This bill helps our families struggling to finance a quality education for themselves and their children through tax-free treatment for participants in college savings or prepaid tuition plans and recipients of employer-provided educational assistance. The bill would also expand the student loan interest deduction. This is a real relief that will help make education more affordable.

There are important provisions relating to school construction in this bill. The need for more resources and innovative ideas to address the issue of school construction and rehabilitation is reaching crisis proportions. My home state of Utah is expected to build 10-15 new schools a year. In the Jordan school district alone, 6 schools are currently under construction. Utah will spend $350 million a year in new repairs. This bill would reduce the burden on small school bond issuers in complying with cumbersome arbitrage rebate rules and will allow school districts to engage in public/private partnerships. The reduction in the cost and time of school construction projects will result in more schools being built.

We have all heard about the challenge that providing adequate health care is facing the American families. The Taxpayer Refund Act provides meaningful help for those who are struggling with the costs of insurance through tax benefits for the self-employed, employees not covered by employer plans, and consumers of long-term care insurance. There is also an additional personal exemption for caregivers.

The bill also contains provisions that would help keep the economy growth strong where there is a package of international tax relief that provides simplification and helps American companies which have operations overseas remain competitive and continue to grow.

The expiring tax credits are extended for five years and the research and experimentation tax credit is made permanent. This tax credit enhances and encourages the development of new technologies and products. This is the only way the U.S. can maintain its leadership in the high-tech world of today into the next millennium. This is very important to future economic growth. It has been said that innovation is the leading factor driving increased productivity and job creation. Innovation predominately derives from the private sector research and development which are encouraged by the tax credit.

This bill is not perfect, however, and there are some things that I would like to change. For instance, the bill should provide some relief from the estate tax by cuts in the top estate tax rate and an exemption that rises to $1.5 million per estate. This will provide tax relief for estates of all sizes. However, I strongly believe that we should go even further and repeal this tax altogether.

The "death tax" is unfair and inefficient. For every dollar that we collect, roughly 65 cents is spent complying and collecting this tax. This is the wrong way to use up our resources. I know that many colleagues on the other side of the aisle have labeled this a tax on the wealthy. They are wrong. The wealthy hire lawyers and advisers to create trusts and do estate planning to minimize the amount of tax they will pay. It is the small business owners and family farmers that hit the hardest by this tax. We must find a way to remove this crushing burden from their backs.

Another important area that is not addressed in the bill is the capital gains tax rate. This too has often been labeled as a tax cut for the rich. This is not true. Million of Americans are becoming investors. They purchase stock and mutual funds directly or they invest in stock options, employee stock ownership plans or 401(k)s. Roughly half of American households now have some sort of stock ownership, and the number grows every year.

A recent DRI study has shown that the 1997 capital gains tax rate cuts contributed to the strong economic growth we have experienced in the last couple of years. Cutting the capital gains tax rate from 28 percent to 20 percent reduced the cost of capital, increased business investment and contributed to the increase in stock prices. We need to continue along the same path and continue to reduce the capital gains rates.

It is easy to get lost in the debate over numbers and how we should spend the surplus. But we must remember who sent us the revenue that created the surplus. We are talking about families struggling to make ends meet, providing education for children, or save for their retirement. They are the family running the corner grocery store or landscaping business. They are bus drivers, day care providers, carpenters and students. They work 3 hours a day on average just to pay their taxes.

The Taxpayer Relief Act of 1999 is a balanced tax cut package that provides relief for middle class taxpayers. It gives American families a well-deserved tax break, simplifies the tax code, and provides pro-growth incentives to help keep the economy strong and growing. This $792 billion bill is the biggest tax cut since the Ronald Reagan presidency. Yet, it still represents a rebate of only one quarter of the surplus dollars that the federal government has collected. We owe the American taxpayers that much.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Wednesday, July 28, 1999, the Federal debt stood at $5,640,294,174,290.65 (Five trillion, five hundred forty-one billion, nine hundred six million, two hundred ninety-four million, one hundred seventy-five million, one hundred nineteen million) which reflects a debt increase of almost $3 trillion—$2,337,675,174,290.65 (Two trillion, eight hundred thirty-seven billion, six hundred seventeen million, four hundred fifty-nine million, one hundred ninety-four million, one hundred four billion, two hundred forty-nine million, one hundred forty-six million). One year ago, July 28, 1998, the Federal debt stood at $5,541,906,000,000 (Five trillion, five hundred forty-one billion, nine hundred six million, two hundred ninety-four million, one hundred seventy-five million, one hundred nineteen million). The fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, the President has signed the following enrolled bill:

Mr. Berry, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2465) making appropriations for military construction, family housing, and base realignment and closure for the Department of Defense for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes.

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 12:57 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Hanrahan, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2465) making appropriations for military construction, family housing, and base realignment and closure for the Department of Defense for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes.

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

At 3:56 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Berry, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bill:

Mr. Berry, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 66) to preserve the cultural resources of the Route 66 corridor and to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to provide assistance.

The enrolled bill was signed subsequently by the president pro tempore (Mr. Thurmond).

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, which were referred as indicated:

EC–4419. A communication from the Executive Director, Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to Medicare payment policies; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–4429. A communication from the Assistant Legal Adviser for Treaty Affairs, Department of State, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of the texts and background