

some would ask about Mr. Archer's NATIONAL SALES TAX.

But it was interesting, each and every person had their own analogy or story about what they went through with the IRS. I guess the most telling is when my own CPA and others have told me they have to seek professional help themselves to figure out their own taxes, so they do not make an error, on their own taxes. So a CPA has to do a CPA's taxes and have them proofread by another person in order to make certain that they comply with the law we have created, so complex, so convoluted. That should frighten the average person.

Again, I think it is extraordinary that we are at a point in time we can talk about two significant changes in the Federal program: One, a surplus in Federal revenues over expenditures, and, two, actually revisiting and looking at the complexity of the code, making it simpler and fairer for every American.

Mr. PAXON. If the gentleman would yield, I would say the gentleman has hit the nail on the head. Every week we go home and hear from constituents that say it is time to change the system, we are tired of abuses. I would just mention for those few, there may be two or three Americans that do not believe there needs to be change in the Tax Code, significant sweeping reform, they should get a transcript of "60 Minutes," the CBS show from Sunday night, that detailed I think the severe problems there are with the current tax system and the way it is enforced by the IRS.

In addition, for those that do not have a chance to get that transcript, they should tune in. C-SPAN has been running tremendous coverage, as well as the other networks, of what has been going on in the Senate hearings that Senator ROTH and the Senate Finance Committee is conducting, again underscoring the abuses of this system.

I am particularly pleased this week H.R. 2483 has picked up two important endorsements. The National Federation of Independent Business, I think the most important grassroots business organization representing 600,000 American small businesses, has endorsed our effort under H.R. 2483 to sunset the Tax Code; and Americans for Hope, Growth, and Opportunity this week, which is an important national advocacy organization, praised this legislation to sunset the Tax Code.

I really believe that we would not have a chance to talk about ending the IRS as we know it and replacing it with some other system if it was not for the work of the gentleman from Wisconsin and the gentleman from Florida, who have pushed first and foremost to get our Nation's budget balanced and are now focusing on the important efforts of eliminating that debt that burdens every child in this country, and, in so doing, ensuring the solvency of our Social Security system.

Mr. FOLEY. I want to make one point as well. When we talk about the

IRS, I want to be abundantly clear, as I know the gentleman from New York is. We are not upset with the workers that work for IRS. These are great family people who are doing a job. It is the complexity of the code they have to deal with that was passed by Members of Congress for the last 40, 50, and 60 years.

Once in a while when I go out to town hall meetings, it seems we are agitated against the IRS, and they look at the person that works at the IRS as the culprit. It is not the average worker at IRS we are talking about tonight. We are talking about the system, the unfairness of the system that does render you guilty until proven innocent, and about the complexity of a Tax Code that is impossible to understand by an average lay person.

After all, government is of the people, by the people and for the people, and if you cannot explain it in a very short sound bite or very short span of time, then it is too much for all individuals to assume.

□ 2315

Mr. NEUMANN. Is this not an exciting conversation? Where we have been tonight, we have talked about the past before the change in this Congress in 1995, before the people changed America with the 1994 elections and we took office; the past of the broken promises where we could not get to a balanced budget in this city because they could not control spending, and the past where they talked about higher taxes and which taxes should go up and how high should they go; and then we have talked about the present, 1995 to today and how different things are; how, instead of talking about broken promises and budgets that cannot be balanced because spending is out of control, we have controlled the growth of Washington spending. It has been slowed by 40 percent in the first 2 years. In fact, we will have our first balanced budget since 1969 next year, an amazing accomplishment in and of itself, but coupled with that, instead of those tax increases of 1993, we did not do it that way.

Coupled with the first balanced budget is a tax cut, a tax cut where the American people get to keep more of their own money instead of sending it out here to Washington, DC; Medicare restored and not by raising taxes on the people, but by reforming the system to provide better services in a more efficient manner to our senior citizens. The present is a balanced budget, the first time since 1969; lower taxes, the first time in 16 years; and Medicare restored for our senior citizens.

Then it gets really exciting because we talk about where we are going to next. After the budget is balanced, we start paying down that awful debt; we pay it off by the year 2026, and by doing so, we also lower taxes on people using one-third of the surpluses for tax cuts, two-thirds to pay down that debt, and

in paying back the debt we are restoring the Social Security trust fund so Social Security is safe for our senior citizens.

Forgive me if I get excited talking about this. This is exciting. It is good news coming from Washington, DC, and the most important thing of all in that future plan: We pay the entire Federal debt off so that our children and our grandchildren can inherit a debt-free nation.

The other exciting news coming out of Washington in the last couple of weeks: Reforming the Tax Code. Some people said it cannot be done. They said we could not balance the budget, too, and that is done. That is done 3 years ahead of schedule. We did it.

They said we could not balance the budget and lower taxes, but that is done, too. They said we could not restore Medicare without hurting senior citizens and without raising taxes, and that is done, too.

We can reform the Tax Code. We can take these 20,000 pages that make up the IRS code and regulations today and reform it with something that is simpler, fairer, and easier for our people to understand. We can do that. It cannot be any harder than balancing the budget 4 years ahead of schedule. We can pay down the Federal debt. It is not any more complicated or harder than what we have done in the past.

With that, I would conclude tonight by saying it is an exciting time to talk about paying off the debt so we can give our children this Nation debt-free.

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield 1 additional second, because it reminds me of watching TV at home and the ominous voice of the announcer comes on and says, have you overextended your credit? Have you spent more than you have in your account? It is time for credit counseling. You need to see a professional to get yourself out of debt.

What we are doing here tonight does exactly what we caution all Americans to do: Get out of debt, get equity, build a future for yourselves and your family. Finally, finally, the Federal Government is going to set and lead by example, rather than setting an example that I think has been devastating to the Nation, because they feel if politicians in Washington and bureaucrats can spend more than they bring in, then it must be all right for me.

#### IMPORTANT CONCERNS ABOUT THE CASSINI SPACE MISSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from New York [Mr. NADLER] is recognized for the remaining time, until midnight, as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge the Members of this House and this Congress and this country to take a close look at the facts surrounding the planned launching by NASA of the Cassini space probe to

Saturn next month. Then we must do a very simple thing: We must reconsider that launch.

I support space exploration, Mr. Speaker. I deeply believe that discovering more about our solar system, as the Cassini probe is designed to do, has the potential to yield crucial data about our universe and to enrich the lives of all of us here on Earth. But we have to ask, at what cost, at what risk?

We must look at the Cassini probe objectively and responsibly, considering all the facts available to us. We must look at the danger. We must think about that danger realistically and critically. We must, with open eyes, take the responsibility of ensuring that lives are not put needlessly at risk.

The Cassini space probe will carry 72.3 pounds of plutonium-238 as fuel to power the probe's instruments. Plutonium-238 is 280 times more radioactive than plutonium-239, the material used in atomic bombs and nuclear reactors. This plutonium will be stored in three radioactive thermoelectric generators, or RTG's.

Now, it is well-known that plutonium is one of the most toxic, most carcinogenic, most deadly substances known. So if we intend to launch this into space, it is incumbent upon us to ask, what are the risks? What happens if the rocket containing the Cassini probe with all this plutonium, all of this toxic carcinogenic material, explodes? What happens if it crashes? Will the plutonium escape into the atmosphere? Will it cause potentially millions of cancer cases and fatalities?

NASA claims this cannot happen. NASA says the plutonium pellets and the RTG's are heavily shielded and will survive any explosion, will not be dispersed into the atmosphere; the shielding will hold them. But Dr. Horst Poehler, for 22 years a scientist for NASA contractors at the Kennedy Space Center, provides a different analysis. He points out that the so-called heavy shielding consists of an iridium shell, 3/128 of an inch thick, two one-quarter-inch graphite shells, some insulating foil, and a one-sixteenth of an inch aluminum housing. As Dr. Polar says, the shielding around the plutonium is really fingernail thin, hardly what one would call heavily shielded.

Alan Kohn, who for 30 years was a NASA emergency preparedness operations officer for NASA, puts it this way: "They call the RTG's indestructible, just like the Titanic was unsinkable."

Common sense would seem to suggest that these plutonium casings are not impervious to damage. But we do not have to rely on common sense, Mr. Speaker. We can look at NASA's own reports.

In the final environmental impact statement for the Cassini mission, NASA acknowledges that there are three main contingencies in which plutonium could be released. First, it could be released in an explosion dur-

ing launch, if the capsules, RTG capsules, then impact on a hard surface.

Second, NASA says, plutonium could be released during the subsequent flight up to orbit, if an accident occurs while the probe is flying over Africa and the capsules then impact on rock surfaces below.

Third, plutonium could be released in 1999 when Cassini returns to Earth after flying to Venus for a fast and low fly-by of the Earth. In what NASA calls a slingshot maneuver, Cassini is designed to use Earth's gravity to increase its velocity so that it can reach Saturn by buzzing by, buzzing past the Earth, less than 500 miles up, at 42,000 miles per hour.

If there is a slight miscalculation, or a slight defect in the rocket burn in outer space for the midcourse correction, and Cassini comes in too low, it could burn up in the Earth's atmosphere, and its plutonium payload would be dispersed to the winds.

These are the scenarios which NASA itself cites as ways in which an accident could take place. Now, we must ask, what would be the result of such an accident? NASA has some ideas about this, too. If the plutonium comes down on natural vegetation, NASA speaks of decontamination methods. What are the decontamination methods NASA recommends? If it comes down on natural vegetation, NASA says, remove and dispose of the topsoil, relocate animals. In other words, eliminate the farms.

If it comes down on an agricultural area, its proposal is to ban future agricultural land use. Eliminate the farms. And if plutonium rains down on a populated area, on an urban area, NASA says, "Demolish some or all structures, relocate affected population permanently."

Mr. Speaker, as a representative of part of New York City, I, for one, do not consider tearing down some or all structures and relocating the population permanently to be acceptable solutions.

What if the probe breaks up in the atmosphere on its 1999 fly-by? NASA thinks that much of the plutonium fuel would disperse as "vapor or respirable particles," the form in which lethal lung cancer doses of plutonium could be breathed in by thousands or millions of people. NASA goes on, "Approximately 5 billion of the estimated 7 billion to 8 billion world population," that is billion, not million, "approximately 5 billion of the estimated 7 billion to 8 billion world population, could receive 99 percent or more of the radiation exposure." In other words, most of the world's population would be exposed to radiation in that eventuality.

NASA thinks the cancer death toll from such an accident would be only 2,300 people; only 2,300 extra people would die of cancer if an accident happens to Cassini. Independent scientists cite figures closer to 20,000, or even 200,000, and some say millions.

These are the dangers posed by the Cassini mission. These are the dangers

NASA itself admits are within the realm of possibility. So why is the mission going forward? Why are there only weeks left before Cassini is scheduled to be launched? Why are we taking this risk? Is this risk justified? How do we justify putting at risk the lives of thousands or millions of people to gather information about outer space and about Saturn? Because NASA said that although any of these accidents would be devastating, they are very unlikely. But we have to look at the odds and see how unlikely they are and see not just what we want to see, but what the facts are. We have made that mistake before. NASA has made that mistake before.

Before 1986, NASA put the odds of a catastrophic space shuttle accident at 1 in 100,000. Then the Challenger blew up. Not surprisingly, after the Challenger disaster, even with all of the improvements, all the safety improvements made to the space shuttles as a result of the investigation into the Challenger disaster, the odds of a space shuttle, of a catastrophic space shuttle accident are now stated to be not 1 in 100,000, but 1 in 76.

This time NASA says the odds of something going terribly wrong are 1 in a million. Mr. Speaker, very few events which can be affected by human error are 1 in a million. Which is more likely, that an unnamed engineer might completely by accident put a gasket in backwards, or that any of us will walk outside later tonight and immediately be struck by lightning?

There are other reasons to doubt the 1 in a million estimate. Cassini is scheduled to be launched by a Titan IV rocket. In the past, Titan IV rockets have exploded during launch about 1 time out of 20. That is 5 percent of the time; 1 time out of 20, not 1 time out of a million.

As for the possible success of the 1999 fly-by, in science one can only know the odds through empiricism, through tests and experiments and experience. There have been only two similar Earth fly-bys involving U.S. space devices. Can we be confident of any odds advanced with such limited data?

In response to these objections, NASA said a great deal about the time and money already invested in this mission. But those arguments are not a defense. They boil down to we have gone to so much trouble, so let us close our eyes and hope everything goes OK. Let us play Russian roulette with thousands of people because we have already gone to a lot of trouble. That is not enough of a justification to take the sort of risks that have made 30-year veterans of NASA stand up and object.

Opposition to the Cassini mission is not a case of Chicken Little saying, the sky is falling. In fact, I would say right now that the sky is not about to fall immediately, in all likelihood. Cassini may very well be launched in October, and everything may go fine. The odds are it will go fine, but the odds are not

big enough: Five percent of Titan IV launches, that it will explode, that when we are talking about the possibility of a disaster that could kill thousands or millions of people, 5 percent odds of a disaster are pretty high odds.

The Cassini mission is like a game of Russian roulette. You put a gun to your head and pull the trigger. The chamber might be empty, you might live, but then again, you might not, especially if you do this over and over again. And Cassini is just one in a continuing series, the biggest so far, the most plutonium, if we are going to do this again and again and again, and when we have 20 such launches and 30 and 40, eventually the chamber is going to be loaded, and there is going to be a catastrophe.

□ 2330

That is not a risk we ought to be willing to take. It does not take a rocket scientist to realize that very real scientific questions have been raised and they must be answered before we permit this and other missions like it to go forward.

That is why I have invited my fellow Members of Congress to join in signing a letter to President Clinton asking him to delay the launch of Cassini, not cancel it but delay it, until a detailed, realistic, real, not propaganda, threat assessment has been conducted.

The time to reconsider this mission is now. As elected officials, we must have the courage to do so. I only pray that the President will have the courage to say, "Stop this game of Russian roulette and let us take a hard, hard look," before we have a *Challenger* disaster that does not put 7 lives at risk, but 7,000, or 7,000,000, or 7 million.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from California [Ms. WOOLSEY].

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for having this special order and starting this conversation on the House floor about the Cassini mission.

Mr. Speaker, I am a strong supporter of space exploration and a strong supporter of NASA. NASA has made many exciting and valuable discoveries over the years, discoveries that have been important to all of us in one way or another, worldwide. The motto for NASA, which is supposed to be better, faster, cheaper, not risky, hazardous, and expensive, actually is not what we had hoped to have in this country. We want the better, faster, cheaper. We do not want the risky, hazardous, and expensive. The Cassini mission does not live up to this better, faster, cheaper motto, and NASA should delay and redesign the Cassini project.

Mr. Speaker, the Cassini spacecraft, which is scheduled to launch from Cape Canaveral next month, carries an unprecedented amount of plutonium, 72.3 pounds of plutonium. That poses a danger to all of us. An accident at launch or in space during a swing-by around the earth could send the craft and its plutonium-powered batteries crashing down upon us.

If an accident occurs during launch, it is possible that individuals may be exposed to radiation. If an accident occurs during the swing-by, the spacecraft may burn up during reentry, scattering over 70 pounds of plutonium throughout our atmosphere.

Some argue that the chances of such an accident are slim, as my colleague said, and that even if one did occur, the health impact from exposure would be small. Prominent scientists and safety experts have questioned both of these assumptions, however. The Challenger disaster proved that NASA can still suffer catastrophic failures. In fact, three of the 24 U.S. space missions and six of the 29 Russian missions using nuclear power met with accidents.

Given this track record, Mr. Speaker, it is understandable that notable scientists and even a former NASA safety expert, Alan Kohn, believe that risks in this mission are simply too high. Several scientists have also stated that the health impact from exposure to plutonium following an accident would be much higher than what NASA has claimed. Since plutonium is one of the most toxic substances we know of, these assertions deserve further scrutiny. We do not want to find out after an accident that these critics were right.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, alternatives do exist. An advanced solar-powered craft, while not available now, could be ready within a few years. Other alternatives are viable right now. NASA's discovery program has shown that the United States can launch a planetary probe without relying on vast amounts of plutonium, and they do not rely on it as part of their primary power source.

For example, Mr. Speaker, instead of sending one large plutonium-powered spacecraft to Mars, NASA launched the Mars Pathfinder using a fraction of the plutonium Cassini is planning to carry. Over the next 10 years, NASA is planning to send six additional spacecraft to study the red planet using electrical energy obtained through solar panel technology. Not only are these planetary probes safer, they are also much cheaper.

Considering that most discovery projects cost less than \$200 million, NASA could launch several planetary probes to Saturn without using large amounts of plutonium. Even the old Voyager and Pioneer programs used much less plutonium for their deep space travel. It is just bad policy for the United States to rely on such large quantities when NASA can design missions at a lower risk and cost to the public.

I would also note that in such controversial missions, public concern must play an important role. We must also note that experts have given us disasters like Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, so possibly they are making a mistake with Cassini, too.

However, NASA's predisposition to the use of plutonium as a power source

has led the agency to simply reaffirm their position, rather than consider the concerns of the public. That is why I support the establishment of a neutral review panel, to provide a voice for both the public and scientific dissenters.

Finally, we cannot ignore a tear in Cassini's heat insulation that has now delayed the launch. As a result, the window of opportunity for a successful launch is now much smaller. Quite frankly, NASA does not have the luxury of running into any new problems, because the agency is now scrambling to launch Cassini in time. Because of that, this rush could create additional safety risks.

If NASA does not succeed in launching before November 4, this delay could cost taxpayers over \$100 million, and the spacecraft will be required to travel 2 years longer than originally planned. In other words, for a lot more money, we will get much less data.

In a little more than 2 years another launch window will open for a mission to Saturn. NASA should postpone the planned Cassini launch in October and use the time wisely to redesign the mission so it carries a safer power source. Even if it takes longer than 2 years to make this project safer, Saturn and its moons will still be there, waiting for exploration. They have been there a long time, Mr. Speaker. A few more years for the safety of our Nation and our world and our planet will make very little difference in the long run.

Space exploration is vitally important, not only to the practical and theoretical sciences, but to humankind's very destiny. It is too important to squander the public's trust on a risky mission. Americans will support a NASA that instills hope for the future, but not fear of tragedy.

#### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. BONILLA (at the request of Mr. ARMEY), for today and the balance of the week, on account of family illness.

Mr. GONZALEZ (at the request of Mr. GEPHARDT), for today and the balance of the week, on account of medical reasons.

Ms. WOOLSEY (at the request of Mr. GEPHARDT), for today before 7:30 p.m., on account of airline delay.

#### SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. McNULTY) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. GREEN, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. MARTINEZ, for 5 minutes, today.