

on the side of families when it comes to taxation policy."

With the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, married, working couples will receive the same tax treatment as singles. Couples will be allowed to choose the tax filing status that makes the most sense for them. The Congressional Budget Office reported that more than 21 million couples suffered a marriage tax penalty averaging \$1,400, and some exceeded \$20,000.

"For most Americans \$1,400 is a lot of money," said Hodel. "That is money that a young family can use to buy clothes for their children, invest in a college savings account or make repairs on a home. The bottom line is it's their money, and a government that truly values families will let families keep it."

INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM,
Arlington, VA, September 12, 1997.

Hon. DAVID MCINTOSH,
Hon. JERRY WELLER,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR GENTLEMAN: The Independent Women's Forum urges Congress to put the tax code where its rhetoric is, and eliminate marriage penalties. Serious steps to reform tax laws would mean real liberation for women, those who work and those who may have to in the future.

Marriage taxes can impose a nearly 50% marginal tax rate on second earners, most of whom are wives and mothers. This is state sponsored discrimination against women, the unintended consequences of which is to discourage women from entering the labor force. If Congress is sincere in improving the lives of American women and their families, it will eliminate tax loopholes that choke their paychecks. Real support for the family begins with tax reform.

Sincerely,

BARBARA J. LEDEEN,
Executive Director for Policy.

AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM,
Washington, DC, September 5, 1997.

Hon. JERRY WELLER,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

Subject: End the Marriage Penalty Now!

DEAR MR. WELLER: Americans for Tax Reform supports the Marriage Tax Elimination Act offered by Representatives Jerry Weller (R-IL) and David McIntosh (R-IN). We believe that married working couples deserve the same tax treatment as singles. Now is the perfect time for action because the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is anticipating an earlier than expected fiscal surplus.

For many Americans, the average marriage tax is approximately equal in value to half a year of car payments. With an extra \$1,400, a couple might be able to send a child to the school of their choice. The bottom line is that the marriage tax is very real to many working couples in this country.

In fact, many working Americans are so skeptical of real tax relief that they have expressed doubt the Taxpayer Relief Act, which became law on August 5, 1997, would provide them with any real relief of their tax burden. Giving them the opportunity to choose to end their marriage tax penalty will go a long way in restoring their confidence in the process and tax reform. The Marriage Penalty Elimination Act would allow couples to select the filing status that makes the most sense to their personal finances.

Americans for Tax Reform supports the efforts of the Sophomore Republican Class lead the march towards tax relief for working American couples. We support efforts to enact the Marriage Tax Elimination Act for

America's working couples. We would like to thank you and Davis McIntosh in particular for your efforts.

Sincerely,

GROVER G. NORQUIST.

HEALTHY PRACTICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). 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. Mr. Speaker, during the past several years, the American Health Foundation, which is based in New York City, has led the charge to reestablish National Child Health Day. Initially proclaimed by President Coolidge back in 1928, this day had unfortunately fallen from our national calendar before being taken up by this foundation. In an effort to bring Child Health Day back on to the calendar, Congressman JOHN PORTER and I recently invited Members of Congress to attend a bipartisan luncheon here in the Capitol which was hosted by the American Health Foundation. While focusing on children's health and healthy behavior is something we should do every day, Child Health Day has the potential to focus our Nation's attention on this issue like never before.

Beginning on October 6, which is National Child Health Day, families across this country are encouraged to make the healthy practices pledge. This pledge consists of five healthy habits that our children can learn at a young age and which can create the foundation for healthy adult lives.

I have been working to take the message of Child Health Day back to my home State of Massachusetts, and on October 6, Massachusetts will proudly unveil the first and only State report card on children's health modeled after the American Health Foundation's national publication. This report is being put together by a team of local volunteers to quantify our strengths and weaknesses in the area of children's health so we can see what we have done right and address those areas where we can improve.

While we have several events planned in my district that will address both children's health and early childhood development, these efforts will be wasted if people do not take the message of keeping children healthy into their homes and to their own families.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a couple of minutes today to share this pledge that has been put together with my colleagues, and I urge all of those parents who are watching here today to agree to sign this pledge. As my colleagues can see, the five items here are not impossible to achieve, and they could make a lasting difference to the lifelong health of our children.

First, have a healthy breakfast. While those of us caught up in the rat race seem to rush around more today

than ever before, there is no reason to leave for work without making sure that our kids have the nutrition they need to start their day. Let us show our kids that we care about this issue and make certain that we at least take the time to sit down with them for a healthy breakfast at least at a minimum 1 day a week.

Second, stop smoking. Children learn by example. Ninety percent of today's smokers became addicted while they were still children. If one personally cannot kick the habit, try to make it a habit not to smoke in front of your children or grandchildren.

Third, engage in physical activities. Watching television is the No. 1 after-school activity for American 6- to 17-year-olds. Childhood obesity is on the rise to the point where some 25 percent of our children are believed to be overweight. Let us make a pledge to teach our children the value of exercise. Supporting our children in sports or just getting out the door and taking a walk will teach our children the importance of healthy physical activity.

Fourth, live and play safely. In my own State of Massachusetts, some 40 percent of parents do not buckle their children in the car. Every day, buckle up. Put your children in the back seat with their seatbelts snugly fastened, secure rear-facing infant seats in the back seat, and have our children wear helmets when biking and in-line skating, and teach them the importance of sunscreen and proper sunglasses. We all know these few steps can really help save lives. We need to commit ourselves to making them a central part of enjoying the outdoors with our kids.

Finally, we need to teach kids to take care of their teeth. Prevention here is so simple. In 1987, some 27 percent of our kids had untreated tooth decay. The number of children who do not brush regularly is staggering. Again, we are the ones who need to set a good example for our kids. Let us make a point to show our kids how important good oral hygiene really is.

Mr. Speaker, although these tips require some effort and planning on our part, their long-term benefits will lead to the better health and full development of our children. Child Health Day gives us an important opportunity to lead the way toward healthier lives for our children. I urge my colleagues to join with me in reestablishing October 6 as a day for us to celebrate our national commitment to our kids.

PROBLEMS WITH FAST TRACK

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

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this afternoon to talk about fast track. Recently the President has requested fast track authority from the United States Congress to extend

the NAFTA-like trade agreements to South America, Chile, and the Caribbean Basin.

Mr. Speaker, what the fast track authority really does is extend trade agreements to countries without any chance of the U.S. Congress or the U.S. Senate to amend, alter, or change these agreements. We are very concerned about this fast track authority. We do not know what the rush is and why we have to enter into another fast track type of agreement when we find problems with past fast track legislation, namely, the NAFTA agreement.

In the past, Mr. Speaker, when we may have criticized fast track agreements, and it centered on labor or environmental concerns, and these are good reasons to oppose fast track if they do not address our environmental or labor concerns, but there is a third reason and maybe a more pressing reason to reject this new fast track authority for the President if the fast track legislation does not contain food safety and pesticide use and control of fruits, vegetables, meats, poultry coming into this country.

Food safety should be of the utmost concern of all Americans. It is not a trade issue, it is a safety issue, based upon the food we present to our family each and every day.

If we take a look at the NAFTA experience, Mr. Speaker, we find that over the past 3 years that NAFTA has been implemented, we find that the standards for food safety, pesticide use on food and products coming into the United States has actually been lowered under NAFTA. Why should our standards, our high qualities that we enjoy here in the United States to ensure proper food, nutrition, and safety on our dinner tables, be waived or lowered in the name of some fast track agreement?

If we take a look at the May 1997 General Accounting Office review of the NAFTA and the food safety issue, we find that over 9,000 trucks per day come into this country from Mexico. That is 3.3 million trucks a year. When we take a look at it, there is very little or no enforcement or inspection of these vehicles entering the United States.

For instance, the GAO study reports that strawberries alone has an 18-percent violation of our health food and safety standards. Carrots have a 12-percent violation. Head lettuce that comes into the United States from Mexico, 15 percent of them are found to be in violation of our food and health standards. Now, these are not my statistics, or it is not my report, but that of the Government Accounting Office, May 1997 study.

When we eat contaminated food, we have problems, as we have seen recently in this country, with E. coli, or hepatitis A. Hepatitis A along the Mexican border with Texas has a 2 to 5 times greater hepatitis outbreak in certain counties in Texas than the national average, and it is directly relat-

ed to food entering into the United States not properly cared for, inspected, and treated before it is being placed on our tables. Even in Michigan where I am from, Mr. Speaker, this past year we had 130 schoolchildren who were infected with hepatitis A when they consumed strawberries that were grown in Mexico.

When we talk about pesticides, which ones can and cannot be used to grow fruits and vegetables, many of those standards are waived under the current NAFTA agreement, and I am afraid that under the new fast track authority for the South American and Caribbean Basin that there will not be adequate pesticide standards placed in that agreement.

Again, this is not a trade issue, but really a safety issue. We should not lower our standards. We should not jeopardize the health and safety of our families in the name of trade, but let us not lower our standards.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Ohio [Mr. BROWN] and myself have been preparing a letter to send to the President which asks him, before he agrees to any fast track authority, we would ask him and we would urge him to do the following: Renegotiate the provisions of NAFTA which relate to border inspections and food safety, and ensure that any future requests for fast track authority include strong food safety protections. Increase the funding for border inspections, or in the alternative, limit the increasing rate of food imports to ensure that safety of our food is paramount at the time of inspection. We would also ask the President to begin an aggressive program to label all food, including fresh and frozen fruits, vegetables, and meats, and also place what country they are from.

What we find now is food coming into the United States, and they are in a big truck or container ship.

FAST TRACK DEBATE

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

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I got confirmation yesterday from the Embassy of Chile that former Presidential candidate Bob Dole is going to represent the Government of Chile against the United States in a trade dispute over salmon. The Embassy expressed the hope and expectation that former Senator Dole would advise the Chilean Government on its political strategy on the fast track debate currently underway in the United States Congress.

I would urge Senator Dole to reconsider his decision. Unfortunately, this is business as usual, and it underscores how bad trade agreements make their way through Congress. Foreign governments have tremendous resources to hire American lobbyists and Washing-

ton DC law firms with powerful connections. Often these lobbyists are prominent ex-Members of Congress, former Senators, and ex-trade officials. But Bob Dole is different. He is not just another politician. I am not saying that Senator Dole has done anything wrong. He left the Senate in June 1996, so he is not bound by the 1-year revolving door laws.

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He is free to represent Chile if he wants. But I am saying that this is too much business as usual. Senator Dole is playing on the visitor's team, and we want him back on the home team. We want him on America's team, not Chile's team. Chile has threatened to take the United States to the World Trade Organization if we act to protect our American salmon farmers and salmon fishermen.

What do the American people think when they see Bob Dole working as a lobbyist for a foreign government which is suing the U.S. Government? I believe there are many American working families, particularly in New England, especially in Maine and in the State of Washington and in the Pacific Northwest and in the State of Alaska, who will be astounded to learn that the same Bob Dole who asked for their support in a Presidential election just 10½ months ago is now trying to beat them and take their jobs in the international arena.

Clearly, this sends the wrong signal to the American people. Clearly, that is why I am asking Senator Dole to reconsider his decision.

We are going to have a tough and vigorous debate over fast track legislation in the House of Representatives. There are many of us, especially on the Democratic side, who are adamantly opposed to fast track without labor and environmental provisions and safeguards. We know we have a tough fight on our hands. We want to keep focused on the issues: jobs in America, environmental protection, food safety, worker and labor provisions, truck safety. We are going to take our case to the American people.

Senator Dole has signed on to help Chile with its political strategy for fast track in the U.S. Congress. This is a perfect example of how things like fast track get approved, even when the American people are so adamantly against them.

USDA ACCOUNTABILITY AND EQUITY ACT OF 1997

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentlewoman from North Carolina [Mrs. CLAYTON] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, the National Black Farmers Association marched yesterday in front of the White House. They marched for equality, they marched for change, they