

social institution: marriage. The American people know that this is unfair—they know it is not right that the code penalizes marriage. Now the Senate is prepared to end this long-standing problem.

25 million American couples pay an average of approximately \$1,400 in marriage penalty annually as a result of the marriage penalty. Ending this penalty gives couples the freedom to make their own choices with their money. Couples could use the \$1,400 for: retirement, education, home, children's needs.

This bill will also provide needed tax relief to American families—39 million American married couples, 830,000 in Missouri. Couples like Bruce and Kay Morton, from Camdenton, MO, who suffer from this unfair penalty. Mr. Morton wrote me a note so simple that even a Senator could understand it: "Please vote yes for the Marriage Tax relief of 2000."

Another Missourian, Travis Harms, of Independence, Missouri, wrote to tell me that the marriage penalty hits him and his wife, Laura. Mr. Harms graciously offered me his services in ending the marriage penalty. "I would like to thank you for your support and effort towards the elimination of the unfair 'marriage tax.' If there is any way I can support or encourage others to help this dream become a reality, I would be honored to help."

I am grateful to Travis Harms and Bruce Morton for their support. And I want to repay them by making sure we end this unfair penalty on marriage.

The marriage penalty places an undue burden on American families. According to the Tax Foundation, an American family spends more of their family budget on taxes than on health care, food, clothing, and shelter combined. The tax bill should not be the biggest bill families like the Morton's and Harms' face.

And families certainly should not be taxed extra because they are married. Couples choosing marriage are making the right choice for society. It is in our interest to encourage them to make this choice.

Unfortunately, the marriage penalty discourages this choice. The marriage penalty may actually contribute to one of society's most serious and enduring problems. There are now twice as many single parent households in America than there were when this penalty was first enacted.

In its policies, the government should uphold the basic values that give strength and vitality to our culture. Marriage and family are a cornerstone of civilization, but are heavily penalized by the federal tax system.

The marriage penalty is so patently unfair no one will defend it. Those on the other side of the aisle are making a stab at addressing the marriage penalty, even though they are not willing

to provide relief to all couples who face this unfair penalty. Their bill implements a choose or lose system for some couples who are subject to the marriage penalty. Their bill phases out marriage penalty relief, and does not cover all of the couples who face this unfair penalty.

This issue, however, is not about income, it's about fairness. It is unfair to tax married couples more than single people, no matter what their income. The Finance Committee bill provides tax relief to all married couples.

In addition, the Finance Committee bill makes sure that couples do not face the risk of differential treatment. Under the minority bill, one family with a husband earning \$50,000 and a mother staying home with her children will pay more in taxes than a family with a combined income of \$50,000, with the wife and husband each earning \$25,000. This system creates a disincentive for parents to stay at home with their children. The Republican plan will treat all couples equally.

While the minority bill is flawed, I am encouraged that they are finally acknowledging that the marriage penalty is a problem. I am also encouraged that President Clinton has also acknowledged the unfair nature of the marriage penalty. But unfortunately, Treasury Secretary Larry Summers has announced that he would advise the President to veto marriage penalty relief.

I say to the President and to my colleagues on the other side: being against the marriage penalty means that you have to be willing to eliminate it. You cannot just say you oppose the penalty, and then fight to keep the penalty in law, or to keep part of the penalty in law for some people. Join us to vote for the elimination of the penalty, and let us bring this important tax relief bill to the American people together.

The marriage penalty has endured for too long and harmed too many couples. It is time to abolish the prejudice that charges higher taxes for being married. It is time to take the tax out of saying "I do."

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE

Mr. HUTCHINSON. Mr. President, I ask that the RECORD reflect the purpose of my absence during final passage of H.R. 8, the Death Tax Elimination Act. I departed Washington this morning to attend the wedding of my young-

est son, Joshua. I would add that my absence would not have changed the outcome of this vote. If I had been present, however, I would have voted "aye."

#### VICTIMS OF GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, it has been more than a year since the Columbine tragedy, but still this Republican Congress refuses to act on sensible gun legislation.

Since Columbine, thousands of Americans have been killed by gunfire. Until we act, Democrats in the Senate will read some of the names of those who lost their lives to gun violence in the past year, and we will continue to do so every day that the Senate is session.

In the name of those who died, we will continue this fight. Following are the names of some of the people who were killed by gunfire one year ago today.

July 14, 1999: Robert Clayton, San Francisco, CA; River P. Graham, 39, Oklahoma City, OK; Lonzie Harper, Detroit, MI; Angelo Rhodes, 20, Philadelphia, PA; Torris Starks, Detroit, MI; Terrance Wilkins, 28, Nashville, TN; Nathan A. Williams, 26, Oklahoma City, OK; and an unidentified male, 27, Charlotte, NC.

#### THE ARREST OF KAZAKHSTAN'S OPPOSITION LEADER

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I rise today to highlight the troubled transition from communism to democracy of the largest of the new states in Central Asia, Kazakhstan. That transition is in serious jeopardy because of the authoritarian behavior of Kazakhstan's President, highlighted by the recent capricious arrest of the leader of the political opposition.

There are high-stakes, competing forces at work in Kazakhstan: the promise of huge sums of money to be made from exploiting the country's vast natural resources, and the pull of old dictatorial ways against the nascent democratic movement.

Last month, I met with a man who could help lead Kazakhstan toward true democracy—a former Prime Minister and outspoken critic of the current regime, Akezhan Kazhegeldin.

Unfortunately, the Government of Kazakhstan is doing everything within its power to see that Mr. Kazhegeldin not get this opportunity.

Two days ago, he was detained in Rome on an INTERPOL warrant instigated by the Kazakh Government. The charges, which range from terrorism to money laundering, are regarded by our State Department as trumped up and political in nature.

This morning word came from Rome that the Italian authorities have shared our Government's assessment of the case and that they have released Mr. Kazhegeldin.