APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER TO THE JAPAN-UNITED STATES FRIENDSHIP COMMISSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, and pursuant to section 4(a) of Public Law 94–118 (22 U.S.C. 2903), the Chair announces the Speaker's appointment of the following Member of the House to the Japan-United States Friendship Commission:

Mr. MCDERMOTT of Washington.

There was no objection.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, 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 gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MORAN of Kansas addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

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

BRING FINANCIAL SECURITY AND STABILITY TO TAXPAYERS

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

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be here today to try and urge my colleagues here in this Chamber and the one across the hall on the urgency of the tax package laid before us, passed by this House, supported obviously by the President who is in New Jersey today trying to urge the Senators from that particular State to be supportive.

Obviously as you watch Wall Street and look at the Dow Jones Industrial Average and you look at the Nasdaq and all of the economic indicators, and also the job losses occurring throughout the country, it becomes more clear and apparent of the urgency of the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Act passed by our body.

We have been certainly applauded and ridiculed by some Members for the speed we brought that bill to the Committee on Ways and Means and then ushered it to its passage on the floor. I will add that we lost not one Republican in the Tax Relief Act, and in fact gained 10 Democrats and one Independent.

Now it is obviously a major, important issue for us to have the Senators consider the important ramifications of not adopting this very important tax relief effort of the President. First and foremost, giving everyone a raise is important because it allows taxpayers to keep more money in their pockets, support their families better, and reduce the burden placed on them by government.

Should Americans spend 40 percent of their income in Federal, State and local taxes? That is a basic question. That is a fairness question and needs to be answered by all parties. I think it is unfair that 40 percent of American's income is paid in Federal, State and local taxes.

Should families pay more in taxes than for food, clothing, and shelter combined? That makes no sense whatsoever. Wasteful Washington spending is a dangerous road to travel in a weaker economy. We are concerned. We hear the notion of triggers that have been advocated by some, and we suggest if you use a trigger on anything, use it on spending as well, to make sure that budget surpluses do not continue and we do not spend our way back into the days of a $5.7 trillion accumulated debt which we witnessed when we came to Congress in 1994 and quickly reversed.

We should let the American people spend their own money to meet their own needs. There are too many people in this Chamber and too many people in this Capitol who believe that the money sent to us is Washington's money not the people's money. People every day go to work and work very hard to make a living for themselves and their families only to see so much money taken out in the form of taxation: Income tax, estate tax, excise taxes, property taxes, you name the litany of taxes, whether it is on your cable bill, TV bill or other charges such as gasoline taxes.

What will happen if we pass our tax relief bill. We believe more jobs, more take-home pay, a stronger economy. It will save the average family of four earning $55,000 a year, certainly not rich, approximately $1,930. To some that may be small, but to the family earning $55,000, that is a watershed of new moneys to help save for college or pay for prescription drugs.

At least 60 million women income-tax payers will save money with our plan. More than 60 million African American income-tax payers will save money with our plan. More than 50 million Hispanic income-tax payers will save money on our plan. This means more money for college, a second car, or even a much-needed vacation.

So let us not have the constant politics-over-people argument that seems to resonate in our capital city. Let us put people before politics and pass a bill that will help us bring financial security and stability to our taxpayers. Let us return their hard-earned money to them so they can spend it in their community, on their families and on their priorities. Let us not make our priorities forced upon them. We can balance Social Security and secure it for the future. We can save Medicare. We can do so many things, including a prescription drug policy, but we also have to recognize that every priority a Member of Congress assumes is so does not need to be that of every American.

Mr. Speaker, let us balance the objective and rule with fairness and provide relief, fiscal strength and security, and move this bill forward so that the President of the United States can have a chance to pass this very important legislation.

□ 1230

COMBATING AIDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, recently drug companies announced that they would sell anti-AIDS drugs in southern Africa at a considerable discount. This would still entail hundreds of dollars per person. The recent experience of Bristol-Myers Squibb gives me caution. A $100 million, 5-year initiative that was meant to donate money for AIDS drugs in Africa has boiled down to almost nothing. The reasons are not entirely clear. Although this was to be a charitable gift, the money has come down to $1.3 million per year to five participating countries.

I recall that when Prime Minister Mbeki of South Africa was here for a visit last year, we all wondered why Mbeki was embroiled in a torturous notion about the cause of AIDS. I wish he had been more forthright about what his real problem was, and when he met with the Congressional Black Caucus I believe I was able to extract from him what his real problem was. South Africa offers free medical care, and on cross-examination it became clear that if South Africa were to even use the rather inexpensive drugs to combat mother-to-infant transmission it would use up its entire medical budget.

We must not forget that with the great importance we attach to drugs and especially the agreement of some of these companies to offer drugs at discount rates in southern Africa, that in developing countries nothing can replace prevention. In this country, Medicaid is overwhelmed with the costs of AIDS, but it is an entitlement, so people are going to get it. In developing countries, where there is TB and malaria and hundreds of other diseases, to superimpose our notion of how to combat the disease is not going to work. I hate to consider it, but it is true. It seems to me that it is time to face the importance of continuing to stress prevention as the most important strategy not only in this country but especially in developing countries.

Developing countries are being set back decades because of the AIDS crisis. To the great credit of some of the companies and others around the world, we want drugs to be made available to developing countries as well. It

will be important to prioritize which drugs to which people. Mother-to-children drugs that are especially effective in keeping children from getting AIDS at all would be very, very important. But, beyond that, we have got to tailor strategies for combating AIDS to the environment in which those strategies are expected to work.

In Africa, we greet the decision of the drug companies to offer drugs at discount rates. At the same time, we must remind ourselves that most of our effort must go into preventing AIDS, which has already become a catastrophe of epidemic proportions in southern Africa.

CONDEMNING DESTRUCTION OF BUDDHAS IN AFGHANISTAN

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

Mr. ENGLISH. Mr. Speaker, all too often we in Washington are insulated from major events that are going on around the world, events that directly or indirectly impact us. But there are few events more grotesque than something that happened just over the last couple of weeks in Afghanistan, an act of barbarism, an act of mindless iconoclasm by a regime noted for its intolerance of all values that do not precisely conform to their own. Here I am referring to the decision of the Taliban outlaw government in Afghanistan to sanction and encourage the destruction of two standing Buddhas of enormous importance to world culture.

The Bamiyan standing Buddha statues in Afghanistan up until this point have been one of the greatest wonders of the world and one of the marvels of that region and one of the remaining gifts that the cultures of that part of central Asia had given the entire world. They were a magnificent example of human artistry and skill.

Mr. Speaker, those statues had represented a common heritage of all mankind. The Bamiyan Buddhas had survived hostile onslaughts over the centuries, but they did not survive destruction at the hands of religious zealots and heretics.

Afghanistan is a country with a very rich and enormously complicated history. Because of its mountainous terrain, it was often on the border of different empires that washed across the history of the world. It was briefly a Greek region under Alexander the Great, and it was also a Buddhist region in the third century B.C., Buddhism having been launched there by the Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan empire.

At that time, Afghanistan lay at the heart of the silk route, which was a source of trade that moved from east to west.

Accompanying the caravans of precious goods, Buddhist monks came and went, teaching their religion along the route. From this very part of the world Buddhism established itself over the centuries in China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Mongolia.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, a new art form emerged, the art of Gandhara, the ancient name for part of Afghanistan. During this period, the earliest Buddhist images in human form evolved in this Kushan/Saka area.

The caravans on the silk route often stopped in the Bamiyan Valley. It was one of the major Buddhist centers from the second century up to the time that Islam entered the Valley in the ninth century.

There these two giant Buddhas, one of them the largest standing image of Buddha in the world, more than 120 feet high, stood, until this week. These symbols of their ancient faith were cut out of the rock sometime between the third and fifth centuries A.D. The smaller statue of Buddha was carved during Kanishka the Great's reign. It was estimated that two centuries later the large Buddha statue was carved.

I have to tell you, it is striking to me as an archaeology buff that both of these statues were dressed in togas of the Greek style imported into India by the soldiers of Alexander the Great when he invaded the region between 334 and 327 B.C.

The features of these statues of Buddha had disappeared. During the centuries, undoubtedly, there had been earlier bouts of iconoclasm. The idea behind the destruction was to take away the soul of the hated image by obliterating, or at least deforming, the head and hands.

The intolerance of the Taliban in leading to this destruction needs to have a strong international response. The Taliban has clearly failed to recognize the value of any art that does not conform precisely to their religious purposes. The Taliban are only the temporary holders. Their government is only a custodian of this area. We cannot tolerate their willful destruction of international treasures that are really holdings of the entire world. We cannot allow them to get away with this action.

The action of the Taliban regime represents the worst case of vandalism in recent history of our ancient past. Today, more and more people are awakening to their heritage and the importance of preserving these sorts of relics. We have in Christian countries many examples of Islamic art that are protected, like the Alhambra in Spain. We know that in Egypt, now an Islamic country, there are relics, there are statues, there are temples that are of enormous significance to the culture of the world.

We need in Congress to send a clear message to the Taliban that this is unacceptable, and we need to bring together all of the nations of the world to express our outrage and take firm action against this cultural imperialism.

ELECTION REFORM

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

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here today to talk on a special order on election reform.

Today I am proud to introduce my first piece of legislation in the United States House of Representatives, a resolution calling on Congress to take swift and meaningful action on election reform so we can implement significant improvements before 2002. I am committed to making election reform a top priority and ensuring that America's faith in democracy is not diminished by pervasive problems in our voting system. We must enter the next Federal election cycle with full confidence in our Nation's voting technology. That is why I urge my colleagues on both side of the aisle to work together to ensure that in 2002 each and every vote counts.

Exactly 1 month ago, I addressed this House on this very same issue. At that time I spoke of my work as Rhode Island's Secretary of State in modernizing our State's antiquated voting equipment. During my tenure, Rhode Island upgraded its voting machines from the worst in the Nation to among the best. We improved our technology, we improved accessibility, we improved accuracy in our elections and achieved a significant increase in voter participation. Furthermore, all of these reforms were cost effective.

Models exist for accurate and cost-effective election reform that States can replicate to assure true democracy. In fact, my former staff has been working with election officials in Florida and New York as well as researchers at MIT to discuss how they can emulate our success.

Many of our Nation's election administrators right now are working tirelessly to improve their voting systems, and I applaud their efforts to ensure that no voter is disenfranchised and that all ballots are counted accurately. However, I know from personal experience that upgrading an entire State's election system is no small feat. It requires a great deal of planning, investment of time and resources, and the coordination of efforts with different levels of government.

Fortunately, 21 Members of this House have introduced legislation to help improve our Nation's overall voting system. The sponsors of these bills hold a variety of ideological views. However, we all share one common goal, to ensure that our Nation's election system does not undermine citizens' confidence in the democratic process and that every vote counts.

For this reason, Mr. Speaker, I am introducing this sense of the Congress resolution encouraging Congress to make this vision a reality by the 2002 election. Though we may disagree about some of the details, my colleagues and I are willing to put aside