

Mr. Speaker, if we have already reached an agreement about the necessity of protecting the Social Security and Medicare surpluses and if there are obvious improvements that could be made to this bill, why is the Republican Leadership rushing this bill through the House?

The answer is obvious. When the Republican Leadership brings the President's tax cut to the House floor later this year, it wants to be able to claim that "Republicans protected Social Security and Medicare," regardless of the price tag for that tax cut and regardless of how much it drained away resources needed for other priorities.

It is one thing to claim that you have protected Social Security and Medicare, but it is quite another to actually do it. Despite the assertions that Republicans make about this bill, the President's tax plan could easily dip into the Social Security and Medicare surpluses. All it would take is for the Rules Committee to waive the points of order contained in this bill.

Indeed, it is not Democrats here in the House who need to be persuaded about setting aside Social Security and Medicare surpluses. Democrats here in the House voted in favor of a Social Security and Medicare lock box in overwhelming numbers in the last Congress and will vote in favor of one again today.

The people who need to be persuaded about setting aside Social Security and Medicare surpluses are Republicans, both in the other body and in the White House.

Mr. Speaker, even President Bush's chief economic advisor, Larry Lindsey, when asked whether the government should dip into the Social Security surplus to make room for tax cuts that he thinks might stimulate the economy, responded: "It's a question that needs to be asked," and OMB Director Mitch Daniels, when asked whether Medicare should get the same protection in terms of its surplus as Social Security, said: "I don't agree . . . We could allow the concept of a Medicare surplus which exists in Part A, but not en toto, to obscure the need for real reform to which this administration will be committed as a fairly early priority. So for that reason I would be very hesitant to treat those funds in the same way as we do Social Security where I think it's quite in order."

Furthermore, according to a Wall Street Journal article from February 5, 2001, "The Bush administration also won't wall off Medicare's current surpluses in a 'lockbox' . . . In fact, Mr. Daniels said he has told his staff not to talk about a Medicare surplus."

In addition, according to BNA's Daily Report for Executives (February 7, 2001), Senate Majority Leader TRENT LOTT has yet to make a commitment to a Medicare lock-box, suggesting "We're going to think that through' before deciding whether to back the Medicare lockbox measure . . ."

Mr. Speaker, Democrats strongly support setting aside the Social Security and Medicare surpluses, but we also understand that doing that alone is not enough. Both programs need more resources. Unfortunately, once the President's tax plan moves through Congress, it will likely consume all available budget surpluses.

We can not afford to squander the opportunity that budget surpluses provide. Demo-

crats favor a tax cut, but one that is enacted within a fiscally responsible framework. Tax cuts should leave room for priorities like debt reduction, education, transportation, a bipartisan program for defense, and strengthening Social Security and Medicare, including the addition of coverage for medicines. We can not afford to completely drain budget surpluses to finance an enormous tax cut, instead of using them to address the challenges that the nation faces.

CELEBRATING STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

HON. JIM LANGEVIN

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 14, 2001

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I wish today to congratulate several young students from my district who have achieved national recognition for performing outstanding volunteer service in their communities. Rochelle Cotton of East Greenwich and Michelle Wheelock of North Kingstown have been named as my state's top honorees, and Claire Berman of North Kingstown is a state finalist in the 2001 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program. This is an annual honor that is conferred on the most impressive student volunteers around the country.

Miss Cotton is a junior at East Greenwich High School and was recognized for founding the Rhode Island Student Alliance. This student-run non-profit organization identifies issues that affect teenagers in the community and attempts to find solutions. Miss Cotton expanded the program to the entire state, personally presenting her idea to the principals of each high school. Representatives from every school in Rhode Island now meet monthly to work on a variety of projects, such as curbing youth violence and creating an advice book for high school freshmen. Miss Cotton is pleased that students can now come together for cooperation rather than competition.

Miss Wheelock is currently in the seventh grade at Wickford Middle School. She was honored for her work with seniors at a local nursing home. Motivated by the opportunity to "brighten up the day of every resident I met," Miss Wheelock never tires of trying to improve the lives of her new friends. Throughout her service with seniors, she always strives to understand what they are going through and listen to their concerns. Miss Wheelock plans to continue volunteering at the nursing home for as long as she can, sharing her happiness with her new friends.

Miss Berman is a junior at North Kingstown High School, who was instrumental in the collection of more than 840 cans of food for the North Kingstown Food Pantry. She accomplished this by organizing a competition where students competed to construct four-foot "Empire State Buildings" out of canned goods that were then donated to the pantry.

These three students are examples for all our young people. Given the growing trend of Americans being less involved in community activity than they once were, it is important to encourage the kind of dedicated service

shown by these three young women. They are inspiring role models for us all.

Miss Cotton, Miss Wheelock and Miss Berman should be extremely proud to be chosen for this honor out of a group of such motivated volunteers. I would like to honor these young citizens for their initiative in bettering their communities. They are truly extraordinary in their level of commitment, and they deserve the admiration and respect of us all.

Mr. Speaker, I hope you and our colleagues will join me in congratulating these students, along with all of the Prudential Spirit of Community awardees throughout the country.

INTRODUCTION OF THE TEACHER TAX CREDIT ACT

HON. ROBERT C. SCOTT

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 14, 2001

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the bipartisan "Teacher Tax Credit Act" which gives a \$1,000 tax credit to eligible public school teachers to defray qualified costs for classroom expenses, professional development expenses, and interest paid on certain education loans. A similar bill, S. 225, has been introduced in the Senate by my Virginia colleague Senator JOHN WARNER.

I think that most people would agree that America's teachers did not enter the profession because they thought that the pay would be good. They teach for far more altruistic reasons: to educate our children and make a lasting difference in their lives. I'm sure that every one of us can remember at least one teacher who changed our lives for the better.

Despite the important role that teachers play in our children's lives, elementary and secondary school teachers remain underpaid, overworked, and all too often underappreciated. Many teachers spend significant amounts of their own money on expenses that improve our children's education, both directly and indirectly. Teachers often spend their own money to buy learning materials for their classrooms such as books, supplies, pens, paper, and even computer equipment. They also have professional development expenses that indirectly benefit our children by insuring that they will be taught by qualified, competent people who know the latest teaching techniques.

All of these expenses benefit students in the classroom either through better classroom materials or through better teachers, and that which benefits America's students benefits all of us. Why do our teachers have to spend their own money on things that benefit all of us? Simply put, because current school budgets are not adequate to meet the costs of educating our children. Our teachers have stepped in to fill the gap with their own money.

Current tax law provides that teachers can deduct some of these expenses. There are several impediments to using this deduction, however, that result in few teachers actually realizing any benefit: teachers must itemize their returns, classroom and professional development deductions have to exceed 2 percent of their incomes, and student loan interest is deductible only for the first 60 months