

The SPEAKER pro tempore. This concludes the call of the Private Calendar.

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PLAYING WITH BLOCKS

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

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, ensuring that our children have the best possible education should be a priority for all of us. However, we need to ensure that our education dollars fund programs that are actually and truly educating our children.

Awhile back I read an article detailing programs endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education which encouraged teaching middle school students to play with blocks and use calculators, rather than teach them basic math skills. These useless programs have prompted over 200 scholars recently to take out a full page ad in the Washington Post denouncing the programs and calling for Secretary Riley to stop endorsing them. But yet programs like these still exist and are still funded with the tax dollars of hard-working Americans.

Our children deserve more. They deserve educational programs that will actually prepare them for the 21st century. This year, let us make a commitment to our children. Let us raise test scores, but let us do it by supporting real education, not by lowering our standards.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back all the dumbed-down education programs that have failed to teach our children.

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THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

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

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, the Republican leadership likes to complain about bureaucracy, but when it comes time to do something about it, something their special-interest friends oppose, they are remarkably silent, because on this very day, as we speak, families across our country are being forced to wade through a seemingly endless bureaucracy, a mountain of paperwork, simply to get the care, the health care, they or their children need and deserve.

It does not need to be that complicated. If your child has fallen and hit his head, you should not have to call an insurance bureaucrat to see if you can go to an emergency room and you should not have to get authorization before taking your child in. You should be free to have only one thing on your mind, and that is your child's safety.

That is what the Patients' Protection Act ensures. It puts health care first and bureaucracy last. That is what we Democrats and some conscientious Republicans are fighting for.

That is the reform the supposedly pro-family anti-bureaucracy Republican leadership has been stalling for years.

Mr. Speaker, the time for Republican stalling is over. The time to act is now. Let us vote for the motion to instruct conferees later today and move the Patients' Bill of Rights to the President's desk.

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REPEAL THE MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

(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, the family is the fundamental building block of society. Our Tax Code for too long has punished Americans for getting married. This year, 28 million American couples will be penalized an average of \$1,400, simply for committing their lives to each other.

It is past time to repeal the marriage tax penalty. In America, our tax policy should encourage family formation, not discourage it.

Mr. Speaker, we need to eliminate the marriage tax penalty for all married couples, not just some. If the marriage tax penalty is bad policy, it is bad policy for everyone. I urge this body to completely repeal the marriage tax penalty and honor all American marriages, not just some.

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SAFE PIPELINES ACT OF 2000

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

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, on June 10th, last summer, a gasoline pipeline in Bellingham, Washington, ruptured, spilled hundreds of thousands of gallons of gasoline and ignited, and a huge fireball took the lives of two young boys and one young man. We now have huge holes in our safety system of pipelines in this country, and we need to act to plug those holes.

Accordingly, yesterday the gentleman from Washington (Mr. METCALF), the gentleman from Washington (Mr. SMITH), the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. DUNN), and myself introduced the Safe Pipelines Act of 2000. This act will include a couple of common sense measures. It is common sense to require periodic regular inspection of these lines, it is common sense to require reporting of spills, and it is common sense to allow States to move forward to have more rigorous safety standards in our neighborhoods.

I would urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this bill. It is only asking these companies to act as a good neighbor when these pipelines run next to our back doors, to make sure they are safe. Let us require them to be good neighbors and pass this bill.

PASS MEANINGFUL MARRIAGE TAX RELIEF

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

Mr. BALLENGER. Mr. Speaker, it is good to hear that the President is joining our tax relief debate. Just last year the President vetoed our marriage tax relief plan. This year he thinks our idea is so great he has come up with his own proposal.

Unfortunately, his plan misses the mark. The President's plan would only affect a fraction of the 28 million couples helped by the Republican plan and would only save couples a meager \$210 a year. Come on, Mr. President. The American people deserve better. On the other hand, the Republican plan would have provided married couples up to \$1,400 in tax relief.

Mr. Speaker, in the next few weeks the House will consider a marriage tax fix even better than our proposal last year. I urge the President to join us this year to pass meaningful marriage tax relief. American couples deserve it, and it is the fair thing to do.

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WAL-MART WIPING THEIR ASSETS WITH OLD GLORY

(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, so much for Wal-Mart's big buy-American promotion. Since 1985, Wal-Mart bought 4 tons of Chinese shoes. Meanwhile, 240 American shoe factories shut down and 30,000 American workers lost their jobs. If that is not enough to bust your bunions, Wal-Mart imports 18,000 tons of goods and products from China each year.

Think about it. While American soldiers literally died shouting "better dead than red," Wal-Mart has allowed China to wipe their assets with Old Glory.

I yield back the fact that Wal-Mart now owns, owns and sells 14 brands of shoes, and they are all made in China. Beam me up.

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ENDING ACRIMONY AND BITTERNESS ON THE HOUSE FLOOR

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

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, let me ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, if they will, to be a little patient. We are already hearing some "foot dragging" commentary on health care. We are hearing a lot of innuendos that somehow the Republicans are not getting to work. We just started.

But I will tell you some of the things we did do last year. Paid down the debt, over \$151 billion; paid do you know what we owe the taxpayers of the

United States of America. Now we are going to have a chance for marriage penalty elimination. Talk about sensible tax relief for all taxpayers.

So let us not start the rhetoric of this new year and this new millennium with accusations of foot dragging and partisanship. I implore the other side of the aisle to be calm, to be rational, and to be deliberate as we debate the very important issues confronting the American people. But if we are going to start with these types of one minute accusations, innuendo and character assassination, then I think the year will start off just as it ended last year, with acrimony and bitterness.

Let us start for the American people a better way on this floor by proving we can legislate and not sit here and constantly belittle the other side of the aisle.

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GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT REAL HMO REFORM

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

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I follow my colleague from Florida in saying that I agree that we should work together. In fact, last year this House passed and worked very hard on a bipartisan Norwood-Dingell bill, on managed care reform, but we have not seen any action in months.

We should stop the delay in managed care reform. We do not need gimmicks or watered down proposals that wind up doing nothing for patients.

In my home State of Texas, we passed these protections in 1997 included in the Norwood-Dingell bill, and there have been no massive premium increases or mass filing of lawsuits that are used against the bill. What Texas residents do have is elimination of gag clauses, open access to specialists, timely appeals processes, coverage for emergency care and holding the medical decision maker accountable.

We do not need any more delays. We need to act this year on a bipartisan basis and pass this bill. Hopefully, the conference committee will at last meet after all these months and pass real HMO reform, and today we will have that opportunity with the motion to instruct the conference committee. We need HMO reform now.

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CONTINUING THE RECORD U.S. ECONOMIC EXPANSION

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

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, it is generally known that success has 1,000 fathers and defeat is an orphan. I would like to stand here and go one step further and compliment the President, for in his State of the Union he used the plural "we" in describing the fact that as we mark this February 1, 2000, it is

the anniversary of the longest economic expansion in our Nation's history. I am glad that he used the plural "we" in describing the fact that we have encouraged policies which have allowed the American people to bring about this economic expansion.

The real challenge is are we going to continue to do everything that we can to pursue those shared goals of maintaining a balanced budget, reducing the tax burden on working Americans, encouraging global trade, which is very, very key, making sure that we continue to reform welfare, and encourage work and productivity. I think we have a chance to do that.

HMO reform, I would say to my friend from Texas, is among those priorities. Congress adjourned before Thanksgiving. It is true that in the last couple of months we have not been working on it, but we are committed to moving ahead with that legislation just as quickly as we possibly can. I am glad that we are working together.

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ENSURING STRONGEST POSSIBLE PATIENT PROTECTIONS IN HMO REFORM

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

Mr. WYNN. Mr. Speaker, this year Congress can begin to address one of America's most pressing problems, reforming managed care. But HMO reform will be meaningless if we do not have a real Patients' Bill of Rights with teeth.

Last year we got the process started. We passed the bipartisan Dingell-Norwood bill, which has real teeth in it. What do we need to do now? First, we need to get started. There has been too much delay. Let us convene the conference committee. Second, we need to insist on the part of the House that we include the tough standards that give patients the right to sue, that require utilization review, that require independent appeals processes and that enable constituents to have an explanation in writing of why they were denied care.

When people are denied care by HMOs, they are harmed. When HMOs harm citizens, they have to be held accountable. The way to hold them accountable is to insist that our legislation includes the tough standards that the House passed last year. We can do it together. I certainly believe this ought to be one of our first orders of business as we begin the new year. I think if we do that we can make real progress for the American people.

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PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(Ms. DELAURO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, 4 months ago we passed a bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights. This is a monumental piece of legislation to reform HMOs. It provides basic rights of care for all Americans. It ensures that we are able to choose our own doctors; that we have access to the nearest emergency room; that we have a specialist when we need one, if we need one for our health; and, yes, indeed, to hold HMOs accountable for the medical decisions that they are making every single day.

Unfortunately, the GOP leadership continues to stall this legislation. I call upon the Republican leadership to stop their delay tactics, pass meaningful HMO reform. This is a bipartisan bill; we have broad support amongst the rank and file Members. We must act to give 160 million Americans access to health care in this country. We owe it to the American people to enact this legislation and to enact these reforms now.

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PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(Ms. SCHAKOWSKY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, now is the time for a real Patients' Bill of Rights; and today is the day that we should instruct the conferees to move quickly to pass a strong bill.

I have a letter from constituents.

Dear Representative Schakowsky: We beg you to please do everything you possibly can to support a Patients' Bill of Rights for those of us who find ourselves in the merry-go-round of dealing with HMOs and reluctant insurance company benefit providers. It has gotten to the point of being ridiculous when patients are subjected to mental torture by these big companies.

This certainly cannot be what our Founding Fathers had in mind. Ultimately, we have only one means of relief, the United States Congress. I understand the big providers have lobbyists, with deep pockets, fighting any legislation that would force them to be more fair and of understanding their responsibilities to their customers, but this cannot be allowed to interfere with what we all know to be basically right and wrong. This is what the average American cannot understand. Why cannot Congress just do what is right for the people whose well-being has been entrusted to them?

It has been entrusted to us. This is the day that we can act to say move quickly, move now.

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PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

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

Mr. GEJDENSON. Mr. Speaker, it is time for the conferees to move forward with a patients' bill of rights. The leadership of this Chamber, which has