This is Sean from Jefferson City, MO:

I think the marriage penalty is a major cause of the breakdown of the family here in the U.S. . . . [Ending it] would do a lot to cut down on the incidence of cohabitation by unmarried couples and give more children two-parent families where there is a real commitment between the parents.

I don't know if I would go as far as what he said—that this has been the major cause of the breakdown of the family in the United States. I don't think that is the case. But it is the wrong signal for us to send. We send signals all the time across the country of what we think is good and what we think is wrong.

Welfare reform: When we went through that fight—it was a very important fight—we decreased the welfare rolls in the country by 50 percent. We sent a signal that we think it is good to work. That is a good signal.

We should eliminate the marriage penalty tax. That is a statement about what we think is good. People are married and they shouldn't be taxed and penalized for that.

According to a recent Rutgers University study, the institution of marriage is already having problems in the United States and is in a state of decline. From 1960 to 1996, the annual number of marriages per thousand adult women declined by almost 43 percent. That impacts and hurts a lot of children. Not that single parents don't struggle heroically to raise children; they do many times very successfully. But that family can have a bonded relationship. Studies are showing again and again that the most important place we can put that child is in a loving relationship between two married people.

I am going to continue to come down to the floor regularly raising this issue because this body will have a chance to vote on this issue in dealing with the marriage penalty tax. I believe there are Members on both sides of the aisle of goodwill who want to see this marriage penalty tax eliminated. I don't think the penalty makes much sense to many Americans at all.

I hope as we start to engage this debate, in this body, that Members on both sides of the aisle will stand up and say: Yes, this is an important issue. We are not going to load it down with a lot of amendments. We are not going to load it down with a lot of extraneous issues. It passed the House. If it passes this body, we can get it to the President for his signature. It is an important signal to send across the country, and we are not going to block it.

There are a lot of ways in this body that you can block something—that you can put it forward and say you are for it but you are blocking it. I hope this would be one that we could say we are going to pass for the 25 million American married couples.

For those in South Dakota, 75,114 are penalized, and for those in Nevada 146,142 are penalized—I see my colleagues from South Dakota and Nevada—I hope they can say to them: We shouldn't be penalizing you.

We have the wherewithal to change this, and let's change it.

Thank you very much, Mr. President. I hope we will have a vote on a true marriage penalty tax bill before April 15 comes and goes. There will be other of my colleagues on the floor later on to address this issue as well.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXPORT ADMINISTRATION ACT OF 1999

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now proceed to the consideration of S. 1712, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1712) to provide authority to control exports, and for other purposes.

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Senator GRAMM is not here. The manager of the bill for the Democrats, Senator JOHNSON, has graciously consented so that I can say a word or two about this legislation.

I rise to speak about an issue that is of particular interest to me and our national economy. The issue I wish to discuss is export controls. As I stated previously, it is critical that the Congress support the engine of our thriving economy while still protecting the integrity of our national security.

Today in America consumer confidence is at a record high. Unemployment is at a 30-year low. New home sales set a record last year. The rate of inflation is less than 2 percent. The stock market has been surging, and corporation profits are better than analysts dreamed.

It was announced last month that we are experiencing a record 107 months of economic expansion. This is all proof that Congress and the administration has done a stellar job in steering the country in the right direction. And yet, thus far, we have been unable to pass legislation to update our export controls. The Bureau of Export Administration and the Defense Department are still conducting business under cold war era regulations. The economic and political world has changed dramatically. That is why I am so pleased that this bill has come to the floor today.

Last year, I met with Senators GRAMM, ENZI, and JOHNSON, in my office, to discuss export controls. They informed me that The majority leader pledged to them that the Export Administration Act would come to the floor before the end of 1999.

Everyone tried, but as happens a lot of times at the end of the session, it was unable to be brought to the floor. That is not because the Senators I visited with—ENZI, GRAMM, and JOHNSON—didn't try. These three Senators, for whom I have the greatest respect, have all worked hard and in good faith to bring all parties to an accommodation.

When this bill passed out of the Banking Committee, it had the full support of the committee and the business community, while still protecting our Nation's national security. I am afraid with the addition of many of the amendments in the so-called managers' package that this bill is losing support both from the business community and the national security interests. I hope we can work something out and not have to adopt the managers' amendment as it is written.

In January of last year, along with the distinguished majority leader, I, Senator DASCHLE, and a group of Senate Democrats, got together to form a high-tech working group. This group came about because we as Democrats realize the importance of high tech to the Nation's economy. Senator JOHN KERRY, through his leadership capacity, has worked very hard in this regard.

We also recognize that Congress can have a large impact on the growth, or potential growth, of this sector of our economy. Our initial goal was to educate our caucus on the high-tech issues. Because of the generation gap between those who run this industry and most Members in the Senate, this took a little time. However, we got to speed very quickly. We toured sites all over the United States, including high-tech sites in Maryland, Virginia, and Silicon Valley.

As with many issues, I often hear that Congress would best serve the public and industry by doing nothing at all. One of the areas most believe we can be of help is in the area of export controls of high-performance computers. There are currently a number of U.S. products that cannot compete with national competitors due to export control limitations, not because of national security interests but because of the slow review process here in Congress.

In June of 1999, and then in January of this year, with the urging of Senator DASCHLE, myself, and other Senators, the administration agreed to ease the level of controls which were referred to as MTOPS—million theoretical operations per second.

We, as well as those in the computer industry, were elated. There is a 6-month congressional review period for raising the level of MTOPS. The Banking Committee bill reduces the review from 180 to 60 days. By the Senate Banking Committee agreeing to the shortened review period of 60 days, the committee recognized a few important things:

No. 1, 180 days is too long for an industry whose success depends on its ability to beat its foreign competition to the marketplace;