report by the Institute of Medicine on medication errors found that safe staffing and limits on mandatory overtime are essential components to preventing medication errors. An investigative report by the Chicago Tribune also found that patient safety was sacrificed when reductions in hospital staff resulted in registered nurses working long overtime hours and being more likely to make serious medical errors.

Mr. Speaker, these studies confirm the grim stories I hear from my constituents on a regular basis. In fact, last October 1,900 people participated in a 1-day strike at Rhode Island Hospital which illustrated the magnitude of this problem facing Rhode Island nurses, hospitals and patients.

I understand that hospitals need an ample supply of nurses to safely administer to the patients, and this body, this Congress, should be the ones to solve this problem. But with nurses within the Life-span Hospital network in my State working 180,000 hours of overtime, the equivalent of 22,500 extra 8-hour shifts last year, I cannot understand why Congress can now support a policy that risks the lives of thousands of Americans each and every day.

Mr. Speaker, what happened in Rhode Island is happening across America. That is why I urge my colleagues to join the gentleman from California (Mrs. CAPPS), the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS), and me in ensuring expeditious passage of both of these bills to help our hard-working nurses and to improve the kind of quality of health care that Americans expect and deserve.

ESTATE TAX RELIEF

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

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today as a strong supporter of reforming estate tax. In the past 2 1/2 years, I have voted for estate tax reform almost every time it was offered on this floor. I even voted to override President Clinton’s veto of the bill.

But since then there have been significant changes in our economy and in the tax proposals, and this body. The administration, the Bush administration, has put all of its political muscle behind a $1.6 trillion tax cut. The House has already used $958 billion of this amount by approving income tax rate cuts, and we have used an additional $399 billion to fix the marriage penalty and phase in an increase in the child tax credit. Together, these bills have chewed up more than $1.36 trillion, 84 percent of the total tax cut proposed by the President.

Mr. Speaker, I will say right now that I think the administration’s overall proposal is too large. It is too large because we do not know whether tomorrow’s surpluses will be there tomorrow, and there are other tax changes which are sure to come before this body which I think the administration’s over-proposed by the President.

What are we going to do to correct the problems associated with the alternative minimum tax? What are we going to do about making permanent the R&D tax credit? What do we do about fixed other unfair aspects of the Tax Code, like reinstating the sales tax deduction?

If we want to talk about real unfairness, let us restate sales tax deductibility to establish fairness for Washington State residents and the residents of six other States who have no income tax but pay sales taxes and cannot deduct them from their Federal return.

Today’s bill should also be about fairness. There is not enough of a small business, small farms and individuals who have accumulated sizable assets through years of hard work. I am frustrated that some in Congress are playing numbers games because this bill that we passed today does not protect enough for many folks in my district. The bulk of the estate tax bill that we passed today will not be felt for 10 years. Then what happens in 10 years? The baby boom generation retires, and we have increases in our needs for Social Security and Medicare.

It is unclear to me why the majority has not and will not look at other legislative proposals to solve the estate tax problems. I am frustrated with the “my way or the highway” approach that they have taken. That is why earlier today I voted against the rule on this bill. We should have more and better options to choose from. It should not just be a coin toss.

The Democrats put forward a bill that would take care of the estate problem today for more than 90 percent of all Americans. I do not think that bill was perfect, but I think it contained some good ideas. And I do think if we took the best parts of the Republican bill, the best parts of the Democratic bill, cleaned up some problems, we could have had something we all supported. But that did not seem to be the way we do business around here these days.

When I came to this body, we elected a Speaker who pledged bipartisanship; we elected a President recently who pledged bipartisanship, but we are not seeing it. Here was an opportunity for true bipartisanship, to get together, draw the best of both bills from both parties and come up with a real solution.

Mr. Speaker, this takes a personal note for me. A month and a half ago my father passed away. One of the last things he said to me, quite literally one of the last things, was, “Son, I’m concerned about repealing the estate tax. I worry that we risk concentrating wealth too heavily in this country.”

We should have had something we all supported. And I do think that if we took the best parts of the Democratic alternative and for final passage on the final bill, but we could have done better, Mr. Speaker. In true bipartisan spirit I think we could have come together, and we could have crafted something that protects family businesses and small farms today, not 10 years down the road; that does not add new burdensome regulatory complications to the Tax Code; that does not allow the very, very wealthiest people in this country to pass their estates on with no tax burden whatsoever. We could have done that, but we did not.

I would hope that before this bill finally becomes law, we do come together in genuine bipartisan. In so doing we would honor the wishes of both my father, of George and Peggy Thoeni and the McChords. Let us do this together, and let us do it right. The people deserve our doing so.

SPY PLANE STANDOFF

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

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, the South China Sea has always been an area of constant stress for our men and women in military uniforms, especially the cat-and-dog fights that have gone on for many of the past years. That is why an accident was bound to happen.

China believes the U.S. plane caused the collision by making an abrupt turn while two Chinese fighter pilots shadowed it. Give me a break. The EP-3 is a lumbering turtle, while the Chinese JJs respond like nimble jackrabbits. Colin Powell has stated, “A tragic accident took place. We regret that the Chinese plane did not get down safely.”

We regret the loss of the Chinese pilot, but now we need to move on. We need to bring this to a resolution.” Make no mistake, the planes were operating in international airspace. By
international law, the EP-3 is sovereign U.S. territory.

Earlier this week two U.S. diplomats were allowed to visit 24 U.S. crew members. The detained Americans looked healthy, but China has given no indication as to when they may be released. Among these are two Illinoisans, Senator Jeremy Crandall of Poplar Grove, Illinois, and Sergeant Mitchell Pray of Geneseo, Illinois.

The Chinese Government is treating this like we are still in the Cold War, and we are not. Our concern is we do not want this to turn into another period of constant tension and struggle and a return back to the Cold War era. But make no mistake, the United States is not a Nation to be trifled with, and our patience will only last so long. We need our crew back, and we need to return to normalized relations with China. The best way to do that is for the peaceful return of both our crew members and our plane.

BRANDON FUNK OF SHOW LOW, ARIZONA, BEING HELD BY PRC

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

Mr. HAYWORTH. Mr. Speaker, I come to the well of this House this afternoon to invoke the name of Brandon Funk of Show Low, Arizona, and 23 others, our men and women in uniform, being detained by the People’s Republic of China.

Mr. Speaker, our President has been clear and unequivocal. In addressing the Communist Chinese regime, he has said simply, “Let our people go now and return our plane.” I support the President, as does this House, united with one voice, not a voice of Republicans or of Democrats, but one voice as Americans.

Mr. Speaker, I would appeal to the Chinese Government to understand what is at stake. They should not underestimate the resolve of the American people, and they should not mistake the genial nature of our new Commander-in-Chief or the gentility he brings to his job as a lack of resolve.

With the People’s Republic of China placing in jeopardy its place among the community of nations, its status as an economic power, its opportunity to highlight and showcase some of the world’s great events. There is a clear choice to be made.

There are a number of options available to our Nation. Mr. Speaker, I do not come here to try to abridge or in any way describe the actions our Commander-in-Chief can take, but they are numerous, with serious repercussions for the Chinese regime in Beijing.

Mr. Speaker, again I would ask the Chinese Government not to underesti-