

Mr. Speaker, just weeks before the election, the Republican leadership has proposed an \$80 billion bundle of tax breaks, and has asked the American people to pay for these breaks by dipping into future Social Security surpluses.

I have worked my entire professional life to improve the fairness of the tax system -- first in Oregon and now as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Unfortunately, the proposal before us today does not represent an improvement to the tax code, rather it is a scatter-shot collection of inefficient and poorly written tax cuts. For example, the so-called 'marriage penalty reduction' gives further tax benefits to those married couples who currently pay less in taxes than they would as single taxpayers anyway. Yet other couples, who have lower incomes and do face a significant 'marriage penalty' will get no relief at all.

In total, this bill gives the top 2 percent of all taxpayers an average tax cut of \$1,709 a year. The 160 million taxpayers who represent the working poor to the upper-middle income (about 60 percent of taxpayers) will only receive, on average, a \$34 cut. This is unacceptable.

To make matters worse, rather than paying for the cuts as required under our budget law, the Republicans' scheme targets the Social Security surplus. We know the baby-boomers' retirement is a serious threat to the federal budget and economy in the near future. We also know that we cannot assume our budget surpluses are going to last. If a recession occurs, our budget deficits would compound Social Security's long-term financing problems, putting in jeopardy our ability to provide for the millions of Americans who are counting on Social Security to be there when they retire.

Perhaps we should not be surprised with the content and timing of this scheme. After all, this proposal is being put forth by the same people who vowed to scrap the entire tax code because it was too complex --only to add 285 entirely new sections of tax code through the passage of their 1997 Act. And, is it just coincidence we are considering this package five weeks before the November elections? Rather than continue to play these political games, it is time Congress made serious efforts to protect our Social Security system and make the tax system more fair, rather than just more complex.