

My hope is that they will keep it a clean bill and that they will move expeditiously and as quickly as possible to wipe out the marriage tax penalty for couples like Michele and Shad Hallihan. That is what it is all about, fairness. Let us wipe out the marriage tax penalty. Let us make the Tax Code more fair. We ask for bipartisan support.

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SENIORS SHOULD NOT BE PENALIZED FOR CONTINUING TO BE PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. FOLEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, as we conclude legislative business today, I particularly commend my colleague from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) on his fine presentation on eliminating the marriage penalty, a vote we had first and foremost in our Committee on Ways and Means, of which I am a proud member, and obviously brought to the floor with overwhelming success in a bipartisan spirit of trying to eliminate the tax burden on married couples throughout America.

Another issue we are debating and considering and, of course, has been authored by several people, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. SHAW), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SAM JOHNSON), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARCHER), but really one of the people that we need to single out today on this special bill is the Speaker of this House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT).

They say success has many parents and failure is an orphan. Well, today we can call one bill that will be coming to the Committee on Ways and Means next week and hopefully quickly to the House floor a very big success and that is thanks to the hard work, again, of the Speaker.

In 1986, Mr. HASTERT, the Speaker of the House, introduced a bill to eliminate the earnings penalty by our seniors that basically for the ages of 65 through 69, when they continue to work productively, they start losing, diminishing, their Social Security monies that come to their account. So virtually in America one is penalized, based on the Tax Code, for working past the age of 65.

Clearly, all statistical data indicate people are living longer, more fruitful lives. They are more productive and more engaged in society, but somehow through the years a discriminatory position of the Tax Code has said we are going to start deducting from their earnings for every \$3.00 over \$17,000 they earn they will have a one dollar liability, basically losing one dollar of Social Security benefit. That is a horrendous policy. That is a terrible dis-

criminary policy of the Federal Government.

Now everybody lately has been saying, I am for that bill. The President says he will quickly sign it. The minority leader says, I am for that bill; in fact, it was a Democratic proposal.

Well, let me talk about the hard work of the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT) since 1986 in bringing that proposal to the floor. Obviously, it was stymied. It was not agreed upon. It was not voted on for many, many years.

Finally, we have a chance to correct what I think is a colossal inequity in the Tax Code, and that is to say to senior citizens 65 through 70, that, yes, we encourage them to continue to work; yes, we in fact applaud them for their continuation of working in the mainstream and, secondly, we are not going to penalize them any longer for that productive activity.

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I think it says a lot about where America is going and whether we should value seniors and value their input and value their expertise and value the fact that they are willing to continue to work hard in the marketplace.

So, as I say, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. SHAW), the chairman of the Social Security Subcommittee on Ways and Means, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SAM JOHNSON), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARCHER), the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT) and others who have joined with us today in this important opportunity, the committee will, in fact, be bringing the bill to the floor, or at least to the committee, next week and then onto the floor.

So, first and foremost, we have had, at least on the House floor, elimination of the marriage penalty as a priority. Now we are facing an opportunity to do something for seniors. And we can continue to work on these initiatives.

Let us be clear. We have balanced the budget. Yes, we still have a huge debt that we must pay, \$5.7 trillion total debt, and we are working on a plan in fact to reduce that. The gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT), the Speaker; the President; virtually everybody agrees that it is time to pay down the debt. Let us do that. Let us do that while we have that surplus cash flow.

We also have a chance to shore up Social Security and Medicare, and I think that it is incumbent upon everyone in the room to reach across party lines and start developing a format in which Social Security and Medicare can be reserved.

Finally, I am certain we will join together in some form of coverage for medicines, health care. Medicare will provide some kind of pharmaceutical relief for those desperately in need of relief from the high cost of pharmaceutical and prescription drugs.

These are issues I believe the Congress can work on without a lot of rancor and bitterness. These are issues that are fundamentally and vitally important for people throughout America. They are programs that seniors depend on.

I think this Congress, now as we enter the 21st century, not only has the fundamental opportunity and responsibility, but clearly now has the resources to make some of these things come to reality: pay down the debt, modest tax cuts for those who desperately need them, shoring up Social Security and Medicare, and doing the kinds of things that will instill in us not only a national sense of pride but also act as a model for young people.

By suggesting finally that the Federal Government is going to pay its debts, maybe it sinks into those who have failed to live up to their responsibility, recognizes the true leadership that is necessary, and they in fact in their own personal lives start paying down debts that they may owe, credit cards and other things that have probably hampered their ability for economic prosperity.

If America is going to move forward, we can start embracing some of these topics today. But I again urge my colleagues to sign on to the elimination of the senior penalty, where we tax those 65 to 69 for continuing to be productive citizens in society. Undo this horrible tax, if you will, on their earning capabilities. Take free the shackles from them and allow them to be productive, prosperous, and successful Americans like everyone else.

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MISTREATMENT OF AFGHANI WOMEN IS NOT CULTURAL—IT IS CRIMINAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about an item that ought to outrage not only everybody on this floor but everybody throughout the world. The plight of Afghani women is desperate. So desperate, in fact, that at least half of the passengers on a recently hijacked Afghani airliner have now sought political asylum in England. So desperate that English authorities continue to investigate whether some of the passengers, men and women, aided their captors in an effort to escape the brutal, vicious, thug-like Taliban regime in Kabul.

Mr. Speaker, as we enter a new century marked by hope and optimism, marked by the expansion of freedom and democracy, the Taliban regime seems bent on dragging its citizens, and in particular its women, back to the dark ages. In fact, it is probably worse than the dark ages.

To be female in Afghanistan today is to be a target, a target for repression,