

6893, The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, into law shortly. I am proud to have voted for this bill, sponsored by my good friend Rep. JIM McDERMOTT, and I look forward to its implementation and the benefits it will bring to young people struggling to overcome their difficult circumstances.

Recent research indicates that across the Nation more than 24,000 youth "age-out" of foster care each year. This figure represents an increase of 41 percent since 1998 in the number of young people who leave foster care without having found a permanent connection to a family or stable adult.

Thus, youth who turn 18 and are discharged from the system find themselves on their own, without the support that most adolescents rely upon as they transition from childhood to independent adulthood. Without that support, former foster youth are known to struggle. One in four will be incarcerated within a year of leaving the child welfare system. One in five will experience homelessness in that same year. Rates of mental health diagnoses are higher than in the general population, yet access to treatment and counseling is sporadic. Additionally, these youth have extremely low rates of educational attainment and thus are frequently unable to secure and sustain employment sufficient to meet their basic needs.

The same research that documents these overwhelming challenges, however, also shows the benefits of extending foster care to age 21. A large, ongoing, multi-State study conducted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, indicates that when youth are allowed to remain in care beyond their 18th birthday, they fare significantly better than youth who cannot. Some States voluntarily extend the option to young adults who have been unable to secure a permanent connection, and when Chapin Hall compares their later life circumstances to those of youth who were turned out at 18, found that they achieved significantly higher levels of education, earned higher wages, waited longer to become pregnant and bear children, and they took increased advantage of available services.

The study's authors state clearly that their findings indicate that extending foster care services can support youth in developing into healthy, educated, productive, and independent citizens. By giving all States the option of continuing foster care services to age 21, the legislation Congress recently approved would allow States to continue vital support for their disconnected adolescent foster youth during a crucial life transition, increasing the likelihood that these youth will experience better ultimate outcomes.

As a long-time member and now chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, I have dedicated many years to the effort of improving the lives of children in foster care and have had the opportunity to work with many different individuals and organizations along the way. Today I wanted to highlight one group in particular for its efforts as it relates directly to the bill we just approved.

The John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes has played an invaluable role in identifying potential policy solutions to the documented difficulties of former foster youth. Under the leadership of California State Senator John Burton (retired), the foundation plays a critical role at the State and national levels

by bringing legislative attention to the needs of some of the Nation's most vulnerable young people. The foundation sponsors and advocates for legislation aimed at providing necessary ongoing support to youth who, by definition, the government has taken on the responsibility of parenting.

Through their advocacy to members of Congress and effective efforts to organize stakeholders in California, the John Burton Foundation has played an important role in ensuring that the extension of Federal funding to age 21 is included in this legislation. The evidence is solid and the conclusion is clear: Extending foster care services to age 21 to young adults raised in the child welfare system will support them in their effort to become healthy, independently functioning adults, and thereby honor the commitment made to them by the State and Federal governments.

Madam Speaker, I deeply appreciate the foundation's efforts and I deeply appreciate the work that my colleague, Rep. McDERMOTT, carried out in passing this legislation. Congress owes a great deal to children in foster care, and this legislation will be a very important step in that direction.

#### SEATBELTS FOR INCREASED BUS SAFETY

#### HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, September 25, 2008*

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, most of us are aware of the bus accidents that have been occurring around the country. Two years ago there was a fatal bus accident involving the Westbrook High School girls' soccer team in Beaumont, Texas. Just this year, there was an accident in Sherman, Texas, which involved several Vietnamese community members. Similar incidents occurred in Liberty, Missouri, Arlington, Virginia, New York City, and New Orleans, to name a few.

These tragic bus accidents demonstrate that school bus safety reform is an urgent issue. While school buses are among the safest mode of transportation, these re-occurring accidents are unacceptable. School buses need to be safer.

The widespread bus crashes have sparked a comeback in the idea of seatbelts in buses. Seatbelts raise the issue of whether they would increase bus safety.

According to the Texas Department of Transportation, Texas safety belt use has topped 90 percent, this being the third year in a row. The majority of people in Texas are wearing their seatbelts in cars and trucks. But few to no passengers are wearing their seatbelts in school buses. Currently, there is no Federal mandate on seatbelts in buses.

Every State, except New Hampshire, requires by law that car and truck drivers and passengers wear seatbelts. This is because seatbelts work—they increase a passenger's chance of survival in a crash. In short, seatbelts save lives.

If laws require passengers of cars and trucks to wear seatbelts, why are there no requirements for buses to even include seatbelts? In many States there are variations of "Click it or Ticket" policies that threaten motorists who don't wear seatbelts, yet no such

laws apply to the buses that carry our children and community members on a daily basis.

Certainly, buses are made very different from cars and trucks. For one, buses can carry many more passengers than any car. Some of these differences might lead one to believe that there should not be a mandate on seatbelts in buses. These differences have not stopped bus drivers from being required to wear seatbelts. So why not for school bus passengers as well?

Some claim that seatbelts may not be properly worn by passengers or cause injury. If anything, it shows that seatbelts should be made better. However, to completely disregard seatbelts as a safety precaution is absurd.

The answer appears to be that of common sense. While seatbelts are in no way a quick fix and there are many questions surrounding seatbelts in buses, they should be looked into as one of the very many necessary measures taken to ensure school bus safety.

MR. JOHN DIEDERICH

#### HON. PETER J. VISCLOSKY

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, September 25, 2008*

Mr. VISCLOSKY. Madam Speaker, it is with great respect and sincerity that I take this time to honor one of Northwest Indiana's most distinguished business and community leaders, Mr. John Diederich of Crown Point, Indiana. On Thursday, September 25, 2008, John will be honored by the Northwest Indiana Forum for his many years of service as a dedicated executive and his many contributions to the Northwest Indiana community. This extraordinary event will be taking place at Gamba's Ristorante in Merrillville, Indiana.

John Diederich has been a fixture in the banking industry in Northwest Indiana for the past thirty-four years. Following his collegiate studies, where he earned a degree in Accounting from Calumet College of Saint Joseph in Whiting, Indiana, and a degree in Finance from Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana, John entered the banking industry as a controller at Commercial Bank in Crown Point, Indiana. From there, he went on to serve as a commercial lender for Gainer Bank before being named its Division Manager for Commercial Lending in 1989. Mr. Diederich remained in this position until 1996, when he was named Manager of Private Banking and Investments for First Chicago NBD. Following a brief stint as Manager of Commercial Lending with Bank One, he was named Regional President of Bank One in 2000, and remained in that role with JPMorgan for the last eight years.

Throughout the years, John Diederich has become known just as much for his contributions to his community as to the banking industry. One of the most giving and selfless individuals I have ever had the pleasure of knowing, John has dedicated much of his time focusing on the development of the economy in Northwest Indiana, most notably as a past chairman of the Managing Board of Directors for the Northwest Indiana Forum and as a founding member and past president of the Regional Development Company. John has also volunteered much of his free time working with organizations that help children in his