

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. CAMPBELL. Madam Speaker, I regret that I was not present for rollcall votes Nos. 16 and 16 because I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present, I would have voted "yes" on both counts.

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PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. PORTER. Madam Speaker, due to air transport delays, I was absent for the votes on H. Con. Res. 247, expressing the Sense of Congress regarding the importance of organ, tissue, bone marrow, and blood donation and supporting National Donor Day and H. Con. Res. 76, recognizing the social problem of child abuse and neglect and supporting efforts to enhance public awareness of it. Had I been present, I would have supported the passage of both of these concurrent resolutions.

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PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Ms. KILPATRICK. Madam Speaker, due to official business in the 15th Congressional District of Michigan, I was unable to record my votes for rollcall Nos. 16 and 17 considered today. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye" on rollcall 16, H. Con. Res. 247, Expressing the Sense of Congress Regarding the Importance of Organ, Tissue, Bone Marrow, and Blood Donation and Supporting National Donor Day and "aye" on rollcall No. 17, H. Con. Res. 76, Recognizing The Social Problem of Child Abuse and Neglect and Supporting Efforts to Enhance Public Awareness of it.

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SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. NORWOOD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. NORWOOD addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extension of Remarks.)

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DEVASTATING TORNADOES HIT SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP. Madam Speaker, tonight I ask my colleagues in the House of Representatives and the people of our Nation to join me in prayer for the families of those who suffered grievous losses as a result of tornadoes last night that brought widespread devastation and extensive loss of life to rural areas of Mitchell, Grady, Colquitt and Taft counties in a part of southwest Georgia that I have the privilege of representing.

This is one of the worst natural disasters in our State's history. The num-

ber of people whose lives were lost continue to mount throughout the day; and, as yet, the total has still not been definitely determined. By now, my colleagues have probably seen images of this terrible disaster in the national news. These are rural residential neighborhoods that now look like battle zones, with home after home turned into rubble. To say the least, it is a heartbreaking sight.

I know the people of my area of Georgia can count on the support of my colleagues as we mobilize all of the available resources, public and private, to provide the emergency assistance that is going to be needed. Our Congressional office stands ready to provide any help and guidance that individuals, businesses, and governmental entities need to gain access to much needed disaster relief assistance.

I want to take this opportunity to commend all of the government leaders in the impacted counties who are responding so effectively and valiantly and the municipal leaders in those areas who are lending their assistance. I also want to commend the many private citizens who are helping to provide relief for their neighbors, as well as the private organizations that are involved in this relief effort.

I certainly commend Governor Roy Barnes and everyone at our State level, including Georgia Emergency Management Agency Director Gary McConnell and all of his people over at GEMA, who have sprung into action on so many fronts and, along with Governor Barnes, have started the process leading to a major disaster declaration.

And those of us from Georgia, Madam Speaker, are also thankful for the efforts of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and its fine Director James Lee Witt, who is working hand-in-glove with state and community leaders in responding decisively to this disaster.

Madam Speaker, this is a time for all of our communities to pull together. After severe flooding struck our area of Georgia just a few years ago, including the areas that have been struck by these terrible tornadoes, I quoted the Apostle Paul, who said, "God's strength is made perfect in weakness."

It is with this strength that we in southwest Georgia will confront this tragedy and come together in our collective faith, our hope, and our charitable spirit to bring comfort to those who have suffered and to begin the work of rebuilding our communities.

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PRESCRIPTION DRUG PRICES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to talk about a very serious issue confronting our Nation. In

the last 4 years, the price of prescription drugs in the United States has increased by 56 percent. In the last year alone, prescription drug prices in the United States have increased by 15.6 percent. That is at a time when our inflation rate is running somewhere around 2 or 2½ percent. Madam Speaker, it is time for Congress to take some action to try and stem this ever increasing price for prescription drugs. All of us here in the House and all of us in Washington know who bears the burden of those tremendous increases in prices. It is principally the senior citizens here in the United States.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk tonight about the differentials between the United States, what is happening here and what is happening in other countries. Many of us have recently read about seniors who are boarding buses in our States and going to Canada to buy their prescription drugs. It is happening in Minnesota, it is happening in Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, and all across and throughout the northeastern United States as well.

Let me try to explain how much of a differential there is in the price of prescription drugs. Let us take a relatively common, one of the more commonly prescribed drugs in the United States. It is a drug called Prilosec. Prilosec is prescribed principally for ulcers or people who have an acid condition in their stomach. A 30-day supply, if one goes and gets a prescription in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at almost any pharmacy, and it is not the pharmacist, they only get about a 3 or \$4 per-prescription fee on it, so it is not the pharmacist that is driving these prices. But a 30-day supply in Minnesota, Minneapolis, is \$99.95.

You buy that same prescription in Winnipeg, Manitoba for exactly the same drug manufactured by exactly the same company in exactly the same plant under the exact same FDA approval, you buy that drug, the Prilosec in Manitoba, and it is \$50.88. But if you go down to Mexico, you can buy exactly the same drug manufactured in exactly the same plant under the exact same FDA approval for \$17.50.

Let me read for my colleagues what George Halvorson who is the chairman of one of our larger HMOs in Minneapolis had to say, and this is a direct quote:

If we could only get half the price break that Canadians get, our plan alone could have saved our members nearly \$35 million last year.

Madam Speaker, I estimate that in Medicaid alone, the U.S. Government could save \$1.8 billion if we could get half the break that Canadians are currently getting for exactly the same drugs. This is not to mention the fact that we currently have 68 million prescriptions filled each year by the VA. Madam Speaker, we are talking about billions and billions of dollars that we could save if we would simply allow free market principles to work.

We currently have what is called the North American Free Trade Agreement. We allow goods and services to move freely across our borders. In some cases we lose. Sometimes our farmers, sometimes our hog producers, sometimes our ranchers are upset about the North American Free Trade Agreement. But it is interesting. The one thing that our own government blocks our own consumers from getting across the border is prescription drugs. In fact, when some of my constituents went up and actually used mail order to order prescription drugs from Canada, the FDA sent a letter to them. It is a very threatening letter. I would like to read just a couple of sentences from it. It says:

Dear Consumer:

This letter is to advise you that the Minneapolis District of the United States Food and Drug Administration has examined a package addressed to you containing drugs which appear to be unapproved for use in the United States.

Appear to be unapproved. These are the same drugs in the same boxes manufactured in the same plants. It is ridiculous. The problem is FDA interference. The story of Minnesota seniors is being repeated all across the country.

The solution is a bill that I have introduced, H.R. 3240, the Drug Import Fairness Act, which is a bipartisan solution. We have literally Members from what some would say the far right and the far left who have joined together on this bill to put it clear to the FDA that they should not stand between our consumers and particularly senior citizens and lower drug prices. That effort has been joined now by a group out of Utah called the Life Extension Foundation. If Members have not received it yet, they will be receiving from our office or theirs a pamphlet which talks about the problem, explains the problem and then explains the solution.

Madam Speaker, let me just close by saying this. In the age of NAFTA, our own FDA should not stand between our citizens and lower prescription drug prices. Particularly, we should not allow the FDA to stand between our senior citizens and lower drug prices. These are FDA approved drugs. We have the North American Free Trade Agreement. It is time for Congress to take action to bring American prices down to the competitive world market prices.

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HONORING CLIFF HOUSER, ACCOMPLISHED BUSINESSMAN, AND OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY LEADER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BARCIA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BARCIA. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Cliff Houser, an accomplished businessman and an outstanding community leader who has worked tirelessly, not only to create

jobs in our State but who has also given to our community and served our country with distinction. He is the embodiment of the entrepreneurial spirit and a testament to the notion that through hard work and perseverance, one can fulfill their dreams.

I have known Cliff for many years and can personally attest to his strong character, his strong commitment to his family and his dedication to civic duty. Cliff began his career in radio in 1965 in Flint, Michigan and later moved on to the television medium, WNEM-TV in Saginaw, Michigan. In 1968, he graduated from the John F. Kennedy Special Forces Center War College. He also attended the Aresty Institute of Executive Education within the Wharton School at the university of Pennsylvania.

When Cliff was asked to serve his country in the mid-1960s, he did so without hesitation and began his tour in Vietnam. As a field correspondent and as a producer for the Armed Forces Radio Network, he was often in harm's way. For his bravery, courage and service, Cliff was awarded the Bronze Star, the National Defense Service Medal, two Asian Theater Citations and the Vietnam Commendation Medal, among others.

Upon returning to the United States after the war, Cliff utilized his keen business sense and cofounded Video Productions, Inc. in 1974. Four years later, he expanded his business by founding an advertising agency, Tel-Ad, Inc. Cliff had the foresight to combine the two agencies, forming an award-winning national full service advertising agency, Cliff Houser & Associates Advertising Corporation.

For the last 5 years, the company has grown to be one of the top 50 fastest growing, privately held companies in our State. In fact, his company is thriving nationwide. As the CEO of a successful business, Cliff taps into his boundless energy and is heavily involved in civic activities and community leadership. He was the 1997 Bay County March of Dimes chairman, the Tri-county Chairman for Easter seals, a past member of the Advising Board of the Bay City Board of Education, and the Teen Ranch of Michigan.

Cliff also invests his time in the business community and is involved with the Michigan Small Business Leadership Panel, on the board of directors of the Downtown Management Authority of Bay City and is a charter member of the Flint Area Advertising Federation, among other organizations.

While much of his time is devoted to his business and civic responsibilities, Cliff is also devoted very much to his family. He could not have achieved these accomplishments without the love and support of his family, including his wife Elizabeth and his three children, Chip, Bethany, and Jordan who are the joy and pride of his life.

Cliff also makes his spiritual growth a priority and is very active in his church. His great appreciation for na-

ture and the outdoors has also fostered an avid interest in hunting and recreational boating. Madam Speaker, I can unequivocally state that our community, our State of Michigan, and our country is fortunate to have Cliff Houser as a neighbor and friend. I invite my colleagues to join with me in thanking Cliff for all his good work and congratulating him on the successes of his company, Cliff Houser & Associates Advertising Corporation.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHERWOOD). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WOLF addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY ELIMINATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HUTCHINSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUTCHINSON. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise before this body and remind everyone of what we did last week that I think was very good for America. Last week, the House passed with bipartisan support; and I think that is important, a tax bill. It was the marriage tax elimination act, which gives the average couple in America \$1,400 in tax relief that they would not have had otherwise. It will apply to 21 million families in America. In my State of Arkansas, it will apply to over 200,000 families.

It is a penalty that they pay because they are married that they would not pay otherwise. It is a penalty in the form of higher taxes. Today, Mr. Speaker, as we know, is Valentine's Day and many of us are away from our spouses, but it is a good time to remember our sweethearts. I think back on my sweetheart that I married over 26 years ago. We had struggles just like everyone else. Many of those struggles center around finances. My wife is working, I am working, and this is typical of couples. Couples struggle today and part of that struggle is simply financial.

If we can help the married couples in the United States, the married couples in Arkansas by providing some tax relief in the form of doing away with a penalty they should not pay, then I think we have done something very good for America, very good for our couples and this is certainly an appropriate day to remind America of what we did in this Congress.

Now, I say this Congress. We passed in the House, and we still of course need to have that same marriage tax penalty elimination act passed by the Senate and presented to the President for his signature, and we hope that he will sign that. To give an example as to how this works, a typical example