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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Let us pray using the words of Isaac Watts:

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.
Before the hills in order stood
Or earth received its frame,
From everlasting you are God,
To endless years the same.
O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Still be our guard while troubles last
And our eternal home! Amen.

THE JOURNAL

THE SPEAKER. 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. Will the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SAM JOHNSON) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas 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.

INTRODUCING THE VETERANS' TOBACCO TRUST FUND ACT

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

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, the recent State of the Union Address recognizes the Nation's obligation to our men and women in uniform, but the

President was silent about the debt we owe them as veterans. Nevertheless, he disclosed a plan in his speech which could affect them. Specifically, he announced an intention to bring suit against tobacco product manufacturers to recover costs incurred by government health care programs.

Members may not be aware that the VA health care system is spending more than \$3 billion annually caring for veterans' smoking-related illnesses. The administration is certainly aware of that fact, but it has yet to commit to providing any recoveries from this lawsuit for veterans' health care. Surely any recovery under a suit based at least in part on the veterans' medical system should be used to strengthen that system and improve veterans' care.

For that reason I am introducing the Veterans Tobacco Trust Fund Act of 1999, and I urge all my colleagues to be cosponsors. This bill would set in place a requirement that any tobacco settlement from the lawsuit also include an allocation of funds for veterans' health care. I hope the executive branch will support my bill.

REPUBLICAN BUDGET OUT OF STEP WITH AMERICA'S NEEDS

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

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, once again the Republicans are pushing a budget plan that is out of step with what the American people want. The President's budget calls for using the budget surplus to protect Social Security now that times are good. The Republican budget, on the other hand, includes yet another stale proposal to spend the surplus on tax cuts for the wealthy instead of on Social Security.

The New York Times recently noted, and I quote, "Every poll shows that

Americans would rather preserve Social Security and Medicare than enjoy a big new tax cut, as Republican leaders want. It is also questionable how much political support there will be for a tax cut that disproportionately benefits the wealthiest Americans."

The Washington Post made a similar observation of the competing budget plans. "On balance," the Post noted, "the President's budget pushes in the right direction, but," the Post added, "the broad alternative, which is to consume in the form of a tax cut that ought to be saved for Social Security and Medicare and other public purposes, is wrong."

Let us use the surplus in a manner that will benefit all Americans, not just the wealthy. Support the Democrats' plan.

KOSOVO

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

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, the President's plan calls for spending more money and raising taxes. Do Members remember when President Clinton sent U.S. troops to Bosnia? He promised, he promised they would have a well-defined mission with a clear exit strategy. Three years later and more than \$20 billion later, about 6,000 U.S. troops are still in Bosnia. Our own Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, has called it a mess.

Now the President intends to further scatter U.S. troops into Kosovo as part of another peacekeeping mission. It is absolutely imperative that the President give Congress and the Nation a clear mission and a clear exit strategy before committing our troops. Mr. Speaker, our military forces are ready and willing to defend the interests of this great Nation. We cannot undermine their oaths. We must define the

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mission, the goal, and an exit strategy before sending our troops into yet another mess.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BRADY). The Members are reminded to address the Chair and not the President.

GUN SHOWS

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

Mr. BLAGOJEVICH. Mr. Speaker, there is no evidence that Timothy McVeigh and cult leader David Koresh ever actually met. But if they had, it is a good bet it might have been at a gun show.

McVeigh financed some of his terrorist activities by selling at gun shows firearms he stole from an Arkansas gun collector. It was at gun shows that Koresh purchased many of the weapons he later stockpiled at his Branch Davidian compound.

The Brady bill has stopped over a quarter of a million handgun sales to criminals, but there is a gaping loophole. Background checks are not required at gun shows. Last year there were nearly 5,000 gun shows in America where anyone can buy as many firearms as they want with no questions asked. That is how a criminal in Florida with 16 felony convictions purchased firearms and killed four people in a one-day shooting spree.

Last weekend in his national radio address, President Clinton announced a report confirming that gun shows are becoming a buyer's mecca for criminals, with over 56,000 illegal firearms transfers.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for Congress to act. There should not be a place anywhere in America where criminals can buy guns with no questions asked.

CHILD ONLINE PROTECTION ACT

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

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, last year the Child Online Protection Act passed the House and Senate and was enacted into law. Without diminishing free speech, the Act set up a screening process so that children could not access obscene material on the Web. This sent a strong message that Congress is united in protecting our children from pornography over the World Wide Web.

Now, unbelievably, on February 1, a Federal judge in Pennsylvania has blocked enforcement of the Child Online Protection Act. It is appalling that our children can easily access these pornographic sites and pollute their minds with sexually explicit material.

In response to the judge's ruling, we must urge the Justice Department to appeal this decision.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of the House to join me in standing with American families to protect our children from pornography. Please contact my office if Members want to sign the letter to Attorney General Janet Reno. We owe this to our children.

JAPAN ILLEGALLY DUMPS STEEL IN AMERICA

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

Mr. TRAFICANT. Mr. Speaker, after World War II Japanese officials were given tours of our steel mills. They were allowed to take photographs. They were further given blueprints of our machinery and technology. Then America gave Japan loans to build steel mills. When Japan could not repay the loans, they were forgiven from the goodness of our hearts.

Now, if that is not enough to massage your subdural hematoma, check this out. Japan today is illegally, let me say this again, is illegally dumping steel in America, destroying our companies, destroying American jobs. Unbelievable.

Japan has steel mills, we have photographs. Japan has surplus, we have deficits. Beam me up. Free trade is one thing. Illegal trade is illegal trade, Mr. Speaker.

ELIMINATE THE MARRIAGE PENALTY AND BRING TAX EQUITY TO WORKING FAMILIES

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

Mr. TIAHRT. Mr. Speaker, I believe one would have to be totally out of touch to defend the current tax code. No sane individual, if asked to start from scratch, would come up with the current tax code in a million years. The tax code is baffling even to the experts. In short, it is indefensible.

One of the aspects of the tax code that is particularly indefensible is the marriage tax penalty. Many people do not learn about the marriage tax penalty until they get married. Then they discover all of a sudden that the government wants to make sure young couples starting out have a little bit tougher time than they had planned.

Perhaps the most surprising of all is the fact that the marriage tax penalty can be the stiffest for those who can afford it the least, the working poor, who are trying to keep home and family together. This unfairness in the tax code should have been done away with years ago, but the liberals in Congress have fought against any tax relief, even for the working poor.

Mr. Speaker, now is the time to eliminate the marriage tax penalty and bring tax equity for working families.

INTRODUCING LEGISLATION HONORING OUR NATION'S FALLEN POLICE OFFICERS

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

Mr. TIERNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation to honor our Nation's fallen police officers. My bill, Mr. Speaker, would honor police officers who have been killed in the line of duty by lowering to half staff a flag over the Capitol which will then be given to the family of the officer.

The Capitol Police Board would designate the flagpole upon which the United States flag shall be flown at half mast for one day whenever a Federal, State, local, or territorial law enforcement officer is slain in the line of duty.

Currently, the United States flag is flown at half staff to honor police officers one time a year, on Police Officers Memorial Day. This bill provides for an additional and fitting tribute to our Nation's fallen police officers and their families. The legislation was originally sponsored by our former colleague, Thomas Foglietta, currently the Ambassador to Italy, and reintroduced by former Congressman Jay Johnson in the last Congress.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that my colleague, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. JOHN LARSON) will be speaking in support of this bill and about a former member of his hometown police force in East Hartford, Connecticut, who was recently killed in the line of duty.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join together with me in honoring our Nation's fallen police officers.

IMPROVING EDUCATION IRA'S

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

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Speaker, education is critically important to the future of our Nation. I venture to say every Democrat and Republican who is in Congress would agree with that statement.

In order to assist parents in financing their children's education, this Congress passed into law education IRAs. In a nutshell, they allow parents to set aside some of their hard-earned money for their kids' education and get some tax relief for doing so.

But a constituent of mine, John Michael, who happens to be a tax accountant, says there is a glitch in the law that needs to be fixed. I agree with him. With most IRAs, the taxpayer has until April 15 to make a contribution for the previous tax year, but under current law the education IRA's contribution must be made by December 31.