

Madam Speaker, it has greatly concerned me that in my home State of North Carolina, there has been a 64-percent decline in minority farmers just over the last 15 years, from 6,696 farmers in 1978 to 2,498 farmers in 1992.

There are several reasons as to why the number of minority and limited resource farmers are declining so rapidly, but the one that has been documented time and time again is the discriminatory environment present in the Department of Agriculture, which was the very agency established by the U.S. Government to accommodate and assist the special needs of all farmers and ranchers.

On February 28, 1997, the Civil Rights Action Team [CRAT] report was issued, a report entitled "Civil Rights at the United States Department of Agriculture." It was done by the Civil Rights Implementation Team at USDA under the direction of Secretary Don Glickman, which documents the decades of discrimination against minorities and women within the Department. Ninety-two recommendations for change were made in the report, 13 of which required legislative action.

I have introduced a bill which seeks to implement most of the legislative recommendations within the CRAT report. This is a beginning, not complete.

My bill achieves this goal by first, changing the structure of county committees; second, changing the status of county employees from non-Federal to Federal; third, making sure that socially disadvantaged farmers can obtain credit and other assistance to maintain their farms as other farmers are able to do; and, fourth, making sure USDA has sufficient funds to carry out its loans, technical assistance, and outreach programs. The bill is H.R. 2185 and is entitled the USDA Accountability and Equity Act of 1997. I urge all of my colleagues to join in support of this bill.

Farmers and ranchers are an invaluable resource to all of us. American producers, who now represent less than 3 percent of the population, provide more than enough food and fiber to meet the needs of our Nation and most nations overseas. Twenty-two million Americans are employed in the processing, selling, trading of our national foods and fiber. Seventy-five million Americans are recipients of USDA benefits. Crops are produced, the soil and water are cared for, and the most available, highest quality and the least expensive food supply in the world is provided through agriculture and related programs.

The Food Stamp Program, the School Breakfast and Lunch Program, meat and poultry inspections and the world's greatest quantity of agricultural exports as well as the world's largest donations of foreign food aid also result from agriculture programs.

In rural communities, agriculture programs dispense loans and grants for housing, utilities, and economic development. Forest protection and preservation is another important product of such programs.

And so, Madam Speaker, I would ask my colleagues that, as we consider the Agriculture appropriations bill, think of small farmers, their families, and the communities they serve.

As debate continues on peanuts and tobacco, bear in mind the burden small farmers have carried in recent years in budget matters.

When we vote on the tobacco amendments and peanut amendment, do not be blind to who we are helping and who we are hurting.

And, finally, I urge each of my colleagues to consider cosponsoring H.R. 2185, the USDA Accountability and Equity Act of 1997.

Small family farmers, particularly socially disadvantaged and minority farmers deserve a chance.

This bill, H.R. 2185 begins to give them that chance.

Madam Speaker, I would urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2185, the USDA an accountability act, and remember that all of our farmers, minority and disadvantaged farmers, deserve the protection of the U.S. Constitution and of this Congress.

A FRESH LOOK AT THE ANTI-TOBACCO CAMPAIGN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. MCGOVERN] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Madam Speaker, I rise to welcome my friends and constituents from the Greater Fall River Fresh Air Kids Program to Washington, DC and to the U.S. Congress. This community youth group has put the phrase, Think Globally/Act Locally, into action with their efforts to combat environmental tobacco smoke. I continue to support the thousands of youthful volunteers whom the Fresh Air Kids have recruited as they use direct action to combat the tobacco industry's advertising campaign against the young people in America.

Within 25 years, tobacco-related illnesses are expected to overtake infectious disease as the leading threat to human health worldwide. In spite of this fact, tobacco companies continue to produce cigarettes at the rate of 5.5 trillion a year. That is nearly 1,000 cigarettes for every person on the planet, including our young children.

Every day, over 3,000 kids become regular smokers, despite laws in every State that prohibit tobacco use by minors. Every year, 1 million young children start using tobacco, with the average teenage smoker starting at 13 and becoming a daily smoker by 14½.

An estimated 419,000 Americans die each year from diseases caused by smoking. That number is more than die from AIDS, alcohol, illegal drugs, fires, car crashes, suicides, and murder combined. Tobacco use is the No. 1 cause of preventable disease and death in my State of Massachusetts, taking 10,000 lives every year.

Ninety percent of all adult smokers begin smoking before the age of 18. In my own family, I watched my mother-

in-law, a lifetime smoker, recently become one of the hundreds of thousands of Americans to die annually from lung cancer. My grandfather continues to suffer daily from emphysema, the product of years of smoking.

In light of these sad but very real statistics, the Fresh Air Kids have made remarkable progress in the 2 years since their organization was founded by Maureen Glisson of Citizens for Citizens of Fall River, Joseph Borges of the Fall River Tobacco Control Program, and Jacqueline Goyette of the Swansea/Somerset Board of Health Tobacco Control Program.

With the encouragement and support of parent groups, educators, community leaders, and members of the media, some 3,000 volunteer youth have fueled the local movement against tobacco in their community.

The Fresh Air Kids have spoken to Massachusetts, and their voices have been heard loud and clear. In a community where 34 percent of residents smoke, these youngsters have pledged never to start, and to work to keep others tobacco-free.

Last October, I had the privilege of joining with the Fresh Air Kids in a march that celebrated their successful campaign to create the first smoke-free mall in southeastern Massachusetts. The kids marched to the mall with placards and petitions from their many supporters in the community. They obtained permission to set up a store front to display signs and collect signatures of support.

At the end of the victory march, I watched with pride as the mall manager stood up and declared this mall is smoke free due to the efforts of the Fresh Air Kids.

Currently the Fresh Air Kids are conducting a billboard campaign encouraging local businesses to buy back billboards which feature tobacco advertising like Joe Camel signs, replacing them with pro-health messages of the Fresh Air Kids. We hope these efforts will encourage Congress to address other such harmful advertising practices, such as tobacco product placement in movies.

The Fresh Air Kids understand and have articulated what I believe is the very foundation of an effective democracy, that informed and active citizens, willing to stand up for causes they care about, really can make a difference.

Here in the U.S. Congress we can try to pass laws that we hope will keep our children healthy, but it is up to the efforts and actions of grass-roots groups in every community across America to take up the fight in keeping our children safe and healthy.

The Fresh Air Kids are a shining example of what citizen action and grass-roots community effort can accomplish. That is one reason why they have been selected as a National Pilot Program by the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, a national antismoking group that has set the standard for keeping our kids healthy.

I thank the Fresh Air Kids, their parents, their educators, the local media, the local elected officials, and fresh air boosters everywhere for making southeastern Massachusetts a better place to live and a safer place to breathe.

I look forward to many, many years of working with them and, once again, to the Fresh Air Kids, I say welcome to Washington, and I am very proud of you.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 1 o'clock and 17 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m.

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. SNOWBARGER) at 2 o'clock p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Rev. James David Ford, D.D., offered the following prayer:

We know, O gracious God, that the pace of living is brisk, and we know too that we need to have time to meditate on Your good gifts to us and to reflect on how we can interpret these gifts in our daily lives.

May we use the gift of faith so our lives develop meaning and purpose; may we use the gift of hope so we can anticipate a new and brighter day; may we use the gift of love so that we know others with trust and affection and share with them our feelings and experiences. May Your gifts of faith and hope and love, O God, that have nourished us along the way be with us this day and every day, we pray. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Texas [Mr. LAMPSON] come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. LAMPSON led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

LET US GIVE THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY THE TAX RELIEF THEY DESERVE

(Mr. GIBBONS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1

minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, our liberal colleagues have used every trick in the book to avoid giving the American people a tax break. After failed attempts at scaring welfare recipients and working taxpayers, now they are trying the same on senior citizens. Well, the truth is the Republican Taxpayer Relief Act will greatly benefit seniors in their retirement years because we believe that those who have worked hard, played by the rules, and saved for retirement should be rewarded, not threatened and not penalized.

Opponents of the capital gains tax relief say, "You're rich if you put money into mutual funds or contributed to a company retirement plan or built a small business with your own sweat and labor." But more than half of all taxpayers claiming capital gains have incomes less than \$50,000, and many are seniors who are able live a better life by converting their lifelong investments. In fact nearly 80 percent of assets other than homes are owned by the elderly and seniors.

No more excuses, my colleagues on the left. For the first time in 16 years, let us give the people of this country a tax break they deserve.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 2003

Mr. BERRY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to remove my name from cosponsorship of H.R. 2003.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

WORKING FAMILIES NEED A BREAK

(Mr. LAMPSON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues know, in Congress we are working on giving Americans an \$85 billion tax cut. The question is who should reap the greatest benefits from these tax cuts? Should it be the wealthiest corporations and the wealthiest Americans? Well, that is what I believe my Republican colleagues suggest. Or should it be the middle-class families who are struggling to obtain their dreams and could greatly benefit from these tax cuts?

The Republican tax plan gives tax breaks to America's most profitable corporations and wealthiest individuals while leaving middle-class families with little help. According to a Treasury Department analysis, 63 percent of the Republican tax cuts will go to the top 20 percent of the wealthiest Americans.

The Democrats' tax plan provides for middle-income families by giving a break to those families making less

than \$75,000 a year. It also provides a \$500-per-child tax credit to middle- and low-income working families.

The Republican plan denies millions of these families such tax breaks. I believe that is wrong. Working families need a break.

PINOCCHI-NOMICS

(Mr. HEFLEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HEFLEY. Mr. Speaker, I feel like we are surrounded by a bunch of Pinocchios. It appears we have two different groups of Pinocchios. On the one hand we have got some liberals who are calling millions of middle-class families rich by using something called family economic income. Family economic income is a magic formula that some ingenious bureaucrat at the Treasury Department dreamed up that means your income is actually 50 percent or more higher than people think it is. On the other hand we have got some liberals who want, now listen to this one, who want to reduce the income tax burden on people whose income tax burden is already zero. Their ideas of a tax cut is to, and now I am not making this up, is to increase the tax burden on the actual taxpayers to give tax decreases to those who pay no taxes. It is hard to know which group is growing the longest noses.

I do not know how to decide which arguments are more absurd, the family economic income liberals or the tax cut to the welfare crowd. Mr. Speaker, this is Pinocchi-nomics.

NEW DEFINITION OF INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR IS GOP EXTREMISM AT ITS ABSOLUTE WORST

(Mr. PALLONE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, if there is any doubt about the Republicans' dedication to helping the rich at the expense of the average working American, one need only look at the new definition of independent contractor in the GOP's tax agenda. The definition has been drastically broadened to allow employers to reclassify longtime employees as independent contractors. By so doing, employers would no longer be obligated to provide health and pension coverage as well as a host of other labor protections to millions, and I repeat millions, of Americans who are now entitled to such benefits; and to add insult to injury, individuals reclassified as independent contractors will be hit with a tax increase. They will be forced to pick up the Medicare and Social Security taxes that employers were formerly responsible for paying.