

Good public policy ought to say that if you care enough to set aside money on a regular basis to pay for your child's education, the tax man ought not to penalize you for it. As Senator COVERDELL himself said earlier, we are getting such leverage from this money. We will probably save, in my opinion, more on the back end by having less loans that we have to pay and subsidize by this Congress than we would by allowing the tax deduction to begin with.

I want to share some things about this idea that these tax changes are just for the rich. Of course, you never know how they define rich. You may have a man and a woman who are both working hard and are making \$75,000, \$80,000, and some intend to call them rich. Those are people doing what we hope every American is doing—working hard, making \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000 a year, and we burden them consistently with taxes. They have to pay, pay, pay. The breaks always seem to go for somebody else because people would say they are rich. I don't agree with that.

Let's look at the numbers we have on who is taking advantage of prepaid tuition plans. We have quite a track record around the country of those. It is middle-income families that are taking advantage of these plans, not the rich. In Florida, 71 percent of the participating families in the Florida prepaid college program have annual incomes of under \$50,000, and 25 percent have incomes of less than \$30,000. They are steadily putting money aside every year, every month, every week to help pay their children's education—a dream they have. Maybe they didn't get an education. My parents didn't get to go to college. They did everything they could to see that I could go to college. They didn't have a lot of the things that you have today that would help.

Mr. President, 72 percent of the tuition contracts in the Alaska Advance College Tuition Payment Plan—a similar plan—have been purchased by families with incomes of less than \$47,500; 81 percent of the contracts in Wyoming's plan have been purchased by families with annual incomes of less than \$34,000; 62 percent of the contracts in the Pennsylvania plan have been purchased by families with annual incomes of less than \$35,000; 36 percent of the participating families in the Texas Tomorrow Fund Program have annual incomes of less than \$50,000. The average monthly contribution to a family's college savings account during 1995 in Kentucky was \$43 a month. Just \$43 a month.

According to the Joint Tax Committee's score, the cost of this bill is \$174 million over 5 years. That is all it costs. But I promise you that it will increase savings. In fact, not too long ago, I saw an article in one of these financial advisory magazines that wondered whether or not they considered it sort of a wash, whether it was a good investment to put your money in a col-

lege savings plan if they are going to tax the interest on it. I can see why this would be an inducement to make absolutely clear that it is a smart investment to invest in savings accounts while your children are young.

Mr. President, I believe in education. I taught in a public school for one year. I got to do something easy after that, I went to law school. Anybody who hasn't taught doesn't know how difficult it is. My wife taught for a number of years in public schools. I have been there when she came home at night in tears over the frustrations and difficulties of teaching. Teachers care about their kids. It is tough in those classrooms day after day. It is frustrating. So often what I am hearing when I talk to teachers is that Federal regulations are making their lives more difficult than they would be otherwise. They are telling me that if you would give us freedom to use some of the money you are giving, we could do more with it. You don't know in Washington. What do we know in Washington?

We can't write a law that can appropriately provide in a sensible way precisely what is needed in schools that are different—schools in the Northwest, schools in the big cities, schools in the small towns. Each State has different systems of education. Some are desperate for new teachers. Some need more buildings. Some need more computers. The Senator from Minnesota said Minnesota didn't have textbooks. Minnesota ought to have textbooks. They have enough money to pay for textbooks. Alabama has textbooks.

Another thing we need to know and remember very clearly—I think it is so important—is we need to do everything we can in this Congress to improve learning. We know, despite the fact we are second only I believe to Israel in per capita spending on education, that our test scores are not good. We finished 19th out of 21 industrial nations in math and science test scores, and 21 out of 21 for physics test scores. Somehow something is not working in our educational programs.

I believe the answer to it—from my travels and from talking to teachers and close friends of mine who are teachers—is that we need to focus our attention on the individual schools, even down to the individual classrooms because that is where learning occurs. We need to empower the people who know our children's names. The Federal Government simply does not have the clout to tell schools how to run their systems. In case many of you may not know, the Federal Government provides only 6 percent of the cost of education in America. Historically, education has always been a State and local enterprise. We have local school boards. We have local superintendents. We have principals who participate in the civic clubs of our community, who know our parents, teachers who know our parents, and PTA associations. Education is local.

One of the best speeches I have ever heard on this floor is the one Senator BYRD from West Virginia shared about the one-room schoolhouse he went to. I didn't go to a one-room school. But it was a country school. They brought water from the spring in a bucket and we drank from a single dipper. It seems he has done rather well. There is not a more educated person in this Senate than Senator BYRD. There is little doubt about that.

I believe we need to look at what we are doing. What is this legislation about? This is not a cure-all to educational problems. This is simply a proposal to allow tax policy to encourage people to save for education. What is wrong with that? The cost of it is infinitesimally small compared to what we are spending in this Congress on education. It is minute. But it would increase substantially parental involvement in making money available to educate children according to the wishes of the parent. It is a good idea, I believe, and a healthy idea.

I wish to say again how much I appreciate Senator COVERDELL's leadership with this effort. Senator ROTH, who chairs the Finance Committee, is committed to improving education, Senator BOB GRAHAM from Florida, who has been a steadfast supporter of making prepaid tuition plans tax-free, and my good friend Congressman JOE SCARBOROUGH of Florida who has sponsored the House companion to the CLASS Act. I think this is a solid first step toward encouraging people and affirming people to care enough to save for the education of their children. Who can be against that?

I thank the Chair. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I thank the Chair.

SENATOR ROCKEFELLER'S FIRST GRANDCHILD

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, it is my pleasure to congratulate my esteemed colleague, Senator ROCKEFELLER, and his wife, Sharon, on the occasion of the birth of their first grandchild. Laura Chandler Rockefeller was born on Wednesday evening, February 16.

February, the second month of our calendar year, is from the Latin, februarus. It is a word of Sabine origin, signifying purification. The Roman festival of purification was held during this month. Nature, in the midst of Winter, with its cold, yet cleansing air, is preparing for the glorious blooms of Spring. And, in this or any season, what can more exemplify the innocence and purity of life than a newborn baby?

Laura's proud parents are Senator and Mrs. Rockefeller's eldest son, John, and his lovely wife, Emily. Laura is in good hands. She is blessed with parents, and grandparents, who love her, and who love learning. John is

completing his doctoral studies in English Literature at Johns Hopkins University, and Emily is a teacher. The first, the most profound, teacher we have is our mother. When we first enter this world, in a blaze of light and confusion, in such frightening contrast to our earlier serenity, it is mother who comforts us. It is mother who soothes our cries, who cradles us safely in her arms, and rocks us to sleep. This is the first, most precious gift of a caring mother.

I have no doubt that John and Emily will teach Laura the joy, the lifelong comfort, of the great books. The great, old man who raised me, my uncle, was truly the most remarkable man I have ever been privileged to know. He was just an old coal miner. He was not educated in this world's halls and universities. He was a wise man and a hard-working coal miner who played his part in life with a stoic and dignified determination to do his best for his small family, for his country, and for his God. He encouraged me to read, to learn, to develop my mind to the best of my own abilities. As another great man wrote, "The reading of all good books is like conversations with the finest men of past centuries."

Carl Sandburg once said that "a baby is God's opinion that life should go on." One of the greatest joys of our existence is to simply hold a newborn baby, especially if that baby is our own daughter, or son, or grandchild, or great grandchild—just to hold a newborn baby that possesses all of the freshness and the newness and the promise of life. We gaze in awe at this valiant little creature, so helpless, and yet so strong, as its tiny, perfect fingers grasp our own little finger with eager curiosity and awareness and pull that finger about.

No flower-bells that expand and shrink
Gleam half so heavenly sweet
As shine on life's untrodden brink
A baby's feet.—Algernon Swinburne.

In my experience, parenthood is a challenging balance of love and responsibility. It is a tapestry of the finest, and most delicate, weaving. We love and guide our children, and we try to always honor this awesome commitment. And we see a pageant of hellos and goodbyes. Children grow up. They go away to school. They go to work, marry, and have children of their own. And then, there are greetings to new and wonderful additions into our midst. For a grandparent, this tapestry, in the glow of a family's history, becomes more elaborate, more richly colored, and more easily observed. It has been one of the greatest delights of my own life, and in Erma's life, to witness this amazing procession of life following after life, seeing a new plateau rise, new plateau of immortality, a new taste. We wish Senator ROCKEFELLER and Sharon the same happiness that has been our experience.

Laura is the granddaughter of one Senator, and the great-granddaughter of another, our greatly admired former

colleague, Senator Charles Percy. In these fast paced times, more than ever, grandparents are an essential refuge of reflection and continuity between the generations. They are the living history of our shared past. In their reminiscences of earlier days, in their principles forged over a lifetime of experience and hard work, they offer a unique, valuable perspective of a complex and intricate world. I recall with considerable awe the birth of my great granddaughter, Carolyn Byrd Fatemi, born on March 4 of last year. March 4 in the old days was when the new Congress came into session, and a new President was sworn into office March 4. Now that day is the birthday of Erma and my great granddaughter, Carolyn Byrd Fatemi. It is a joyous, and humbling, realization to truly see oneself as part of that intricate tapestry of successive generations.

A new baby, so fragile, so tiny, so soft, so sweet, so delicate, and yet so determined to join this wonderful, maddening world, stirs our hearts and reminds us once more of our enduring link to the eternal. As William Wordsworth wrote,

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

Erma and I also congratulate Senator and Mrs. Rockefeller on the engagement of their daughter, Valerie, to Mr. James Douglas Carnegie. Perhaps the greatest transition in a person's life is when he makes that great leap from "I" to "We." It is the beginning of a journey with a beloved partner, who will share life's joys, and ease its inevitable burdens. My own treasured wife, Erma, and I have been on this wondrous journey for sixty-two years, and it will soon be 63, the Lord willing. To Valerie and James, I would wish the benediction of Milton, "Mutual love, the crown of all our bliss."

Senator ROCKEFELLER has worked tirelessly for the people of West Virginia for over thirty years. It has been my great privilege to work alongside him in this Chamber for the past fifteen years. He has been a tenacious champion of developing economic opportunities for West Virginia's workers, and a compassionate, determined voice for children, for senior citizens, for our nation's veterans, and for our retired coal miners. I could not wish for a more capable, diligent and congenial colleague. I offer Senator ROCKEFELLER my best wishes on these happy occasions for his family, and also my sincere gratitude to him for his intelligence, his strength of character, and his friendship.

Congratulations again, 100 times, on the birth of this beautiful little granddaughter. How proud he has to be.

I yield the floor.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I say to Senator BYRD, that was a most

enjoyable presentation. I am glad I was here to have an opportunity to hear it.

Mr. BYRD. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SESSIONS). The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. COVERDELL. Although there is no unanimous consent, we have been moving back and forth on both sides. Under that scenario, Senator GRAMS is here and will make a presentation; Senator KERRY is the next speaker.

Mr. KERRY. If I may ask, Mr. President, how long does the Senator from Minnesota plan to speak?

Mr. GRAMS. Four or five minutes.

Mr. KERRY. I have no objection.

AFFORDABLE EDUCATION ACT OF 1999—Continued

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I come to the floor today in support of S. 1134. I would like to make a couple of brief remarks as we consider this very important piece of legislation, the Affordable Education Act. This is a bill that would expand the right for parents to save money for their children's education without incurring a tax liability. Very simply, allowing parents to put some money aside to help their children's education, and do it without incurring tax liability, is a win-win situation.

The proposed new education savings account would allow families to contribute up to \$2,000 per year in a savings account for a variety of public or private education-related expenses. Current law allows parents to save up to \$500 per year for their children's college education without penalty. However, the expanded education savings accounts would allow parents to save more tax-free, and the money could also be used for children's kindergarten through 12th grade education expenses as well as college. These education savings accounts help working families, and deserve the support of this body.

I would like to provide a Minnesota perspective on this debate, because we can learn from what has happened in my home state with a similar education initiative. S. 1134 is similar to a tax break for working families instituted in Minnesota by former Governor Arne Carlson.

Governor Carlson and grassroots organizations in Minnesota fought for and won an education tax credit, enacted in 1997, which, like Mr. COVERDELL's bill, can be used by parents to offset the cost of certain expenses made in the education of K-12 students in public, private or home schools. Thanks to Governor Carlson's initiative, low and moderate income families in Minnesota can receive up to a \$1,000 per child tax credit for qualifying expenses such as tutoring, after-school or summer academic programs, music lessons, textbooks, and instructional materials—to allow the children these educational opportunities. Families with higher incomes are not eligible for the tax credit, but can still claim a tax deduction for similar education expenses.