park. We need to have national parks close to where people live. We have one in the Santa Monica Mountains.

While I am focusing on local issues, I should also point out the most important transportation need of the southern California area, and that is dealing with the intersection of the San Diego Freeway and the Ventura Freeway, the 405 and the 101. I want to applaud our State government for beginning a $10 to $15 million plan to provide some immediate quick fixes and one additional lane in order to deal with the huge snarl of traffic at that interchange. But these quick fixes and moderate amounts of expenditures will not be enough to solve the problem. I want to thank Secretary Rodney Slater for providing for a half-million-dollar study of what can be done to deal with this intersection and the transition roads that have to accommodate almost half a million cars every day.

Madam Speaker, I would like to use the last 10 minutes of my presentation, and I thank the House for giving me this much time, to focus on one particular type of tax cut that I hope will have bipartisan support, and that is the need to reform our estate tax laws to dramatically reduce the amount of estate planning, the length of documents and the literal legal torture that we put our elderly and our near-elderly through as a result of an estate planning process that yields virtually no revenue from the middle-class and upper middle-class individuals who need to go through the process.

Let me describe that process briefly. We have an estate tax that reaps, I believe, $17 billion in revenue for this country. It is designed to get revenue from the wealthy as great wealth passes from one generation to another. We designed the law so that a married couple could leave $1.2 million to their children with no tax at all. That is the tax policy that we have established, $1.2 million tax-free.

But we adopted that tax policy in a bizarre way. And when I say, by the way, $1.2 million, that number is going to be ratcheted up over the next decade to a total of $2 million, depending upon, of course, when people die and that estate tax becomes applicable. In my presentation here I will use the old figures, the $600,000 figures and the $1.2 million figures.

That is to say, how is it that current law provides for that $1.2 million exemption? It provides a $600,000 exclusion to each of the two spouses. So what do they have to do to take advantage of this $1.2 million exemption? They have to write a long, complicated estate planning document and bypass trust so that when the first spouse dies, that first spouse does not just leave all the family assets to the surviving spouse. Oh, no. That would trigger an estate tax of major proportion when the second spouse dies. Instead, the first spouse to die must leave $600,000 in a trust for the benefit of the surviving spouse. The effect is virtually the same, but the legal complexities are enormous.

First, just drawing the instrument is a $1,000 to $3,000 legal fee tax imposed on any couple that believes that when the second of them to dies it is possible that their assets will exceed $600,000. And given the possibility that homes in southern California would go up in value with the same rapidity next decade as they did last decade, every middle-class married couple sees that as at least a possibility.

Keep in mind, those who fail to go through this excruciating estate planning process, and I will describe why I think it is excruciating because I have lived it, are told, well, if the second spouse dies, there will be a quarter of a million dollars of extra Federal tax that you could have avoided, a quarter-million-dollar penalty on the family for failing to go through this complicated estate planning process.

But the estate planning process is not over. It seems to be over but it is not over when the trust is documented and the couple leaves the lawyer's office with a 50-page document. Because there will come a time when the first spouse dies, and at that point complicated legal steps need to be taken so that assets are put into the trust and other assets are assigned to the widow or widower, and then every year thereafter that trust has got to fill out a separate income tax return. Assets have to be kept separate.

Imagine trying to explain for the 20th time to a 95-year-old widow or widower how some assets they have control over and are in trust, which they are only allowed to touch under certain circumstances but get the income under other circumstances, and other assets are in a different trust. Why do we afflict America's elderly, especially our widows and widowers, with the need to be in these bypass trusts?

Now, I am not talking here, by the way, of the living trusts that are established to avoid probate in many of our States. Those are genuinely simple. But built within so many of them are these bypass trusts, created not to avoid probate but created to deal with very complicated tax laws.

What we should do instead is provide that when the first spouse dies, they can leave all the assets, or some portion of them, to the surviving spouse, and any unused portion of the unified credit, the in effect $600,000 exemption, goes to the surviving spouse. In the simplest plan this would mean when the first spouse died, all of the assets could go to the widow or widower. When the widow or widower passes on later, $1.2 million would be exempt from tax and the rest would be subject to tax.

This is the same tax effect that most couples will be faced with. I just think they should be able to reach it without living with these trusts throughout the widowhood or widowerhood of the surviving spouse.

Now, the Joint Tax Committee has informed me that they believe that this kind of change would deprive the Federal Government of a billion dollars a year in revenue. For those who want to see a significant estate tax reduction, that is a strong reason to join me in this proposed estate tax change.

But I would argue that that billion-dollar reduction in revenue is almost entirely illusory, because the bill as I would propose it would provide tax benefits no greater than any married couple could get simply by visiting a lawyer and paying a $1,500 legal fee. The vast majority of couples with assets of over $600,000 will do just that, and as a result they will obtain through complication the tax savings that I would like to provide through simplicity.

I look forward to working with the staff of the Joint Tax Committee to get a more reasonable revenue estimate of this estate tax simplification, and I look forward to working with as many of my colleagues who are interested in crafting legislation to try to simplify the life of every middle-class and upper middle-class widow and widower in this country.

I want to thank the Chair for extending so much time. I want to thank my colleagues for their patience in allowing me to get so many matters off my chest.

DISPENSING WITH CALENDAR WEDNESDAY BUSINESS ON TOMORROW

Mr. WELLER. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the business in order under the Calendar Wednesday rule be dispensed with tomorrow.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

TIME FOR A TAX CUT

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

Mr. WELLER. Madam Speaker, I have the privilege of representing one of the most diverse districts in America. I represent the south side of Chicago and the south suburbs in Cook and Will Counties, industrial communities like Joliet, bedroom communities like Morris and New Lennox, farm towns like Tonica and Mazon.

I hear one common message as I travel throughout this very diverse district and listen to the concerns of the people I have the privilege of representing. That message is fairly simple. That is, the American people want us to work together, they want us to come up with solutions to the challenges that we face.

When I was elected in 1994, I was elected with that message of finding solutions and finding ways to change how Washington works, to make Washington more responsive to the folks back home.