

Be it resolved that the Select Committee on Ethics should, when it releases its final report concerning Representative NEWT GINGRICH, disclose to the public all documents concerning the matter, including but not limited to the work of the special counsel.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under rule IX, a resolution offered from the floor by a Member other than the majority leader or the minority leader as a question of the privileges of the House has immediate precedence only at a time or place designated by the Chair in the legislative schedule within 2 legislative days its being properly noticed. That designation will be announced at a later time. In the meantime, the form of the resolution noticed by the gentleman from California will appear in the RECORD at this point.

The Chair is not at this point making a determination as to whether or not the resolution constitutes a question of privilege. That determination will be made at the time designated for the consideration of the resolution.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida [Mrs. THURMAN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mrs. THURMAN addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. DREIER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. DREIER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

BIPARTISAN SUPPORT ESSENTIAL FOR COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FORD. Mr. Speaker, today, January 9, is a monumental day for post-secondary education. Just a few hours ago President Clinton announced that the college loan default rate has fallen to a 7-year low which translates into lower interest rates and more loans for young people. From a high of 22.4 percent in 1990 the default rate has dropped to approximately 10½ percent, and I applaud the Clinton administration for its efforts to improve the collection of defaulted loans and to prevent loans from falling into default status.

The Department of Education has done a sensational job in counseling

students about their loan responsibilities and helping to create more flexible payment options for young people. A spokesman for the American Council on Education, an association representing colleges and universities, stated, "This administration has tightened up on weaknesses in the system, and defaults are down."

I agree, Mr. Speaker, with my colleagues who suggest we need to reform our educational system. However, I disagree with those who call for the abolition of the Department of Education. To the contrary, we need to expand the role of the Federal Government with respect to education and educational funding.

Recently, the Department of Education released Pursuing Excellence: A Study of Eighth Grade Mathematics and Science Teaching, Learning, Curriculum and Achievement in International Context. The results were not surprising. Although the United States is making progress compared to our major economic and political allies, Mr. Speaker, we must do much more. We must and can do so much for our children.

Instead of focusing entirely on punishing and sentencing young people, we should be searching for ways to challenge and propel people into the 21st century equipped with the tools to keep America competitive and make these young people viable holders of jobs in the marketplace.

As a new Member of Congress I intend to reach out to all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, particularly those in my own class. I was heartened yesterday, Mr. Speaker, by an encounter that I had with my new friend, the gentlewoman from Texas [Ms. GRANGER]. Strong bipartisan support is essential for any dynamic and comprehensive educational reform package to gain the support of the American people.

The investment in America that will generate the largest yield is an investment in America's potential. That is the education of our youth. As I stated earlier, this investment effort must be driven by bipartisanship and common sense rather than partisan ideology which lacks both a vision and a mandate.

I was pleased to see the Speaker both contrite and repentant in his view of the work facing the 105th Congress. The circumstances surrounding his election and the will of the American people necessitate our building together for the best interests, working together for the best interests of the future of America.

TAKING AIM AT OUR NATION'S PROBLEMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. RIGGS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I just want to take this opportunity to rise and

follow up on our wonderful celebration on Tuesday of this week when the new Congress, the 105th Congress in our country's history, was sworn in and to remind my colleagues that amidst our welcome celebration it is good to harken back to the words of Winston Churchill, who said in 1942, "The problems of victory are more agreeable than those of defeat, but they are no less difficult."

With that in mind, I am anxious to work with my like minded colleagues on both sides of the political aisle to serve our constituents, who elected us to solve the many problems facing our country today, and make no doubt about it, those problems are real and they are severe.

Bill Bennett, a man that I very much respect, former Education Secretary and Drug Czar, was quoted the other day as saying the following: "America is the most powerful, affluent and envied nation in the world, but America also leads the industrialized world in rates of murder, violent crime, juvenile crime, imprisonment, abortion, divorce and single-parent families, the production and consumption of pornography, the production and consumption of drugs, and that is just a partial list."

So, Mr. Speaker, I would submit that the lasting lesson of this election, the lasting lesson of politics in America has little to do with the big winners and losers on election day. The real moral of the story, the real moral of this election is simply this. Our faith in our politics cannot be separated as we look at the issues and as we address the problems facing the American people. Whether it be crime in the streets, skyrocketing teen drug use, problems in education, a tax system that bankrupts the family, the crisis of illegitimacy and so forth, an individual's position on these topics is greatly influenced by one's moral and religious perspective.

In fact, as the Speaker suggested in his remarks to the Congress 2 days ago, religion is the single most important factor in determining how we vote. It is more influential than gender, race, or income. Still there are some who want to take morality and religion out of politics altogether. They want our leaders to conduct their business while keeping religious and moral convictions outside of the political debate. After all they would argue you cannot legislate morality.

In truth, however, the only thing that can be legislated is morality, for every legislative act is a moral judgment. Abraham Lincoln understood this clearly when in 1860 our country faced a similar cultural crisis. His opponents and even some of his political advisers told him then not to bring morality into politics or politics into religion, but he saw through their empty arguments and recognized slavery for what it was, a moral crisis that demanded a political response. Lincoln was a true statesman. He understood the moral of the story.

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we can work together to make government more efficient, more accountable and less intrusive, that working together we can make the problems of victory our greatest opportunity.

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MILITARY WIDOWS MISLED AND MISTREATED

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LIVINGSTON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. FILNER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, the widows of our Nation's veterans are being misled and mistreated, misled and mistreated by our own Government.

Although I introduced legislation 2 years ago to terminate the confusing system that discriminates against surviving military spouses when they reach the age of 62, no action was taken on the bill, and the problem continues. I know you find it hard to believe, Mr. Speaker, that our Government condones a system that penalizes aging widows. I know I was shocked when the situation was first described to me.

Let me share with the Members a sad story that is typical of the thousands of these cases. When a resident of my congressional district retired after many years of honorable military service, he elected to have a portion of his monthly retirement pay set aside under the military survivors benefits plan, so-called SBP, so that when he died his wife would have an income she could count on. He knew the enormous sacrifices she had made in order to maintain a home for their family during his military career, often in parts of the world not nearly as lovely as my town of San Diego. He understood and appreciated that his wife had served their country as surely as he had.

He did not, however, understand that following his too early untimely death, the SBP would provide his wife with the financial cushion she needed, but only until her 62d birthday. On the day she became 62 her SBP benefit, which had been 55 percent of her husband's retired pay, was automatically, automatically reduced to 35 percent of the retirement income. She received no warning that her check would be slashed on her 62d birthday. She received no explanation.

When she was finally able to locate someone who could tell her why she was facing this crisis, she was given the following explanation: Your survivor benefits have been reduced because when you became 62, you also became eligible to receive Social Security. Puzzled, she pointed out that her Social Security payment, such as it was, was based on her own work. It had nothing to do with the survivor benefit plan her husband had paid into. Too bad, she was told. That is the law.

Well, we have to change the law. The SBP plan is very complicated. The ben-

efit for one group of survivors is reduced by the amount of the military retiree's Social Security when the widow reaches age 62, regardless of when she actually begins to draw Social Security benefits. Under the newer SBP plan which covers the widow in my congressional district, the benefit is automatically reduced at age 62 from 55 percent to 35 percent of the military retiree's retired pay. Even people with substantial incomes would have a tough time with a reduction of more than one-third of their retirement benefit.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to change this misleading and unfair law. Too often it causes enormous financial hardship for the affected survivors. We Americans do not treat our aging citizens, some of the most vulnerable members of our American family, with such disdain.

Two days ago, on the first day of the 105th Congress, I introduced H.R. 165, the Military Survivors Equity Act of 1997. This bill would fix the problem by simply eliminating the callous and absurd reduction in benefits that now burdens our military widows. Instead, they would get what they and their deceased spouses thought they would get: 55 percent of the military retiree pay. To put it simply, no offset; a simple solution to a difficult problem, an equitable solution to a mean-spirited practice.

I hope I do not have to raise this issue with my colleagues a year from now, and say again that our Government is still misleading and mistreating military survivors. Let us correct this disgraceful situation and enact H.R. 165 in 1997.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS PUT IN THE POSITION OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. MILLER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, earlier this week this Congress and the Nation watched as the Republican leadership and the Speaker of this House bargained with, negotiated with, and twisted the arms of the members of the Republican caucus to support the Speaker to be reelected as Speaker of this House for the 105th Congress. That was done because the effort was made to be sure that we would vote on the Speaker of the House of Representatives before the Ethics Committee had completed its work.

That was unconscionable, Mr. Speaker, that we would in fact do that. But now this morning we learn that the Ethics Committee is continuing in that path, because we see now that the schedule of the Ethics Committee that has been set forth by the chairperson of that committee requires that the House will vote on whatever recommended punishment the committee will make to the House, that the House will vote on that prior to the issuance

of the final report of the Ethics Committee.

What does this mean? It means that both the Members of the House of Representatives and our constituents will be denied the access to the information necessary on which to make an informed judgment, very similar to the situation that those who supported the candidacy of Speaker GINGRICH earlier this week were put in, in having to vote for him for Speaker before they knew whether or not he was ethically fit to be the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

What is becoming very clear is that the continued orchestration of the Ethics Committee by the Republican leadership to try and dampen the flow of information to the Members of Congress and to the members of the public continues. This committee should be allowed to function independently, and this committee should be allowed to function without a debt to the leadership of this House.

We have hired a special counsel to seek that independence. That special counsel should be allowed to do his work. That special counsel should be allowed to present the evidence, and that special counsel should be allowed to write the final report of this committee prior to the Congress voting, voting on any recommended punishment brought forth by the committee.

But it is also very clear that it is now the intent, it is now the intent of the Ethics Committee to keep that from happening. So once again, we are put in the position of Alice in Wonderland, where once again we will render a verdict first and later we will look at the facts and we will look at the evidence.

I think it is very, very improper that the Members of the House of Representatives be put in this position by the Ethics Committee. I believe, as the House turned down the bipartisan recommendation of the ethics investigative subcommittee and of the special counsel in not allowing them additional time to prepare their work product, it was for the first time, I believe, in the history of the Congress where we turned down a recommendation of a special counsel, a person that is supposed to bring independence to this, on their recommendation that they needed additional time to complete their work product in a proper fashion for a presentation to the committee and to the Congress.

So we now see a series of votes being forced upon the House of Representatives, the sole purpose of which is to deny access to information by the very people that will have to vote on the recommendations of the Ethics Committee. The Members of the House, on a bipartisan basis, should reject that notion. We should not go forward with a vote prior to the issuance of the final report of the special counsel.

Then the Members can go home and say to their constituents, however they decided to vote, that they in fact had a full opportunity to examine the entire