

money, because there is no greater myth ever articulated in this Chamber than those who would try to drive the wedge between economic stations in life, to claim that tax relief helps only the wealthy.

Because even as the gentleman from Minnesota told about one of my former colleagues in broadcasting, I thought about the young man in Payson, Arizona who owns a print shop, who I saw the other week at a luncheon, who has four children, who the per-child tax credit will help immensely with \$1,600 staying in that family budget, and then elevating that to some \$2,000 on next year's tax return with the \$500-per-child tax credit.

Yet, our challenge, Mr. Speaker, is how do we expand this, because I will go in other town halls in communities like Maricopa, just south of Phoenix in the metropolitan area, and have people come to me and say, look, I am not married, I do not have a child, I do not have any of those targeted areas that are covered with tax relief right now. What about my circumstance?

And so one of the things we are examining is how to broaden that base and how to offer simple, sane, reasonable tax relief to even more Americans. And that is one of the challenges we confront.

But it is vital to remember that these are not the stories of micro or macroeconomic incidents in a textbook or even despite the graphic nature of these charts that have been presented tonight, Mr. Speaker. No, these are the stories of flesh-and-blood families in the American heartland who may have studied economics but who know the reality of their economic situation, who sit around the kitchen table on a weekly basis making those tough decisions that have the most impact on their futures, decisions about education for their children, decisions about how much to put away, to save, spend, and invest if that is possible, decisions about mom joining the work force, oftentimes out of necessity rather than choice.

In this land of the free, we must work to ensure economic freedom and prosperity by allowing people that freedom to make decisions based on what they feel is best for their family, not on what some Washington person feels is best for some Washington program.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, I just want to go over just a few of the facts. And one of my favorite quotes is from John Adams. And he said that facts are stubborn things. And you know Winston Churchill said it slightly different. He said, you can ignore the facts, you can deny the facts, but in the end there they are.

The facts are these: Since we came here, the deficit has been slashed. And for the first time since 1969, we have a balanced budget. That, in part, has driven interest rates down by 25 percent. The stock market has more than doubled. Eight million new jobs have

been created. Unemployment is lower than it has been in 27 years. Violent crime is actually down to its lowest point in 24 years. We cut taxes for the first time since Tiger Woods was 5 years old. That is an amazing thing when you think about that.

We have allowed families to keep and invest more of their money. We have made it easier for them to send their kids on to higher education. Over 2 million families have gone off the welfare rolls and onto payrolls. We have eliminated over 300 government programs.

Well, the American people expect results. We are a results society. We have produced some results. But there is so much more to be done. I think we do need to spend a few minutes talking about will we return to the old policies of tax and spend, or will we start to take some of those surplus dollars that we believe are going to be created in the next several years, and are we going to start to pay down some of that debt.

There was an architect from Chicago, and he said something very simply but very powerfully. He said, make no small plans. If you think about that, the American people have always been big dreamers and big thinkers.

The people who came here, our ancestors, as Winston Churchill said, you did not cross the oceans, ford the streams, traverse the mountains, and deal with the droughts and pestilence because you were made of sugar candy.

I think the American people have always wanted big dreams and big goals. I think we ought to set this goal and this marker out before the American people. I think we ought to pay off that \$5.5 trillion worth of debt in this generation.

The fact of the matter is, if we will exercise the same kind of fiscal discipline that we have exercised for the last 3 years, if we will limit the growth in Federal spending to about 1 percent greater than the inflation rate, the good news is pay off the debt in 22 years.

I cannot think of a better thing to leave our kids than a debt-free future. It is within our grasp; that can be done. What is the great news about that? It means they do not have to pay that \$7,000 per family in interest that ultimately gets paid today. It means we leave our kids a brighter future, and we do what those farmers talked about, as I mentioned earlier. You pay off the mortgage and you leave your kids the farm. In some respects, that is generational fairness. That is generational equity.

As you pay down that debt, the good news is 40 percent of the debt is owed to the Social Security trust fund. So you make Social Security solvent again. Congress has been borrowing from Social Security since 1964. I think, again, we all know that is wrong. We have been borrowing from our kids, and we have also been borrowing from our parents. I think it has

been left to our generation to make things right. So we are headed in the right direction.

I am delighted that you joined me tonight. If you have got any closing remarks, we certainly would like to hear them, and we will yield to the next speaker.

Mr. HAYWORTH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Minnesota very much. I would simply remind all of us assembled of the observations of Abraham Lincoln, who reminded us that you do not strengthen the weak by weakening the strong; that you do not enrich the poor by sending impoverishment upon the well-to-do; that, indeed, our strength is not from finding divisions among us bred from envy; but, in fact, the American dream is best summed up by allowing all families the freedom to pursue faith as they see fit, to reinvest faith in this remarkable grand experiment called the United States, by letting them choose their destinies with their economic resources for their futures and the future of their children.

Let us all pledge to do that, no matter our partisan stripe or political label. Even though we champion disagreements within this Chamber, we will be better off. The American Nation will be better off because we recognized these basic truths. Again, I thank the gentleman from Minnesota and the American people, Mr. Speaker, for this time in this Chamber to discuss these topics.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arizona for joining me tonight, and I just want to say that sometimes, as I said earlier, we talk about these issues, and we sound as if we are accountants, and we talk about numbers and statistics, but in the end, this is really about what kind of a country we are going to leave to our kids.

□ 2115

And it is about what kind of a country we are going to have for ourselves. Is it going to be a future of debt and dependency, or will it be a future of hope, growth and opportunity?

The good news is we have made so much progress, but we still have those challenges. There are people who want to turn back to the old policies of tax and spend, but as long as we are here, we are going to fight the good fight. We have been making a difference, we are going to continue to make a difference, not just for this generation of Americans, but for generations of Americans to come.

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I am here today with my friend and colleague, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN) to

host this special order on one of the most important needs of children today, and that is the need that I call "the fourth R," the need for room.

There has been much talk about school construction needs. That is because schools across America have reached their breaking point. I know this is true because I have visited over 70 schools this past year alone in my district, and I have witnessed firsthand how schools are trying to house double the numbers of students they were originally meant to accommodate. I have seen auditoriums and closets converted into classrooms; and I have seen more than enough portables take over the school grounds.

To highlight the need for legislation addressing school overcrowding, I invited Vice President AL GORE to my district last week for a town hall meeting on education, and during this town hall meeting the Vice President spoke with students and parents and administrators about the daily challenges they face due to crowded schools and classrooms. The stories we heard were heartbreaking.

Elementary and junior high school students talked about no longer having playgrounds because 19 portables took up the blacktop at their junior high school. Parents discussed the difficulties over constant scheduling changes due to double sessions and year-round schooling.

It is disappointing to see the public school that I went to as a child in such bad condition. Remember, I represent my own hometown. But I know that the Federal Government can assist our schools with the infrastructure needs. The Federal Government can help local schools without threatening local control. We can help schools save money in interest costs and give local investors a Federal tax break.

My colleagues might ask, how can we do this? Through the legislation offered by myself and the President that will create new bond programs designed to give our schools the helping hand they need. It is a partnership between national government and local school districts and, really, the business community.

These bond programs would offer interest-free bonds to schools seeking to finance new school construction or renovate aging schools. The Federal Government would provide a tax credit to investors in the amount of the interest that would otherwise be paid by the school.

One of my local school districts, for example, Anaheim City school district, with elementary schools has a bond initiative on April 14. It is going to be on the ballot, and it is to pass to raise monies for a new elementary school. If local voters approve this bond initiative, it would raise almost \$48 million to rehabilitate schools and to build new classrooms for children.

My bill, the Expand and Rebuild America's Schools Act, could save Orange County taxpayers millions of dol-

lars in interest costs and keep more taxpayer dollars at home at the local level.

Let us give our schools a fair shake. Let us give them a chance to help themselves. This Federal tax break will lighten the load on local taxpayers. As an investment banker, I know this program can work. It will provide stimulus for local schools to pass bond initiatives and encourage private investment at the same time.

Congress must pass meaningful legislation this year for school construction. We can help our schools through tax incentives and through Federal bond programs. I am looking forward to hearing from my colleagues about their efforts to address school construction needs and how their schools can benefit from Federal legislation.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues for joining me this evening. At this time I yield to my colleague, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN).

Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the gentlewoman in this special order this evening and I am pleased to join my other colleagues as we discuss school construction in our districts. We repeatedly say that our children are our future; we talk a lot about preparing that bridge to the 21st century. Well, Mr. Speaker and colleagues, the investment in our children and their education is the strongest bridge that we can build.

I have listened time after time to the ongoing debate about private versus public education. That discussion is not productive, because today our schools are far from being on a level playing field. The fact is that our public schools have not been provided with the tools they need to prepare our children, to educate them, and to help them develop into the productive citizens that they can be and whom we need to enable this country to compete globally.

Primary among the deficiencies which impede the proper education of our children is the fact that in all of our districts, States and territories alike, there are too many schools which are dilapidated, unsafe, or do not have the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the technology that is needed to educate our children for this century, not to mention the next one.

My district, the Virgin Islands, is currently plagued with schools that are structurally inadequate, mostly due to damage from several powerful hurricanes over recent years; but insufficient funds to properly maintain the facilities have also taken its toll. Last year, the Virgin Islands Department of Education reported that there were air-conditioning deficiencies, inadequate infrastructure, shortages of classroom space even at the kindergarten level, dysfunctional locker rooms and bathrooms, lack of water fountains, substandard cafeteria facilities, potentially dangerous electrical hookups,

and more. In fact, the St. Thomas-St. John district proposed repairs of new construction totaling over \$40 million. At least the same amount will be needed to bring St. Croix's long-neglected schools up to standard as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, if we indeed believe that the children are our future and that the work of our village is to be the raising of our children, we are not doing the very best job. In fact, the majority of America's children who happen to be in the public school system are being neglected.

I feel that just as it is a criminal offense for families to neglect children, it is also a criminal offense that it happens within America's family, and it is to our shame. The children of this country spend most of their waking hours in schools. Looking at the schools we give them, we are saying to them day after day that we do not care about their well-being or their education.

And Mr. Speaker, they are getting the message. They are letting us know in clear messages of their own just how they feel about it.

So we cannot speak about improving education or opportunity in this country if we do not begin by putting the facilities in which our children spend most of their time, our schools, in order.

That is why I support the President's initiative which provides over \$22 billion for school construction bonds, as well as the legislation of the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL), the Public School Modernization Act of 1998, which provides for an education zone program, as well as a school construction bond program; and I also fully support H.R. 2695, the bill sponsored by the gentlewoman from California, the Expand and Rebuild America's Schools Act which would set up a pilot bond program to assist local education agencies and provide additional classrooms necessary to meet the ballooning needs of those communities.

These are initiatives that put our money where our children are.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this time to commend my colleagues who have provided leadership on this issue, such as the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) as well as the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL), the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY), the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS), and others who have labored long in this very same vineyard. I am pleased to join them in supporting the bill of the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) and the American public schools and supporting our children. I will continue to do so as long and until all of the needs of our children are met.

Mr. Speaker, before I close and turn this over to my colleague who will be speaking, I want to take the opportunity to welcome the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. CAPPS). I was not able to be here when the gentlewoman was sworn in last week, and we welcome her in many respects, but we

know that she has been committed for a long time to our children and that she will join us as we work to provide better schools for all of America's children.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE).

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) for organizing this special order this evening and for giving us an opportunity to focus attention on the urgent needs that our States and our communities have as we work to provide schools, quality schools and quality facilities for our children so that they can meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, I could not help but think as the previous speakers were talking and both of the gentlewomen were talking about school construction, what a different world it would be if children could vote. We would not be arguing about school facilities this evening; we would have them. We would not be talking about the need for infrastructure and having the kinds of technology that our schools need, and we would not be talking about all of these things that children need to be prepared for the 21st century. We would have it.

Mr. Speaker, prior to my service in this body, I served for 8 years as the elected superintendent of schools in the State of North Carolina. I have probably spent more time in school classrooms than any other member of this Congress.

In fact, just this morning, I taught all the 6th graders; well, I am not sure I taught, I spoke with the 6th graders at Terrell Lane Middle School in Louisburg, North Carolina, and we talked about the government and how they respond to government. We had a delightful time. But I can tell my colleagues from my experience that there are some wonderful things going on in the public schools in my State of North Carolina and in the schools across the country.

I can also tell my colleagues that we need to invest to upgrade our infrastructure, to relieve the overcrowding, to reduce class sizes, and to restore a sense of order and discipline for a solid learning environment in the schools of this country. Every day in America countless elementary and secondary school students are forced to attend classes in trailers, closets, portable classrooms, and substandard facilities.

In Wake County, which happens to be the county of our capital city, that county has 13,000 children who go to school every day in a trailer. In fact, in communities throughout the United States, we have an urgent need to build new schools, reduce overcrowding and class sizes, and improve good discipline and provide for quality instruction.

The General Accounting Office has officially estimated that nationwide, there exist in America some \$112 bil-

lion in unmet needs for modern school facilities. That does not even address the need for technology. In North Carolina alone, the School Capital Construction Study Commission reports that the most comprehensive study that has ever been done in our State identified school construction needs of more than \$6.2 billion worth of needs.

As a former school superintendent of schools, I know that we cannot expect our children to learn in substandard physical facilities. We cannot ask our teachers to maintain the kind of order in an environment that is conducive to learning if we relegate them to second-class infrastructure. We cannot adequately prepare the next generation to tackle the challenges of the 21st century if we fail to meet the needs of modern school facilities.

We would not dare, at a Chamber of Commerce meeting, to invite a new business to town and put them in the kind of buildings we put some of our children in to learn.

□ 2130

The problem is bad, and it is getting worse. Growing communities suffer under tremendous strain of overcrowded schools. Just last week the number crunchers at the Census Bureau confirmed what many of us have known for a long time: that our communities are cracking at the seams.

Since 1990 in my home State of North Carolina, my home county has grown by 18.9 percent. Johnston County, an adjoining county, has grown by 25.3 percent. Our capital county of Wake has grown by a whopping 29.4 percent. State legislatures from California to Virginia are struggling to provide the funds to build the schools that we need. I believe it is now time for Congress to do their part.

The administration has requested that Congress approve in next year's balanced budget a plan to provide \$19.4 billion in assistance to States for construction, rehabilitation, or repair of public school buildings. Under the administration's plan, our State, my own State, would receive roughly \$300 million for school construction.

I support the administration's plan, but I am also working on my own initiative to target additional school construction resources to those fast-growing States like North Carolina. We happen to be the second fastest growing State in the United States. North Carolina happens to be second only to California in growth.

The Secretary of Education has projected that over the next 10 years our State will experience the second largest growth rate in the country in the number of students enrolled in high school. This phenomenon is known as the Baby Boom Echo. It will present some immense challenges all across the country for school systems that are already under the stress of rapid growth.

I am drafting legislation to provide \$7.2 billion in school construction

bonds over the next 10 years specifically to those growing States that we know will need the resources, and many cannot meet those needs. My bill will be fully paid for by closing an obscure tax loophole that some seek to use to finance a risky voucher scheme.

The Etheridge bill is a commonsense approach to a very real and urgent problem. Members can be sure that I plan to work to the end of this 105th Congress, and I challenge my colleagues to join me. And once again, I thank my colleagues who are here this evening for organizing the special order to call attention to the tremendous need in school facilities all across the country. The children of America deserve quality facilities if we want quality education.

I say to the members, our teachers are doing an outstanding job in conditions that no business would put many of their employees in.

Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from North Carolina. If we here in Congress worked in some of those facilities in the same type of disrepair that our teachers have to work in and our children go to school in, we would probably not be doing a very good job, either.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from the 22nd District of California (Mrs. LOIS CAPPS).

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN).

Mr. Speaker, schools are so essential in our future. I firmly believe that it is our responsibility as a society to ensure that our schools are not failing our children. Rather, the role of schools is to assist families by providing a safe, even uplifting educational setting so that each child's full potential can be realized.

As a school nurse in the Santa Barbara school system for over 20 years, I have seen firsthand the damage that deteriorating schools can do. Students cannot thrive academically if they are learning in overcrowded and crumbling buildings.

As the gentlewoman just mentioned, imagine how hard it would be for all of us in Congress to work if we had to dodge falling plaster or work in our hallways or contend with leaky roofs. It would surely interfere with our concentration, and this is exactly what is happening to children all over the country at the most critical time in their lives for learning.

According to the General Accounting Office, one out of every three schools in America needs extensive repair or replacement. Surely we can do better than that for our children. Education is, first, a local and a State issue, but I believe that we have a responsibility to get involved at the Federal level as well. There is a role for us here.

This is a local problem which deserves a national response. When local school bond measures fail, local communities, with school boards, parents,

and teachers, need to find other resources to turn to. The proposed legislation will assist local districts in providing that option for educational settings that are quality for all of our students.

Today I have cosponsored two bills which address this problem. The first is introduced by my colleague, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY), which will provide \$5 billion in Federal funding for school construction across the Nation. Half of these funds would be distributed to the States and the remaining half would target 100 school districts with the largest number of students living in poverty. For the first time, the Federal Government will enter into a partnership with our local communities to rejuvenate our ailing schools.

Another innovative approach introduced by my colleague, the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. TAUSCHER), incorporates the use of State infrastructure banks which will be created with Federal seed money, and then offer a flexible menu of loan and credit enhancement assistance to local school districts.

I am also interested in proposals raised by Vice President GORE, where State governments could help schools issue bonds to modernize school facilities. Schools would owe only the principal to investors, who would receive interest in the form of Federal tax credit. This is a great idea. California has made real progress in school construction, and yet in my own district I have seen classrooms, being held in hallways, teachers lounges, utility rooms, and auditoriums.

On the other hand, when it goes well, we have so much to be proud of. Just three weeks ago I had the pleasure of touring the Sinsheimer School in St. San Luis Obispo. I was amazed with the advanced state of their school technology program which allows children easy access to modern computer labs.

The same is true at the Joe Nightingale School in Santa Maria, which was chosen as a blue ribbon school by the Department of Education because of its superior test scores and community-wide commitment to technology.

I have also had the pleasure of visiting recently Goleta's Kellogg School, another fine example of educational technology at work. If only all of our children could have such state of the art classrooms and programs to return to each morning.

Really, this is what it is all about, ensuring that all children, no matter what their economic status or the economic status of their community, that all children have safe, clean, adequate schools to attend each day. We must set our standards high, challenging our teachers and students to be the best they could be and providing them with the tools to do so.

Today we are preparing students for jobs in the new economy, where technological skills are of the highest importance. To do this, students must be

learning in school facilities which are well-equipped and up to date, including modern science labs and adequate wiring for access to computers and to the Internet.

We are not keeping up with these demands, and we simply cannot afford to look the other way another minute. America is only as good as its schools. We know that. We cannot prepare our children for the 21st century in outdated schools. Let us make this a priority for our children and for ourselves.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I would just like to thank our new colleague, and also say, considering that she is from California, that these initiatives are so important for our State in particular.

For example, the proposal that the President and Vice President GORE have with respect to interest credits is so important, when we take a look at the fact that when we pass a local bond issue to build new schools, in California we need two-thirds of the vote affirmative in order to pass that.

By saying that the Federal Government will give tax credits to pay the interest cost, what we are actually doing is giving an incentive to those on a local basis to take the responsibility on of building schools in their communities, and saying, we are going to help you hand-in-hand to ensure that the students of the gentlewoman's area, who are the students of America, are going to succeed in the future.

Mrs. CAPPS. If I could respond to the gentlewoman, that is exactly why, even though this is my second week on this job, during my campaign countless parents told me how critical this is to them in the State of California, where local bond issues do fail, and where we can, as the Congress, offer not a heavy hand but just a helping hand, a loan or seed money for an interest on a bank loan. That is what we are talking about.

Ms. SANCHEZ. I thank the gentlewoman. Now I yield to our good colleague, the gentleman from Maine (Mr. TOM ALLEN), from the other coast of the United States.

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) and the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN) for organizing this event tonight, and to say to our newest Representative in Congress, it is great to have her here. She is going to be a wonderful Representative for her district, I say to the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. CAPPS), and I am very glad to see the gentlewoman here.

Mr. Speaker, it is springtime in Maine. When I say springtime in Maine, I do not mean the snow is gone, because it is still on the ground. When I say springtime in Maine, that it is springtime in Maine, I am just saying it is after March 21. What that means to most municipalities in Maine and most school administrative districts is that budget time is coming.

For 6 years I was a member of the Portland City Council. I read six Port-

land school committee budgets. I went to all of our schools in the city, and I worked with members of the school committee trying to put together budgets that work for our community.

Since I have been a Member of Congress, I have talked in schools all around the District. I have talked to superintendents, school committee members, parents, teachers, principals, all trying to get a grip on the problems we have with our schools, and what we need to do in order to make sure that our children get the best possible education that will prepare them for the 21st century.

We have a late spring in Maine. We have, frankly, not much of a spring. We are not even in mud season yet. But I know that the debate is already beginning, because the way we fund our schools in Maine is primarily, almost entirely, with State money and with local money; now more local money than State money. That is raised on the basis of property taxes.

So every year in certain communities around the State of Maine we have a huge debate among those who are trying to hold down property taxes and those who are trying to make sure that the kids in that particular community have a fair chance to get a good education and move ahead. That debate is repeated all across the country. This is a national problem.

If we expect our children to grow, to prosper, to learn, we have to take account of the environments in which we are asking them to do that. With the current condition of our Nation's public schools, the question we have to ask is, what message are we sending to our children? One out of every three schools in this country needs extensive repair or replacement.

Nearly 60 percent of schools in this country have at least one major building feature in disrepair: maybe a leaking roof, maybe a wall that is not quite what it should be, maybe stairs that are deteriorating, but major problems. Nearly one out of every three schools in this country was built before World War II.

There is a recent report by the American Society of Civil Engineers which found that the only infrastructure category in the United States to receive a failing grade is our schools, the only infrastructure category in the country. It will cost \$112 billion to repair, renovate, and modernize our existing schools, and another \$60 billion over the next decade will be needed for new school construction.

Back in Maine we have some very good schools. We have some schools that are relatively new, but we also have some schools that are run down, that are not being renovated, that are not being replaced when they should be. It always comes back to that debate in the spring when some communities, some school administrative districts, realize they simply cannot afford to bring their schools up to the level of quality that they think they need.

Just in terms of numbers, in Maine there is about \$60 million in urgent health, safety, and legal compliance needs in the public schools. The total repair and renovation needs may be as high as \$637 million. More than one-half of the schools in Maine have unsatisfactory environmental conditions. Air quality conditions are aggravating asthma problems. That is a leading cause for absenteeism.

□ 2145

And some schools are really being forced to close unsafe schools.

Now, as I said before, the question always comes up: How do we pay for these schools? We have had referenda in some communities where the school budget has been voted down not once but two or three or four times before we get a school budget through, and that is often just for the operating expenses. And when communities have that kind of struggle over the operating expenses, they cannot get there in terms of funding the schools.

The people are saying we need new schools, but we cannot figure out how to pay for them. The Federal Government pays only 7 percent of education costs around the country and we could do a little bit more to help our local property taxpayers, to help our local communities and school administrative districts do some school renovations, school expansions, and school repairs.

The Federal Government, I believe, should support States and local school districts, help them afford the costs of school construction and modernization. I think that we in Congress can be proud of the fact that the 1997 Taxpayer Relief Act established qualified zone academy bonds, and they provide a source of capital at little or no interest. Now, while those qualified zone academy bonds are a step in the right direction, we need to do more.

Democrats in this House, including the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) have put forth a number of initiatives which support school construction and modernization. We need to deal with those proposals. We need those proposals to be debated here on the floor, not after hours, but while we are engaged in our legislative work.

It is time to say to our children and parents around this country that children remain our top priority for the 21st century. Our goal this decade, this century, has got to be to leave no child behind, and we cannot do that if we are trying to teach in crumbling schools around the country. It is time for a new national initiative to help not to take over the school system, but simply to afford some financial assistance to our States and local communities to help them upgrade the quality of our schools.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say "thank you" to both the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ) and the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN) tonight for

bringing us here to talk about this very important issue. I look forward to working with them both to make sure that we get something done.

Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN. Mr. Speaker, we thank the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) for joining us this evening.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. KLINK) for such time as he may consume.

Mr. KLINK. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding to me, and it is so nice to join my colleagues from the Virgin Islands to California, from Maine to North Carolina and all the States in between to talk about something that really, this is an issue that really comes down to good Democratic Party ideals, something that we believe in.

So much has been said tonight about the shortfall in investment in our schools and the need that we have. We have heard the statistics and too often these statistics just become raw numbers that we start throwing around, millions and billions and shortfalls, but there are real stories that are tied to the numbers that we are discussing on the floor tonight.

There are a couple of things that happen, and I think if we look at western Pennsylvania, we are in many ways a composite of what is going on around the whole Nation. In cities like Pittsburgh and communities like Aliquippa and Ambridge and Beaver Falls, those old industrial communities people have left because those industries have closed down, and when they leave there they move into a suburban area or they move to other parts of our Nation.

When they move to a new area, we have to build new schools because the population is increasing. We have to build new highways. We have to make an investment in infrastructure. And what is left behind is a shrinking tax base of primarily elderly people, people who do not have the means to be able to pay property taxes, people who do not have the good jobs, but they are stuck in those communities.

So what we are looking for is some help from State and Federal Government to say to the kids who are stuck in these communities that we are going to help, that we care; that as this Nation begins to move from the Industrial Age into the Information Technology Age that we are here as a Nation to establish an agenda to make sure that no child is left behind; that we are investing in safe schools, we are investing in building more space, more classrooms so people are not jammed in. We are investing in modern schools so that we do not have leaky roofs or asbestos that can cause harm to those kids.

In fact, I was on the floor a little earlier during the 5-minute segments, talking about the fact that it has been projected by our Commerce Department and by those people in the Information Technology Association of America that between now and the

year 2006 we are going to need 1.3 million new workers in the information technology field. What are we doing in this Nation to be able to train the students for those jobs? In fact, the industry has said we do not want to do that; we would rather import workers.

Now, I have got a problem with this. When we have got a lot of workers out there, like in my region of the country, southwestern Pennsylvania, during the 1970s and 1980s we lost 155,000 industrial jobs. During the debate on NAFTA, we admitted as a Nation that we were going to watch many of what we called the low-wage, entry-level manufacturing jobs move off shore, but the new economy, the Information Age, was going to ping up our work force and create tens of thousands of jobs.

Well, if we are going to import workers from other nations rather than spending money on schools, rather than spending money on training the students and retraining that displaced work force, what kind of a Nation are we? We should be looking at our people in this country. We certainly want to be a Nation that welcomes people; we have always done that. My family were immigrants from Europe. Other families are immigrants. We welcome that. But we also have a responsibility to give hope to the sons and daughters of the taxpayers who built this Nation.

And if we are going through a difficult time where we enter a worldwide economy, this Nation has to be willing to put its money where its mouth is. We have to be willing to invest from the Federal level on down in the building of schools, in the creation of more classrooms and the modernization of the teaching technologies that will match the technologies that these same students will be using in the workplace.

Those schools need to be safe. Those schools need to be effective. And we have seen study after study where the atmosphere of the school, the condition of the building, obviously has an impression on the ability of the students to learn and the teachers to teach. If people are going to work in any job in the worst conditions, in the worst physical plant, they cannot do the best job. And as a young impressionable student, if they are going to school in a school that is falling apart and the roof is leaking and windows are broken and there are dangers of asbestos and other kinds of things in the school building, then they cannot learn and the teachers cannot teach and they have a whole bad idea of their own self-esteem, the self-esteem of the school where they are coming from and they say, what is there to strive for?

Mr. Speaker, we owe our children better. And that is why I would like to thank both of my colleagues for moving forward with an idea that stands up for what the Democratic Party believes in. We believe that we have to take a nationwide view of where this country is going, of how this country is going to compete in a worldwide economy;

how we are going to prepare our work force, both those students who are growing up now, our sons and daughters as they are getting ready to enter the work force, and those workers who, as we have gone from a manufacturing industrial base technology into a technology that is information based, that is scientific based, that is technologically based, that we give them the tools, give them the schools, make the investment in those workers for training and for retraining so that we can educate that work force. Those people need to become taxpayers, not tax recipients.

Mr. Speaker, that is what this party stands for. That is why I am proud to be a Democrat. That is why I am proud to stand here at almost 10 o'clock when many people are home, but my colleagues are here working because we cannot talk about these things during the day. These things are not brought up on the floor during the day. They are not bills that are put on the calendar that we can vote on, even though 70 percent-plus of the American public believes we need to invest. The Federal Government needs to join the State government in investing, so that the burden does not fall only on those people paying property taxes, so that we are not taxing the elderly out of their homes by forcing the local government to raise all the taxes and to make their own determination as to how they can build school buildings.

So we need to find a national answer, and we in the Federal Government as the representatives of 500,000 people that reside in our district have that responsibility. We have that responsibility as Democrats, as Republicans, as independents, as citizens of this great Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their leadership on this issue, and thank them for the time to join them, and to them I say, "May God bless you for your efforts."

Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania very much for joining us. We want to call on our colleagues to bring these issues to the floor for a vote, as the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) said. It is important for us to gather here this evening to discuss the needs for school construction in all of our districts, but to be effective at doing this, we must bring it to debate on the floor when Congress is in session and vote on these issues and make sure that in voting we leave no child behind, as he has said.

The gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) mentioned the "Baby Boom Echo," which is a Department of Education report which highlights the need for expanding our Nation's classrooms. That report says that it is predicted that K through 12 enrollments will be at an all-time high of 52.2 million by this fall, and by 2007 the number will reach 54.3 million. The Secretary of Education anticipates that 6,000 schools need to be built over the

next 10 years to accommodate this school population increase.

These are the kinds of issues that H.R. 2695 is to address, and I think we could spend the few more minutes remaining to us to highlight some of the points in the bill offered by the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SANCHEZ).

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the subject of this special order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky). Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to talk about the particular bill that I have introduced into the floor here.

I have here a chart that I want to go over so that I can somewhat explain some of the situation that is going on. Mr. Speaker, tonight we have many of our colleagues here from across the Nation. This is not just a California problem. It is not just an Anaheim problem or a Santa Ana problem. It is really an opportunity for us to make the room to educate our children.

Remember that the schoolhouse is not only the room in which we educate our children of the Nation, but we also use our school buildings for other reasons. Boy Scout and Girl Scout meetings, special meetings of the community, and we do ESL classes at night for new immigrants who want to learn English. So the schoolrooms are actually used more often than just the 5 or 6 hours during the school day.

On this chart, this is the projected increase of children in the next 10 years across the United States. And we see here we have the five fastest growing as far as projection of school-children, the five fastest growing States: California, Hawaii, New Mexico, Utah, Idaho at about 16 percent to 11 percent, growing in the next 10 years.

Now here is the interesting point. Here is the Anaheim Elementary School District, the elementary schools of my hometown, and we are growing at a 25 percent rate. Let me tell my colleagues, Anaheim is a major city. It is the home of Disneyland. But I have a city right next to it, Santa Ana, and Santa Ana is also a major city and it has the youngest population of a major city across the United States. What does that tell us? We are full of youngsters in these towns. And we are growing at a 25 percent rate and yet, for example, in Santa Ana, we have 600 portable classrooms. Now, if we do the math, 600 portable classrooms is the equivalent of 27 elementary schools. New elementary schools. Where have we put these portable classrooms? We have put them on blacktop, on the places where our children used to play basketball and

dodgeball, and where they used to play soccer on the green fields, on the staff parking lots. We are actually using more and more of the playground and the other amenities that we need.

Mr. Speaker, I have gone to schools. One of the things about growing up in the same area that I represent is that I have gone to the same schools that I went to.

□ 2200

We used to have, a "breezeway" we used to call it, a separate hall. It is a tunnel between classrooms where you have a large amount of classrooms so that the teacher would not have to take the children all the way around all the building, of all the classrooms, you had to wait to cut in between. And that separate hall now has doors up on it and it has become a classroom. The broom closet of the janitor, the place where he used to store his round barrel with all the push brooms and everything, has now become an office of a therapist who now deals with 6 special ed children. These are the classrooms of today.

And I have classrooms in my district that actually do not have a classroom assigned to them, classes that, thank God, we are in Southern California, they teach outside; and on a rainy day, like when we have El Nino, we put them in a classroom where there is already a class going on, and it makes it very difficult to learn in those situations.

So not only are we bulging at the seams already, not only have we used up our space and now to the equivalent of 27 elementary schools, for example, but on top of that we have this almost double-growing happening in our area.

And that is why I say it is a local concern, it is the responsibility of people in local communities to stand up and say we need to do something about it and we want to do something about it. But it is also important for us to help at the Federal level, especially when we cannot build a school fast enough to house the growth that is going on. That is why these tax incentives are important. That is why we need to get involved.

Now let me tell my colleagues, it is not just willy-nilly; we are not just saying, oh, here, let us give away tax dollars up here. First of all, the restrictions on these are, for example, you must have already as a school district done something to help alleviate this problem.

Let me tell my colleagues what they have done at home. We have gone to year-round school. We do not go traditionally September through June any longer, and take the 3 months off of vacation time in the summer. And that is tough. Think about the fact that Southern California is a desert, so during the summer it is very warm in the classrooms, and those classrooms were not built with air conditioners. So in those classrooms where we might have had the funds to put an air conditioner

in, usually the air conditioner is louder than the teacher in the classroom. So it makes it very difficult to learn even if we have air conditioning in the classroom.

So we have done things. We have gone to year-round school. In fact, in Anaheim, if our bond issue does not pass on April 14, what will happen is we will go to double sessions, little kids going early in the morning to school and others coming home late at night after 5:00 p.m., when it is already dark at times during the year walking home or coming home. It is a very dangerous situation to be in.

Or what happens if you are a mother with 2 or 3 children, some going to the a.m. schedule, some going to the p.m. schedule, 1 of them going to a junior high that is on the traditional 9-month schedule, your other 2 children in the elementary school district going on the year-round schedule? How are you supposed to get your children there, take vacation, plan for the family? Think about that.

Or think about the fact that now we are having double or triple sessions of our children when they go to lunch and when our children stand 15 minutes in line to get their lunch. They sit down and have got 3 minutes to eat it because they have got to clear the picnic table for the next set of children to come on in. They have tried to solve their problems effectively, but it is still not enough.

Here is another problem that occurs for example: If you are using the school all the time, when do you do the normal wear-and-tear maintenance? How do you paint the graffiti out when the kids are there all the time? It becomes very difficult. Do you pay the custodian more to come in on Saturdays and Sundays? Because that is overtime; that is extra time. How do you make sure the kids' fingerprints do not show up on the wet paint because you cannot get it dry overnight? These are the difficulties that we are fighting, just very practical difficulties.

Secondly, what other incentive, what other restriction do we have? The business community must be involved in the school district. And we have very many partnership companies that have adopted schools that are helping with the technology aspect of schools. This is another thing that we put in.

Third, another way to qualify, another qualification that you need for this bill that we have got. They must have some children, at least 35 percent, who are on the school lunch program, i.e., it is a lower income area, someone who really needs the help. Because we were talking about property taxes earlier and there are really some school districts in dire straits.

Now, the issues for renovation that we already passed in the Tax Relief Act this past August targets the 100 most poverty-stricken school districts across the Nation. But there are even more who need help. I have to tell my colleagues, I know just how much we need

help because, it is a shame to say, but one of my school districts qualifies in that top 100 poverty-stricken school districts across the Nation.

But my bill would require that they meet some basic provisions; that we have a low income level; secondly, that the business community is working with them; and third, that they try to do something to help with the situation that they have before they would qualify to have the opportunity to try to pass a bond issue again, remembering in California this is a two-thirds vote, 66.7 percent of the people who come to vote must say yes, and then they would get a tax incentive provision to those investors in the bonds that would allow the interest cost to be picked up basically by the Federal Government.

So it is not just willy-nilly, it is really for those school districts like Anaheim Elementary School that have come forward and said, we need to do something, let us work very hard to get this bond issue passed; and it is a way for the Federal Government to say, we understand the need that you have there, we believe that "the fourth R" is important, and we are going to help you with that.

Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN. Mr. Speaker, I think we need to commend those school districts where they have made the effort to ease the overcrowding through creatively trying to address it. But as my colleague has pointed out, in many of those instances where they have tried to accommodate the overcrowded classrooms, our children have suffered. They have to rush. They have no playroom space.

And so the whole educational environment is compromised, and so they do not get the kind of nurturing and support that school is supposed to provide; and so it is very important that we pass bills such as yours to provide additional classrooms and alleviate that overcrowding and, in a sense, reward some of those schools that have really worked very hard to keep the standards of their classrooms up and relieve the overcrowding.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that is happening is that we are realizing as a nation that the smaller amount of kids we have in the classroom with the teacher the more they learn. We have tried in California for the past 18 months the 20-to-1 ratio. Our kids, we used to have 28, 32, 40 kids sometimes to every teacher in the classroom. So we tried in the beginning classes, first grade, second grade, third grade, to try to accommodate and go to 20-to-1 ratio. We put the money forward to do that, and we have brought on new teachers.

There is also a teacher problem; but we brought on new teachers, we cut it down to 20-to-1. And where we have done that up and down the State of California, we have seen an improvement in test scores. Teachers that work with the children in the classrooms say this is the best thing they

have ever seen, our children are learning. And guess what? No classrooms.

Here is another problem. We know what works: more outreach, more time with each child. It requires more rooms in which to teach. I noticed that the President's initiative, as it came forward in the budget, had an 18-to-1 ratio that he wants to try to implement across the United States. Why? Because it works. We know it works. We have tested it in California. We are there. The problem is "the fourth R," where do we find the room for this to happen?

Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN. I do not know if my colleague has ever experienced double sessions, but when I was a PTA president and served on the board of education in the Virgin Islands, we had double sessions; we had our children getting up in the dark, coming home in the dark, and it is a very unsatisfactory situation for children to have to go through in trying to just get a basic education. So we do not want our children to have to go through that again.

Another point that was made was that schools are used for more than just educating our children; and also as we have realized how important it is to have small class size, we have realized the important role that school facilities can play in our community for the enrichment and the learning of the entire community. And so again it even underscores much more strongly how important it is that we have facilities that can meet the many and varied needs of the community that we represent and that we serve.

Mr. SNYDER. Mr. Speaker, will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. SANCHEZ. I yield to the gentleman from Arkansas.

Mr. SNYDER. I wanted to add my voice of support for what my colleagues are talking about tonight. In Arkansas, I kind of divide our State into areas of rapid growth, the suburban areas; and then we also have the areas in which we have had lots of growth. And in all those areas there is a need for help with funding for school construction.

Our rapid-growth areas, I talk with superintendents, and each year they talk about how can we keep up with the growth of the next year, another elementary class? The problem we have with the folks that lose population is how do they keep up with the old school buildings?

I go, as I am sure all of my colleagues do, into the school buildings and take tours and meet the kids; and I went into one classroom and there was a huge hole in the wall. And every year they would patch it, but it is a structural problem and it leaks. And so those kids go in there every day to see the area where plaster is falling off the wall, yet we consider this as one of our very premier high schools in Arkansas, and I think it is a real problem.

It is too easy for us sitting here in Washington to say, that is a local problem, it is a State problem, it is not

anything we should worry about. And yet we expect our kids to be competitive around the world in jobs. We expect our kids to go into military and provide national defense. We expect our kids to be top, premier scientists to compete with the rest of the world. And yet we are going to turn our back on these school building problems, which I think is a real big part of what makes our kids do well in math and science with reading skills that we all expect.

So I do not know what the answer is in terms of the bill. But I know the first part of it is to call attention to the problem, and I commend my colleagues for doing it. In fact, I was back at my apartment watching C-SPAN and I thought, by gosh, I want to get in my two cents' worth on this issue. Because it is a big issue for Arkansas, and I appreciate my colleagues doing the work on it.

Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN. Mr. Speaker, we appreciate our colleague running over to join us and offering those words of encouragement and support.

Ms. SANCHEZ. I want to add something to that. My colleague talked about how we want our children to compete and be the best in the world. And we know that we are in an information age now, we are in the 21st century. I just had the Vice President out and he is a big pusher of technology in the classroom, and I was trying to tell him that in Anaheim Elementary, here is another reason why we need that bond issue passed on April 14. We have 3, count them, 3 phone lines into each of our elementary schools. That means when people call, to call in their kids being sick that morning, there are only 3 phone lines they can call in.

If someone needs to fax something, they are going to be using one of those phone lines. If the principal needs to be talking to somebody or making a phone call out, he or she is going to be using one of those phone lines. There are only 3 phone lines into that entire school.

If the teacher is in a classroom and an emergency is going on, there is no phone line into her classroom. Somebody has to get through the phone line at the front office and then somebody has to run down to that teacher's classroom and tell her something is going on and get the problem solved. Only 3 phone lines at a time.

Think about it, in our own businesses, imagine if in our businesses we had 60 managers and we had all these clients coming in and we had only 3 lines coming into our office, 3 lines in which to fax, et cetera, and call and take calls outside and bring calls in. How much work would we really get done?

And then add this to it. If we wanted to be on the Internet on your computers, if we wanted to be connected to the rest of the world the way all of us are now connected, we cannot do it on 3 phone lines alone. And that is why we need to put money not just to buy

them computers or bring them computers or to get them connected, but to redo the infrastructure that our children use.

Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN. Well, I do not know if there are any points that my colleague still wants to bring out in her bill.

I want to join my colleague who said earlier how proud he was to be a Democrat. We have several proposals that have been mentioned here this evening. We have H.R. 2695. We have one of the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL), H.R. 3320. The gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY) has a bill. The gentlewoman from California (Mrs. TAUSCHER) has a bill.

The Democrats really have been working very, very hard to improve education, beginning with the President's initiative.

□ 2215

I think with all of the bills that have been mentioned here this evening, we are putting together quite a comprehensive package that will begin to address the deficiencies in the school facilities while we also try to address giving the children the tools that they need and the teachers the tools that they need to educate our children. I am very proud to be a part of this caucus. I look forward to working with the other members of the caucus on their legislation and to see that it is passed.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I would like to end by thanking all my colleagues for spending their time tonight to highlight the situation, to bring forth their ideas and in response, yes, it is great to be a Democrat and to bring forward these initiatives. I hope that we actually get them on during the legislative day and get to vote on some of these proposals.

Mr. TORRES. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of increased funding for school construction and for bond initiatives to assist local communities in school improvement projects.

I have received numerous letters from my constituents regarding the need for action in this matter. These are not letters from large organizations or big corporations with a financial agenda. These letters are from junior high and high school students in my district. They are writing me to ask what I can do about the leaking ceilings and the crumbling walls in their schools. One of the high schools in my district has an entire section of its buildings sectioned off because it has been condemned. This is not only a crisis in my district but a crisis throughout the country.

We tell our children that they must maintain better grades, and that they must perform to higher standards, yet, we send them to schools that are falling apart. And we ask our teachers, who have one of the hardest jobs in the world and are grossly underpaid, to perform at higher standards, while sending them to work in substandard buildings.

One of the more promising ideas for reform is to reduce class size. This is a proven, effective method for improving academic achievement in students, but we need more classrooms to accomplish this goal.

We talk about reforming the public school system and debate over vouchers, block

grants and national tests. But tomorrow morning, millions of children will go to school in buildings that are inadequate.

We have an opportunity in this Congress, in his budget cycle, to give these children the classrooms they need to achieve their full academic potential. Let's not let them down.

Mrs. McCARTHY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleagues in support of school construction. I believe that the best way to give young people the chance to succeed in life is to ensure that they have a quality education. I spend every Monday and Friday in the schools on Long Island, talking with students, teachers, principals, superintendents, and parents about how we can make the education system work better. In visiting these schools, I see teachers and students who are committed to education. And these visits show me that we have great schools on Long Island. But these visits also show that many of the buildings in which our students learn are inadequate, overcrowded, and in poor condition.

Mr. Speaker, what kind of message do we send kids about reading when their libraries have no books? What message do we send to our teachers about teaching when their classrooms are overcrowded and run-down? And what message do we give to the world about our ability to compete globally when our computers are hopelessly outdated?

These problems were repeated in many of the schools I visited across Long Island—overcrowded classrooms, leaky roofs, broken doors, poor heating and bad ventilation systems. And this surprised me. I thought as many others do that this was an urban problem. Well, I was very wrong.

I decided to find out the true extent of the problem. Last Fall, I sent out a survey to every Superintendent in my District, asking them about the physical condition of their schools—the age of the buildings, whether they needed renovations, the quality of the roofs, the windows and the walls, and whether they had access to the Internet.

The response was overwhelming and insightful. Twenty three percent of schools say that additional space is a top problem and 44 percent said that classes are held in other areas. After the survey results were in, I visited the Washington Rose School, a school that reported many problems. I toured the facility with the principal, superintendent, and parents. And I talked with wonderful, bright children who are very eager to learn—but stuck in a school with physical problems.

In fact, one of the most serious was the speech teacher's office—a small desk with two chairs out in the stairwell. I thought to myself, how can any child work through a learning disability in the stairwell, with other children passing by?

Who is to blame for these problems? I have spoken with the principals, superintendents, teachers and the parents in my district. They are committed to making their school buildings the very best they can be. But it is expensive to rebuild and repair schools. And local money is simply not available.

School construction and renovation affect every corner of the nation, and each child in school now demands our attention. If we provide funds for school construction, then we will send a clear message to our young people that, yes, we do care about your education, and, yes, we do want you to learn in the best

environment possible. We can do no less for our children.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. ISTOOK) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. ISTOOK. Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to address an extremely significant issue that relates to our schools, that relates to some of our most cherished principles as citizens of the United States of America and that unfortunately involves things which the courts of the United States have thrust upon the people despite the unwillingness of the people, in fact despite great concern and opposition by the public.

This relates, Mr. Speaker, to the matter of what happens in our public schools. It relates to the practices that have gone on for generations upon generations in this country involving prayer in public bodies, in particular, in our schools.

I am not talking about this just to be talking about it, Mr. Speaker. I am doing it because we are going to have an opportunity in the next few weeks here in the House of Representatives to vote on correcting what the courts in the United States have done, what the U.S. Supreme Court has done in its bans and restrictions and prohibitions on the practice of simple prayers being offered at public school. That particular legislation is the Religious Freedom Amendment, House Joint Resolution 78. I am privileged to be the principal sponsor of it. There are over 150 Members of this body who are sponsors as well. I would like to share with my colleagues the text of that. The Religious Freedom Amendment is very simple and straightforward and tries to return us to what were bedrock principles of this country until the Supreme Court began undercutting those principles some 36 years ago. The text is very straightforward and reads as follows as an amendment to the U.S. Constitution:

To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience, neither the United States nor any State shall establish any official religion, but the people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage or traditions on public property, including schools, shall not be infringed. Neither the United States nor any State shall require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity, prescribe school prayers, discriminate against religion or deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion.

It is simple and it is straightforward. It states that just as the constitutions of every single State in this country state, we believe in the people's right to acknowledge God, and expressly mentions him, as the constitutions of the States do. No official religion, but not these restrictions that are put on prayer and positive expressions of reli-

gious faith but that are not applied to other forms of speech.

Why is religious speech singled out for discrimination? Mr. Speaker, in 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that even when participation was voluntary and even if it was some sort of non-sectarian prayer, it was unconstitutional, they said, for school children to join together in a prayer in their classroom. That was followed by other Supreme Court decisions, *Stone v. Graham* in 1980, in which the U.S. Supreme Court said that the Ten Commandments could not be displayed on the walls of a public school. Mr. Speaker, I would note that that decision came out of your home State of Kentucky because it was Kentucky schools that had the practice. Groups would make copies of the Ten Commandments available and they would be hung with other important documents as the source of law as well as the source of spiritual guidance.

I notice, Mr. Speaker, here in the Chamber of this House as I am facing and as the Speaker faces from the Speaker's dais, right there is the visage of Moses looking down on this Chamber, the great lawgiver who brought down from Mount Sinai the Ten Commandments which cannot be displayed in public schools. The U.S. Supreme Court says it is unconstitutional.

They went beyond that. They ruled in a case that came out of Pennsylvania, they ruled that a nativity scene and also a Jewish menorah could not be placed on public property during the holiday season unless right up there next to it you put nonreligious emblems, like plastic reindeer and Santa Claus and Frosty the Snowman. They had to be balanced. But, Mr. Speaker, I have never heard of any community that is required if they want to put out Santa Claus that they have to balance him with a nativity scene or a menorah or whatever it may be. It seems to be a one-way street.

The U.S. Supreme Court kept going. They had the case in 1985 of *Wallace v. Jaffree*. It came out of Alabama. Alabama had a law that said you can have a moment of silence to start the day at school, a moment of silence. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that was unconstitutional, because one of the permitted uses of that moment of silence was to enable students to have a silent prayer, and thus they said the whole moment of silence is even unconstitutional. And then a case upon which I would like to elaborate in 1992. By a 5-4 decision, the case of *Lee v. Wiseman* out of Rhode Island, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled a prayer at a school graduation to be unconstitutional. It was a prayer that was offered by a Jewish rabbi. The court held it was unconstitutional.

All of these things, Mr. Speaker, are what the Supreme Court has done to twist and distort and undermine our First Amendment, the very first right mentioned in the First Amendment, Congress shall make no law respecting

an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. Now, without even getting into the point of whether a school is creating an act of the Congress, and we are kind of two different bodies at two different levels, but to say that they are ignoring the part of the Constitution that says you do not prohibit the free exercise of religion, because what the Court did, Mr. Speaker, in all of these cases is to say that having a prayer or the Ten Commandments or a moment of silence or a nativity scene or a menorah, that that was the same as creating an official church. How absurd. An official church created just because you have a prayer? We open sessions of this Congress with a prayer. The House and the Senate, just like legislative bodies all around the country, be it State legislatures or city councils or private groups, Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, PTA meetings, people commonly open those things with prayer, just as we do here in Congress. It is normal. It does not make us a church just because we have a prayer. But the Supreme Court says, "Oh, you have a prayer at school and you're turning the school into a church." Therefore, they ignore the free exercise clause of the Constitution.

We have been living under this for 36 years. The only way that we are going to be able to fix this is with the religious freedom amendment, to straighten out the courts, by saying that the things they have said are somehow wrong are indeed, as the American people believe, right.

I said I wanted to focus on a particular case. That was the case in 1992 of *Lee v. Wiseman*. What I would like to do, Mr. Speaker, is in different evenings during these special orders in talking about the religious freedom amendment, I think it is important to dissect and to help Members of this body as well as the general public to understand what the courts said so that we can understand the necessity of correcting it with the religious freedom amendment. After all, that has been the method that we have used to correct Supreme Court decisions ever since the 1800s in America, including, for example, Supreme Court decisions such as the *Dred Scott* decision that were trying to uphold the practice of slavery. We made sure that it was outlawed.

Mr. Speaker, looking at the *Lee v. Wiseman* case, and I would note, it is a 5-4 decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. Had one justice, just one of the nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court gone the other way, we would not have this same problem when it comes to being able to have a prayer at a school graduation. Yet because one justice would not go the other way, we have to get two-thirds of the House of Representatives, two-thirds of the Senate to approve a constitutional amendment, and of course then it has to be ratified by the legislatures in three-