Federal water agencies are working comprehensively in the watershed, Mr. Speaker.

The next great advance in livability, if my colleagues will pardon the expression, is to be found on the waterfront, and I call on my colleagues to join me in this Congress in a comprehensive approach to a new vision of water resources.

SPECIFICS OF THE REPUBLICAN AGENDA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, I thought I would take a few minutes to kind of report on what the last couple weeks were like when I was back home spending time with my constituents during the district work period, conducting 15 town meetings, and I wanted to report today on really the response to the Republican agenda of good schools and low taxes and a secure retirement for all Americans.

I have the privilege of representing a very, very diverse district, the south side of Chicago in the south suburbs of Cook and Will Counties as well as a lot of rural and bedroom communities, and one always listens for the common concerns when they represent a diverse district of cities, suburbs and country.

During the last two weeks I got a pretty good response. People were very supportive of the Republican agenda of strengthening our local schools, of lowering the tax burden for the middle class, of making for a secure retirement for all Americans by strengthening Medicare and Social Security.

I would like to take a few minutes just to talk about some of those specifics of our Republican agenda, and of course let me begin with the Republican efforts to strengthen Social Security and to strengthen Medicare for the next three generations.

Mr. Speaker, I am often asked a common question over the last several years that I have had the privilege of being in the Congress, and that question is: When are you politicians in Washington going to stop raiding the Social Security Trust Fund? I was pleased to tell my constituents that this is the year we are going to do that. This is the year we are going to wall off the Social Security Trust fund and say, ''Hands off,'' and my constituents frankly were pretty shocked when they learned that the Clinton-Gore budget actually raids the Social Security trust fund by $351 billion.

I think it is important to note that when we compare Republican efforts to wall off the Social Security Trust Fund, which means 100 percent of Social Security according to this chart for Social Security versus the Clinton-Gore proposal for 62 percent of the Social Security Trust Fund going to Social Security and the other 38 percent being spent on other things, that is what this means. The President wants to spend 38 percent of Social Security on new government programs. Republicans, of course, want to wall off the Social Security Trust Fund, essentially putting trust back in the trust fund with 100 percent of Social Security for Social Security, and that is a big victory.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to note that the Republican budget sets aside almost $400 billion more than the Clinton-Gore budget for Medicare and Social Security.

Now our second priority in our agenda, of course, is lower taxes for the middle class, and I am one who believes that when the tax burden for the average family in Illinois is about 40 percent of their income going to local, State and Federal Government for taxes, that that tax burden is too high and we need to lower the tax burden, particularly for the middle class. And when we talk about the tax burden, I find that constituents, whether it is at the union hall or the VFW or the local Chamber of Commerce, they tell me that the Tax Code is too complicated, requires too much paperwork, and the majority of people have to hire someone else to fill out the tax forms. And I also point out that the tax burden is really unfair.

As we work this year to lower the tax burden, I believe that our top priority should be to simplify the Tax Code, to address the unfairness in the Tax Code, and of course we need to begin by eliminating the marriage tax penalty. Is it right, is it fair that 21 million married working couples on average pay $1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married, $1,400 more than an identical couple living together outside a marriage? That is wrong, that our Tax Code punishes marriage.

The Marriage Tax Elimination Act has 230 cosponsors. Let us get it done this year. Let us simplify the Tax Code and eliminate the marriage tax penalty.

Of course the Republican agenda, a secure retirement and lower taxes also includes strengthening our local schools, and we want to strengthen our local schools by empowering our local school boards and our local teachers and our local parents to run their schools and giving them the flexibility, of course, to meet the needs of local communities, and that is an important shift because previously for 30 to 40 years all the power was moving to Washington. And I talk with local school administrators and school board members. They tell me maybe in Illinois 6 percent of our public schools' budget comes from Washington, but so does two-thirds of the paperwork and almost 100 percent of the mandates, micromanaging how our schools are run.

We want to let local schools run themselves and meet the needs of their local communities, and that is why we want to pass the Ed Flex legislation. My hope, it will be on the President's desk fairly soon.

The other concern that local school board members also share with me is they say, as my colleagues know, ''You've increased funding at the Federal level by 10 percent, even while you've been balancing the budget, increasing funding for education, but if you look at how those dollars have been spent, only 70 cents of every dollar actually reaches the classroom. Thirty cents is lost in the Washington bureaucracy.''

Our goal is to ensure that more dollars get to the classroom, with a goal of 95 cents on the dollar reaching the classroom, and if we compare that to the current cost of delivering those funds to our local schools, that is a 25 percent funding increase above and beyond what they are currently receiving. We are providing $22 billion in Federal funding for our local schools. It is just wrong that 30 cents on the dollar currently is lost in Washington.

Let us help our local schools. Let us lower the tax burden for the middle class. Let us secure retirement by strengthening Medicare and Social Security.

PUERTO RICANS—FIRST CLASS CITIZENS IN TIMES OF WAR, BUT SECOND CLASS CITIZENS IN TIMES OF PEACE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. Mr. Speaker, as we return to our offices from our 2-week Easter recess, many important issues claim our immediate attention, not the least of which is the crisis in Kosovo. The matter is further complicated by our concerns about the three American soldiers being held prisoners by the Serbian government. Our prayers are with them and with their families at this critical period.

Throughout our Nation's history it has been demonstrated that our commitment to democratic values and securing peace and stability throughout the world has in many instances required the mobilization of our armed forces for the common good. During this century, in our dedication to peace and harmony amongst all people, we have opposed the forces of genocide and the inhumanity and cruelty of those who aim to ethnically cleanse a population, and this time it is not any different. The NATO allies stand firmly behind the aim to secure peace in the Yugoslavia region.

And now in this endeavor, just like we have in every other armed conflict throughout the century, the American citizens that reside in Puerto Rico stand shoulder-to-shoulder with their fellow American citizens from every

other State, ready and willing to contribute in any way possible to the establishment of justice and freedom. Because we are proud to enjoy the freedoms that our Nation stands for, we have been willing to accept the responsibilities and sacrifices that are demanded. The discharge of this important trust is what patriotism is all about.

Inherent in this quest for freedom is the belief in equality. Only as equals can we join in the common quest.

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Our Nation's first elected leader, President George Washington, said it best when he wrote that ''the spirit of freedom beats too high in us to submit to slavery.''

President Washington's message to the Senate and the House of Representatives of January 8, 1790, underscored this guiding belief in equality. He said, and I quote, ''The welfare of our country is the object to which our cares and efforts are to be directed. And I shall derive great satisfaction from a cooperation with you, in the pleasing though arduous task of ensuring to our fellow citizens the blessings which they have a right to expect from a free, efficient and equal government.''

What is difficult to understand is how, despite our Nation's adoption of equality as one of the guiding principles of our democracy, we, the American citizens who reside in the territory of Puerto Rico, are not only denied the right to participate as equals in the democratic process but also denied participation in the safety net programs that all other Americans enjoy in the 50 States. Despite our common vision throughout the century, despite the 197,000 Americans from Puerto Rico who have heard the call to defend democracy, and despite the thousands who willingly paid the price of patriotism and sacrificed their own lives, 4 million American citizens are denied the benefits that all others in the Nation take for granted.

Senator MOYNIHAN told us a decade ago that when people fight for a country, they get a claim on that country. His words ring as true today as they were then. We have been equals during times of war and death, and we aspire to be equals in time of peace, prosperity and in life.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage my colleagues to remember at this critical time that separate and unequal policies that promote unfairness and discrimination have no place in our Nation. By virtue of living in a territory, American citizens are denied equality that is inherent in the American system of government. This denial betrays our democracy and the men and women who valiantly defend it.

What is more, let us remember that even though our troops face danger equally, they are not all equal citizens because not all of them enjoy the same participation in the health and education programs that benefit all other Americans.

Puerto Ricans are first-class citizens in times of war, but second-class citizens in times of peace. That is un-American.

THE SOLVENCY OF SOCIAL SECURITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MICA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I come before the Chamber this morning to talk about an important item for this country, and that is the solvency of Social Security.

I have been in Congress 6 years. When I first came to Congress in the 103rd Congress, and subsequently in the 104th Congress, 105th Congress, I have introduced legislation that would keep Social Security solvent.

This year, I am chairman of a bipartisan Budget Committee Task Force on Social Security. The problem of solvency justifies a few minutes of review and comment.

Most workers today look forward to some kind of Social Security when we retire based on the fact that most of us now pay 12.4 percent out of every dollar we earn as a Social Security tax. Most workers anticipate that there is going to be some return on that kind of contribution to the Social Security system.

However, we were told back in 1993 by the Congressional Budget Office, and by the President's Office of Management and Budget, that Social Security would be going broke.

Now, in the last several months, we have been hearing from both sides of the aisle, the Democrats and the Republicans, that paying down the public debt with some of the Social Security surplus would somehow save Social Security. Not so. Not so, Mr. Speaker.

It is good and it is historic that for the first time in recent history we will not be using the Social Security surplus for other government spending programs. So when some have bragged about having a balanced budget in the past, they have been misleading. It has been somewhat of a hoodwinking of the American public, because we have depended all these years on the surplus coming in from Social Security to mask the deficit.

The good news is that this year, for the first time in many, many years, we will not be spending that Social Security trust fund surplus. Now we have got to have the intestinal fortitude, we have got to have the willingness, to face the tough problem of saving Social Security and Medicare. That means a restructuring of the program.

Generally, Mr. Speaker, the problem is based on demographics. There are more and more retirees in relation to the number of workers paying in those taxes. Let me just give you a quick example of why depending on current worker taxes to pay current retiree benefits is a problem.

In 1950, there were 17 people working, paying in their Social Security taxes that was immediately sent out to beneficiaries. 17 to 1. This year there are three workers paying in their Social Security tax for every one retiree, and the estimate is that by 2030 there will be only two workers trying to come up with enough to support their families and one retiree. So there has to be some structural changes in the way the Social Security system works.

It is a tough decision, and that is why politicians have not dealt with it. There are only two ways to save Social Security. That is, either reduce benefits or increase the amount of revenue coming in. One way to increase revenue is private investment. However, that by itself will not fix Social Security.

Let us hope, Mr. Speaker, that we have the gumption, the fortitude, the willingness to step up to the plate to make the hard decisions in order to save Social Security. Let us hope that the American people are willing to learn about the complicated ways Social Security is financed and to encourage their representatives in Congress to move ahead. Let us be clear that even though using the Social Security surplus to pay down the public debt is better public policy than using the money to finance more government spending, it does not save Social Security.

LET US KEEP MEDICARE A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC PROGRAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, we received good news 2 weeks ago when the Medicare and Social Security trustees reported that both programs will be solvent significantly longer than projected. For Medicare, the trustees reported that the Medicare trust fund will remain solvent through at least 2015.

Those in Congress, the think tanks and the Washington pundits who want to privatize Medicare are wringing their hands over the trustees' latest report. They believe these new projections will lead Congress to do nothing towards reforming Social Security and Medicare.

Once again, Medicare privatizers are wrong. The real threat to Medicare is not its alleged pending bankruptcy. The real threat to Medicare is a legislative proposal just rejected by the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare which would have privatized Medicare and delivered it to the private insurance market.

Under a proposal soon to be introduced called ''premium support,'' Medicare would no longer pay directly for health care services. Instead, it would provide each senior with a voucher