

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. It is a rare day in Washington.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Again I would like to express my appreciation to my two colleagues for sponsoring it and moving this bill forward. I think the reason we had such a great debate on the floor today is that Members on both sides of the aisle recognized that it was the right thing to do.

The end result is we have provided seniors the opportunity to continue doing what many of them want to do, which is to continue working because they love their jobs and in many cases they are in professions where they can mentor, train, and teach young people. This provides a wonderful avenue to keep those skills and those resources in the workplace. Congratulations to my colleague from Texas for spearheading this effort and getting it done. Now we will watch as we see what we can do to move it over to the other body.

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. I appreciate the support of the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. HOEKSTRA). I yield to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. There are a lot of parents of this bill. The gentleman from Texas is one of those parents. This is something that has been in the works with bills introduced for the last 15 or 16 years trying to correct an injustice.

It is interesting it has taken us this long. Then there is a unanimous vote to move ahead. When it is an injustice and it is moving ahead with fairness, then I think there is a general attitude in this Chamber when it is reasonable, when it is fair, when it is getting rid of something that is unjust, then it is very good.

I would just say there is another provision that I hope we can move ahead with in terms of fairness, in terms of encouraging individuals to work, and, that is, to increase benefits for individuals that, at age 65, decide to delay taking those Social Security benefits. And so if they wait a year, they should end up with more benefits. It is called delayed retirement credit. A provision of this bill that would make an 8 percent increase in benefits for every year was an amendment that I hoped to incorporate in this bill someplace along the line.

I talked to the White House, the President has agreed to it, the Democrats and Republicans have agreed to it. The actuaries at the Social Security Administration have suggested that it does not cost money because actually it might save money encouraging individuals that want to delay taking Social Security to have an increased benefit later on, to make it actuarially sound. Another point that I think is important in this issue is that widows eventually would have the higher benefit when they become widows. This kind of action, the kind of piecemeal

approach of sending one bill at a time to the President I think is the right policy decision, so you can measure the merits, the pros and cons of each policy. Again my congratulations and thanks to the gentleman from Texas for having this hour.

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. I appreciate those comments. Do you want to tell people what the percentage is right now, because you are not raising it very much.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Right now under the legislation as we amended it in 1983, it started at 2 percent per year increase after age 65, then it went to 4. This year it is going to 6 percent. The amendment that I have proposed would move it up to 8 percent, which is the actuarially sound amount. If you are going to live an average life span, then it is reasonable if you put off taking benefits and continue working, continuing paying the FICA tax to support Social Security, it ends up ultimately being somewhat of an advantage and so moving that 8 percent per year up until you are age 70 is a reasonable step to take.

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. But what you are saying, they will get their money back where they are not now.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Especially if you exercise and you live longer than the average, then you of course are going to get more than your money back. So everybody should exercise, all seniors should contribute to the workforce and contribute their talents, now they can do it under this legislation.

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. We can all live to be 100 and earn our Social Security benefits, right?

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. It is so interesting. I chaired the Social Security task force. The futurists for health care are suggesting that within 25 years, anybody that wants to live to be 100 years old would have that option.

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Within 35 to 40 years, anybody that wants to live to be 120 years old will have that option. This is just another signal that everybody, especially younger people, better save now, so save and invest now, because who knows what medical technology is going to do.

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Well, I thank the gentleman for joining us today. I would just like to say that I want to repeat that this legislation will take effect retroactively, from January 1 of this year, which is important to a lot of seniors. That means you can go to work right now.

Republicans agree, we have got to set in motion steps to reform Social Security overall. I think the gentleman is involved in some issues like that. I can think of no better way than by repealing the Social Security earnings limit as a start.

I always tell people, you know, I fought in two wars, Korea and Vietnam, for freedom; and I think that that entitles our seniors the freedom to earn the savings they have been putting away and paying for during their years of employment, year after year.

I think Nick probably agrees with me, America's seniors need, want, and deserve a penalty elimination. No more penalties. This is a day of freedom. I salute the gentleman and all America. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Sam, everybody salutes you. You are a great American and a great veteran.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUYKENDALL). The Chair reminds all Members that it is not in order in debate to refer to other Members by their first names.

A CRISIS IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, today was a historic day; and I join my colleagues on the other side in celebrating the passage of the Senior Citizens' Freedom to Work Act. It is a great achievement. We all should be quite proud of it. I congratulate my colleagues. It was a bipartisan achievement, and we should all celebrate it and also take the next step. My colleagues on the other side of the aisle said we should take steps to reduce the Social Security tax as soon as possible, so I hope that that is going to be somewhere in the proposed budget proposals and appropriations proposals, that we will begin to take back, roll back, the increase in the payroll taxes.

The payroll taxes represent the largest increases in taxes over the last 2 decades. So we heard our colleagues on the Republican side say they think it ought to be rolled back. We want to endorse that wholeheartedly. Let us roll back the payroll tax and lower the taxes that people pay for Social Security.

The immortal words of Thomas Jefferson kept ringing in my ears as I listened to the debate today, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In affirming the fact that we want to take care of our senior citizens, we say we want to have more life, longer life, and we are all in favor of that. Life is sacred; and all over the world I think there is no ideology, no political philosophy at this point and no religion that condones irreverence for life.