now turn to one of my colleagues who has been a strong advocate of strengthening families in the Congress, a gentleman who has been a leader in the Family Caucus, a strong supporter of our bill to eliminate the marriage penalty tax, my good friend and colleague, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. WELDON).

Mr. WELDON of Florida. I thank the gentleman, and I appreciate his yielding. I definitely want to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MCINTOSH) for the leadership he has provided on this critical issue.

We have had several Members of our Republican Conference who have led the charge, so to speak. The gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is one, and the other one that comes to my mind is yourself.

The Tax Code, as everybody knows, is very complicated and so is knowing how to repair it so that it is not a Tax Code that encourages people to live out of wedlock, how do we repair it to make sure it is not a Tax Code that discourages marriage. I first became interested in this subject actually years before I got elected to the U.S. House when I was still practicing medicine, and I had people coming in my office who I knew were living together physically as husband and wife, but they had different last names, not because the wife chose to keep her maiden name, but because they had actually not married.

Some of these individuals were senior citizens, which was another thing that amazed me. They knew when I talked to them about this issue, they knew they were setting a bad example for their grandchildren, living out of wedlock together, but always it was the same story. ''If we get married, our tax burden would go up so much, that we live together out of wedlock.''

To me, in my opinion, this is a moral issue. This is an example of how our laws in Washington encourage a bad thing. It is actually morally wrong to have a Tax Code that discourages marriage and encourages people to live out of wedlock, especially people who say they would like to get married, they want to get married, but they do not do so because of the code.

One of the biggest reasons why we have so many features in our Tax Code like this is this desire on the part of so many liberals in this city to create a Tax Code where tax breaks and tax benefits phase out if you make above $60,000, or above $50,000, or above $80,000 or above $100,000, this desire to always tax the rich. One of the consequences of that is if you get two working people who come together, they are immediately in this tax bracket where all of their tax benefits or breaks disappear and they are better off not getting married.

One of the things that has been shown repeatedly by psychologists is that one of the things that is most critical and most helpful to the proper intellectual development of a child, growing up in a family, in terms of are they going to stay off of drugs, are they going to have good academic performance, are they going to do well in school, is a healthy, stable, married family environment, that they have a mother and a father in the home, and that every social scientist and every politician who follows these statistics, they all go around saying that we need to encourage marriage and we need to do what we can to support marriage in the United States, but yet they will stand by idly and do nothing about this problem.

I want to address this proposal by the President. This proposal by the President is a day late and a dollar short, as far as I am concerned. No, it is not a day late, it is 8 years late; and it is not a dollar short, it is about $10 or $20 billion a year short.

His proposal just does not go far enough. It is going to help some people, true; but for an awful lot of people, they will continue to have the same choice put before them. It will be get married and pay higher taxes or live together out of wedlock.

The Republican GOP plan is real marriage penalty relief. The President's plan is, again, the same sort of status quo. The marriage penalty will remain for millions of Americans. Actually, the difference is about 17 million Americans.

Our proposal is easily paid for. We are looking at close to $2 trillion of surplus over the next 10 years, and this proposal is going to cost $180 billion over the next 10 years. Essentially one-tenth of the surplus would go to correcting this measure in our Tax Code.

It is a good plan. I believe the President should sign this. I commend again the gentleman from Indiana for his work in this area. I believe ultimately the President will sign this once the public begins to see and analyze the features of this bill and how it really would be good for our Nation to get rid of these problems in the Tax Code.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his good work and strong support of this bill. I appreciate it enormously, working with the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, let me now yield time to a good friend of mine, also from Indiana, we have worked in the trenches together on this and many projects, my good friend the gentleman from the 4th District of Indiana (Mr. SOUDER).

Mr. SOUDER. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Indiana. It was great to see our friend from Florida. This is such a Midwestern value; it is great to see it is a Southern value as well, along with the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MCINTOSH). But this has support from all across America because of the inequity of the Tax Code.

I want to congratulate my colleague for his leadership and persistence in pushing this and not going away when people said, no, we want to do other things, and his persistence, along with the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER). If this indeed happens and with the President at least paying lip service to part of it, this is the year when this may actually happen, and it will be a great crowning achievement as you go back to lead us in Indiana.

Let me mention a couple of things. There are different types of tax cuts. Some types of tax cuts are oriented toward economic growth, where we try to say how can we keep our interest rates down, how can we keep our inflation down, how can we keep this tremendous growth going in the economy. Capital gains, investment tax credits, targeted inheritance tax relief, those things keep our economy going, but some tax relief is necessary because they plain flat out are unfair.

1445

In the marriage penalty, one of the problems here is that it just discriminates; it is a lack of equity and it catches and punishes one group of people and benefits another group of people.

There are several letters and e-mails here to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MCINTOSH), but I wanted to read a couple of them because sometimes when we hear statements like the gentleman from Florida (Mr. WELDON) made, well, people might make decisions on their marriage based on the take liability, one goes, oh, no, come on, you right-wingers, you are just making this kind of stuff up.

But here is one from Montana to Dave that says, my husband and I both work. We are 50 and 55 years old. This is a second marriage for both of us. We delayed our marriage for a number of years because of the tax consequences and lived together. It caused a great deal of stress and lots of anguish. My son and his fiance simply have not married also for tax reasons. They would take a large tax hit if they married.

Do not say it is some hypothetical, paranoia, conservative thing. There are actually people in America, right or wrong, who are making these decisions because tax policy does have actual consequences on people's behavior because it is a lot of money. They are trying to figure out what can we do to start a home, how can we buy a house, how can we get the best education for our kids, how can we get good health care, and then the government hammers you if you get married. It can cause people at the margin to do that.

Here is another letter to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MCINTOSH): My husband and I are both 81 years old. Before we married our lawyers advised us that we would be better off financially to remain single. We listened but did not heed. The full impact of what we were told struck us after our accountant computed our income tax. With approximately the same income, my portion of the tax increased from $4,200 to $10,000. My husband's portion of the tax also increased dramatically.

We were shocked, to say the least, and have actually considered an annulment or divorce to avoid a recurrence of this situation.

This one is from Florida. I have had people call me on the phone, come up to meetings, tell me they have calculated how much they would have saved if they had each been single. They not only would have gotten tax benefits, they might have been eligible for Pell grants for college as opposed to having to fund their college. There are all sorts of government programs that we have that are really penalties for being married as opposed to being single, but the marriage penalty is the most flagrant. We have it built into our Tax Code.

Let me make one other comment here. I find one of the greatest ironies in America is right now is how we deal with the marriage penalty. The President appears to want to cap this to only let some people benefit from it. The irony with this is the primary beneficiary in the marriage penalty relief is going to be working women. Because of the way families are traditionally structured, it is that additional income that is really getting whacked, and they are making decisions of how many hours they work, how much they are in the workforce.

The President in the State of the Union address came down here, talked about comparable worth. He talked about how women were not making as much as men in society, talked about glass ceilings. The marriage penalty is a glass ceiling on the income of women in America; and if you cap that, as the President has proposed to do, rather than the type of legislation that the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MCINTOSH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) are proposing to do, what you are doing is saying it is okay for women to make a certain amount of money but after someone adds a second income to their family, or in cases of some families where the woman is the primary and the highest income and the man adds a second income, after a certain point we are going to tax them differently than if they stayed single.

This has inadvertently become one of the primary reasons we have a glass

ceiling in this country. It is one of the primary reasons why there are earning differentials. The last thing we need to do is change the marriage penalty to make it more progressive, to put a penalty on those who are actually advancing. One does not want to be in an employer situation where they have an outstanding employee and they say, well, would you like to work additional hours, we would like to promote you and that person says, but the marriage penalty is capped. If I go up in a promotion here in this firm, my husband and my income will go over a certain point and all of a sudden we will be taxed differently.

If we start capping the marriage penalty as some are proposing to do, while it might sound good the fact is that the bias is being reinforced not only against marriage in this society, but it is also discriminating in the most degree against working women who are advancing to higher income salaries.

I thought one of our primary goals was to open up opportunities for women in this country to move up in the corporate ladder, to earn higher incomes. In most cases, not all cases but in most cases, the marriage penalty is a disincentive to women often who have not had the opportunities, who have gone back to school, who have been homemakers, they come back in and all of a sudden get whacked with this additional tax. So the irony is the double standard in the same speech of capping the marriage penalty and also talking about how to open up opportunities for women and all Americans to increase their salary.

You cannot talk out of one side of your mouth one way and out of the other side of your mouth the other. So I thank the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MCINTOSH) not only for his leadership in the marriage penalty but for having an elimination of the marriage penalty that is actually responsive to the type of concerns that Americans are having and that would really promote sexual equity in this country and marriage equity in this country rather than the other types of forms of this bill that lead to other unintended consequences.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. SOUDER) for his comments.

I would say to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. SOUDER) that his point is really telling. The President wants to get political bonus points by saying let us get rid of the glass ceiling and political bonus points by saying let us have something on the marriage penalty, but when we look at it, the way he does it, by putting that cap on there he undoes everything we would want to do to help women who want to pursue their careers.

I appreciate the gentleman making that point to our colleagues and to the people listening.

Let me close today by saying it was 3 years ago, almost to the day, when Sharon Mallory took out pen to paper and sent me this letter that launched my effort in eliminating the marriage penalty tax. I have teamed up with a great colleague, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER), and another great colleague, the gentlewoman Missouri (Ms. DANNER). This has become a bipartisan effort, because everyone realizes it is the right thing to do. There was a chart that was out here earlier, I wish I still had it, that showed how that $1.8 trillion surplus could break up over the next 10 years. Half of it went to spending. There are plenty of lobbyists here in Washington who come and tell us how we can spend more money.

Another portion went for tax breaks to business and others, and farmers and others. There are plenty of lobbyists here to tell us how we can give tax breaks for businesses and other interests, but there was no place on that pie chart for families, because there are no lobbyists in Washington for families.

Families are spending their money paying their bills, helping their children to save for college, trying to make ends meet, planning for the future, trying to provide a vacation for their family. We need to do what is right even when there are no lobbyists, so that people like Sharon Mallory and Darryl Pierce do not have to write their congressman and say: Darryl and I would very much like to be married, and I must say it broke our hearts when we found out we cannot afford it because of the marriage penalty tax.

It will be a great day in this institution when we get rid of the marriage penalty tax once and for all.

I urge my colleagues to join us in the coming week as the leadership brings forth this bill so we can send a message and pass into law something that would be good for families throughout this land, the marriage penalty elimination bill.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. DEFAZIO (at the request of Mr. GEPHARDT) for February 3 through February 15 on account of official business.

Mr. VENTO (at the request of Mr. GEPHARDT) for today on account of personal reasons.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Ms. SLAUGHTER) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. FILNER, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. GREEN of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Member (at the request of Mr. LOBIONDO) to revise and extend his remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. BURTON of Indiana, for 5 minutes, February 8.

(The following Member (at his own request) to revise and extend his remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. MINGE, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Member (at his own request) to revise and extend his remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. JONES of North Carolina, for 5 minutes, today.

SENATE ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

The SPEAKER announced his signature to an enrolled bill of the Senate of the following title:

S. 1733. An act to amend the Food Stamp Act of 1977 to provide for a national standard of interoperability and portability applicable to electronic food stamp benefit transactions.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. MCINTOSH. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 54 minutes p.m.), the House adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

EXPENDITURE REPORTS CONCERNING OFFICIAL FOREIGN TRAVEL

Reports concerning the foreign currencies and U.S. dollars utilized for official foreign travel during the third and fourth quarters of 1999 by Committees of the House of Representatives, as well as a consolidated report of foreign currencies and U.S. dollars utilized for Speaker-authorized official travel during fourth quarter of 1999, pursuant to Public Law 95–384, and for miscellaneous groups in connection with official foreign travel during the calendar year 1999 are as follows: