

[Skip to article](#)

- [Welcome, ctzcrank](#)
- [Member Center](#)
- [Log Out](#)
- [Home Page](#)
- [My Times](#)
- [Today's Paper](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Most Popular](#)
- [Times Topics](#)

- [Opinion](#)
- [All NYT](#)

The New York Times

Opinion

- [World](#)
- [U.S.](#)
- [N.Y. / Region](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Editorials](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Contributors](#)
- [Letters](#)
- [N.Y./Region Opinions](#)
- [Readers' Opinions](#)
- [The Public Editor](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Style](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Autos](#)
- [Editorial](#)

What Passes for Good News

- [E-Mail](#)
- [Print](#)
- [Save](#)

ARTICLE TOOLS
SPONSORED BY



Published: June 9, 2006

Any day in which the House or Senate refrains from doing something destructive is about as good as it gets in Washington lately. Yesterday, the Senate cleared that low bar when it rejected efforts to repeal the estate tax.

The nation is at war and the budget is so wildly out of balance that the government cannot pay its bills without borrowing money from foreign investors. The idea that this is a good moment to repeal a tax on people who inherit multimillion-dollar estates is mind-boggling. But Congress, pushed by the lobbying efforts of a handful of super-rich families, was on the brink of doing just that. The country was saved from that fate when the Senate fell three votes short of the 60 needed to prevent a filibuster by Democrats who were rightly horrified by the whole idea.

The senators who deserve the most credit for saving the day, however, were George Voinovich of Ohio and Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island, Republicans who broke with their party to help block consideration of the repeal. Mr. Voinovich said, rightly, that the idea of eliminating the tax under current conditions was "incredibly irresponsible and intellectually dishonest."


Majority Leader Bill Frist, on the other hand, was the chief culprit. Mr. Frist appears convinced that the best way he can demonstrate his potential as a presidential candidate is to march the chamber through votes on all the most divisive and useless legislation moldering on the agenda — banning gay marriages, writing a prohibition of the nonexistent flag-burning problem into the Constitution, and eliminating a tax that applies only to the richest 1 percent of the population.

The estate tax certainly needs work. It currently exempts the first \$4 million of a married couple's estate — or \$2 million for an individual — and taxes anything beyond that at 46 percent. The exemptions go up to \$3.5 million and \$7 million by 2009, and the rate drops to 45 percent. Then in 2010, the tax is repealed entirely. In 2011 it reverts to 55 percent of everything over \$1 million.

Congress could easily have rationalized the tax structure, while protecting small businesses and family farms. But that would have forced everyone to admit that there's nothing wrong with asking people to pay a tax when they inherit enormous fortunes. For this Senate, the bar doesn't go nearly that high.

[Next Article in Opinion \(2 of 13\) »](#)

Related Articles

- [Frist Will Consider Compromise if Repeal of the Estate Tax Fails \(June 8, 2006\)](#)
- [Estate Tax Showdown Is Splitting the G.O.P. \(June 7, 2006\)](#)
- [A Boon for the Richest in an Estate Tax Repeal \(June 7, 2006\)](#)
-  [YOUR MONEY; With a Little Estate Planning, Your House Can Stay in the Family \(January 21, 2006\)](#)

Related Searches

- Taxation
- Wills and Estates
- Politics and Government
- Senate

[Next Article in Opinion \(2 of 13\) »](#)

Inside NYTimes.com



TimesSelect

[U.S. »](#)

[Movies »](#)

TimesSelect

[Travel »](#)

[Business »](#)



[Watching the World Cup](#)



[Manatee Off Florida's Endangered List](#)



[Judith Warner: My Last Day of School](#)

[Movie Minutes: 'A Prairie Home Companion'](#)



[A New Look at the Old West](#)



[I Saw a Deadhead Sticker on a Bentley](#)

Home

- World
- U.S.
- N.Y. / Region
- Business
- Technology
- Science
- Health
- Sports
- Opinion
- Arts
- Style
- Travel
- Jobs
- Real Estate

- [Automobiles](#)
- [Back to Top](#)

Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company

- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [XML](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Work for Us](#)
- [Site Map](#)

--