Mr. Speaker, there are many more issues that I could review, but I think I am approaching the end of my time.

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HASTINGS of Washington). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PETERSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, we are hearing increased rhetoric, some of it bordering on fantasy and hysteria, concerning global climate change. What is lacking and desperately needed is a full and open and robust debate. Is our climate changing?

One temperature measuring system suggests that since 1900 there has been less than 1 degree of warming. Two other systems point to a slight cooling trend. While treaty supporters assert that the science of issues of global climate change are settled, the evidence clearly and loudly says that the debate should just be beginning.

Here are some of the risks not mentioned by treaty supporters: the risk that energy suppression mandates will devastate employment in major U.S. industries; that rising fuel and electricity prices will depress the living standards of American families; that new tax and regulatory policies will handicap employers, enrich special interests and expand bureaucracy and risk the surrendering of more U.S. sovereignty to the U.N.

Now, some people think that the Kyoto Protocol is the flawed execution of a bad idea, based on the conceit that government planners can know today what will be the worst calamity facing mankind 50 or even 100 years from now. Mobilizing the nations of the world and spending vast sums to fend off one possible threat that may prove to be nonexistent or trivial compared to the age-old scourges of poverty, hunger, disease and oppression is not a prudent insurance policy.

The resources available to protect human health and safety are limited, especially in the Third World. Any policy that diverts trillions of dollars from real problems and real science to speculative and imaginary ones, or that locks mankind into politically correct and industrial policy schemes can only make societies less resilient, less able to meet the challenge of an unknown future.

Mr. Speaker, should we risk the American economy and way of life before the evidence is conclusive? Let us have the debate first. Let us not approve the many billions of dollars that the President has requested to start implementing in this year's budget. The President has not submitted a treaty to the Senate. No debate has been held in the Senate. No ratification of a treaty has taken place.

Let us tell the President, no, no, no, on funding until we have the debate first and until the evidence is conclusive. I have no doubt that if the evidence is conclusive, if we do come to that conclusion, this Congress will do whatever is necessary to resolve the problem.

But until we have that debate, until the evidence is in, until we have absolute proof, let us say no to the President to spending billions of our tax dollars, starting this year, on a treaty that has not been approved by the Senate.

REPUBLICAN AGENDA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from California (Mr. RIGGS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our leadership for designating me as the person representing our leadership and House Republicans during this special order. The very first thing I want to do is compliment the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. PETERSON, who preceded me to the well for his very, very incisive remarks on the global warming theory, particularly when we get so much ''chicken little'' hysteria on environmental issues back here in Washington that are not always supported by very sound science. I thank him for his comments today. I join with him in his efforts.

I also wanted to take the floor to address the House during this special order because just a couple of days ago the President accused congressional Republicans, since we are the majority party and we do have a responsibility for governing the legislative branch of government and the country, to accuse us of being a do-nothing Congress, specifically with respect to his proposals.

So I would like to challenge his comments, I do not think they should go unchallenged or that we should allow them to stand without a rebuttal, and try to put things in context for my colleagues; and to, and for, frankly, our fellow Americans who might be viewing or listening to this debate.

First of all, with respect to the President's new education proposals, let me assure my colleagues that we Republicans in the Congress have our own agenda. It focuses on common-sense reform, not creating more bureaucracy back here in Washington, not funding a host of new Federal programs and regulations with your hard-earned tax dollars.

We would prefer, we Republicans would prefer to focus on parental involvement and parental choice in education. We understand that the key to improving education in America today is to empower parents to choose the education and the schooling that is most appropriate, that they deem most appropriate for their child. We understand that empowering parents through greater choice in education is the only way really to make our education system more competitive and, therefore, more accountable. It is called ''bootstrap improvement'' because empowering parents, giving parents more choice, and I favor giving parents the full range of choice among all competing institutions, public, private or parochial, that has been my position even before I was elected to Congress and certainly before last year when I assumed the chairmanship of the education subcommittee in the House.

I personally believe that empowering parents to choose the school and education that is appropriate for their child is the only way to make schools more accountable. However, that involves what we would call a paradigm shift. That involves shifting the focus in education from the providers of education, the whole education establishment, including the very powerful teachers' unions, shifting the focus from them, the providers of education, to parents, the consumers of education.

We are working hard to do that here in Washington. We are working hard to help working families and stay-at-home mothers.

With respect to the President's child care proposal, he wants to put more and more emphasis on institutionalized, that is to say ''outside the home,'' child care, especially for families where both parents work. We Republicans believe that as a matter of government policy and in terms of spending again your hard-earned tax dollars, we should not favor institutionalized day care. We should not, as a matter of policy, almost discriminate against families where one parent chooses to stay at home in order to be there for the children, in order to provide the children with the additional care and nurturing that they need during their early or all-important formative years. In fact, we think that, again with respect to child care, the President's emphasis is in the wrong place, that we ought to reverse his emphasis and put more emphasis on helping families keep more of what they earn so that both parents do not necessarily feel compelled to work outside the home in order to be able to meet the needs, the financial needs of that family.

With respect to education, we also want to drive more money down to the local level. We would prefer that at least, at least 90 cents of every Federal taxpayer dollar for education, every dollar that you send to Washington that is earmarked for Federal education purposes and programs, we would like to ensure that at least 90 cents of every dollar go back down to the local level, ideally to the classroom to pay someone who actually knows that child's name, who works with that child on a daily basis, rather than continue to use it to build more bureaucracy back here in Washington.

□ 1615

That only leads to concentrating more power, more money, more decision-making in Washington as we Federalize education and move further and

further away from the long-standing American tradition in public education of local control and local decision-making.

Now, I specifically want to challenge the President's assertion the other day that this has been a do-nothing Congress, or that we are at risk of falling into that mode. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It would be wonderful to have the opportunity to actually debate the President or some high-ranking official in his administration, because the truth of the matter is that last year we passed more than a dozen common sense education proposals either through the Congress, through the House, which are now pending in the Senate; or through the Congress which were vetoed by the President; or, in a few cases, legislation that we were actually able to pass through the Congress and convince the President to sign into law.

But we now have proposals pending in a number of areas. We have a reading excellence bill that was passed by the House of Representatives and is now pending in the other body, which is how we are supposed to refer to the Senate, that provides literacy grants for parents.

We have a job training bill and a vocational education and technical training bill for young people that focuses on young people who are not college-bound or who, if they go to college, will not complete college, so that those young people can hopefully get the education and job skills that they need to take advantage of this knowledge-based economy and all of the unfilled information technology jobs in this economy that pay a living wage. I will have more to say on that in just a moment.

We did pass a bill improving educational opportunities for children with special educational needs, learning disabled children, and that was passed through the Congress on a bipartisan basis and signed into law by the President.

We also have a bill that I authored that addresses juvenile crime, since juveniles, young people, account for the fastest growing segment of the criminal population. And it is a bill that I believe is tough on punishment but also smart on prevention. That legislation has passed the House and is pending in the Senate.

So I would like to know from the President what he proposes to do about the fact that so many of our bills that have emanated here, originated in the House of Representatives, actually originated in my subcommittee, passed through our full committee, passed through the House and are now languishing in the other body, the Senate, which all too often becomes the graveyard for well-intentioned legislation. I would like him to work with us to convince the members of his party in the other body to allow our legislative agenda to go forward. Because otherwise his comments about this being a, quote-unquote, do-nothing Congress are a little bit disingenuous.

We also want to provide more Federal taxpayer assistance in the form of scholarships or, as some prefer to call them, vouchers to needy inner-city children, beginning here in the District of Columbia. The District of Columbia public schools have the highest dropout rates and the lowest test scores of any large school district in the country. And again I want to emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that the President should support these education initiatives before creating a host of new programs that would compete with these programs for the same limited, in fact, precious Federal taxpayer dollars.

So I guess my first message to the President is first things first. Let us support the programs that we have already passed through the House of Representatives, not new ones that happen to sell well in an election year because they make for a catchy sound bite or because it is a proposal that is based on some poll or on some focus group. That is not the way to make good policy.

And I am very disturbed that the administration is also proposing now to cut, to cut, everyone heard me right, the President in his budget proposal to the Congress is now proposing to cut some very important education programs, while on the other hand talking about creating a bunch of new education programs. That does not make a lot of sense.

In fact, one of the programs that the President and his administration are talking about cutting is the Even Start Family Literacy Program. That is a program that is focused on very young children. It is an expansion of the Head Start program because it also works with the parents of those young children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds when the parents themselves have reading problems or lack fluency in the English language, which is, after all, the commercial language of our country. And in my view we should designate the English language the official and common language of our country as well.

So the President is proposing, or at least his administration is proposing to cut the Even Start Family Literacy Program, and he is proposing to cut funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It is called IDEA, and that acronym, since there is an acronym in Washington for every program, that acronym stands for the Federal special education program. In fact, it is a civil rights and special education program because it is designed to ensure that every child with a learning disability receives a free and appropriate education under our civil rights statutes.

Now, we know this program works. We made modifications and improvements to it last year on a bipartisan basis and the President signed that legislation into law. And no sooner do we get it signed into law than the President turns around and is proposing to cut funding for that program.

Now, consider this. When I talk about him proposing to cut funding in his budget proposal, this program, IDEA, the Federal special education program is the only curriculum mandate imposed on State and local school districts by Washington. There is no other curriculum mandate in Federal law, yet we continue to underfund this mandate.

In fact, I think the best way to think of it is probably the mother of all unfunded Federal mandates because we require that local school districts comply with this law. Like I said, it is a curriculum and legal mandate, yet we have never fully funded compliance with that mandate by State and local school districts.

We personally believe, we Republicans, that that should be one of our country's top priorities. That should be the number one education priority in this country. Because when Congress first passed this law way back in 1975, we promised to pay 40 percent of the additional cost of special education created or incurred as a result of the Federal legislation.

However, today, even with the historic funding increases that we have given this program in recent years since Republicans became the majority party in the Congress, Federal taxpayers are only covering 9 percent of the total cost of special education in America today. Nine percent versus the original promise back in 1975 of 40 percent.

And even though we are at 9 percent, a record high, the President wants to reduce that next year in his budget proposal. We believe that a promise made should be a promise kept, and that we ought to live up to the promise made 23 years ago, especially to those families who have children with learning disabilities and special needs.

We also know that there is plenty of room to cut the Federal education bureaucracy here in Washington. The Federal Government today has roughly 788 education programs at a cost of $97 billion. My colleagues heard me right; 788 programs on the books, administered by the Department of Education and dozens of other Federal agencies and commissions spread across the whole Federal government's bureaucracy.

We believe that there ought to be a bipartisan effort in the Congress to focus on reforming existing programs before creating expensive new and potentially duplicative Federal programs. We have certainly had ample debate here in the Congress, and we have heard from the Secretary of Education and others in the Clinton Administration who claim that somewhere between 100 to 200 of these 788 programs are actually not real education programs because they have never been funded.

But our response to that is, if that is the case, if these programs have been

created by an act of Congress but never funded, then they should be taken off the books. It is time to completely sunset them, get rid of them. If we did that, it would just narrow us down to or it would reduce us down to somewhere in the neighborhood of 500 to 600 programs that we already have for education in America today, even before we begin discussing the new ones that the President proposes.

Secondly, I want to make the point that the money is really not there for a host of new Federal education programs. The President's spending proposals would return us to the era of big government. And it was just a few years ago that he stood right here behind me at this podium at the microphone to address the Nation and the Congress during his State of the Union address and declared that the era of big government was over.

Well, one could not tell that from looking at his budget proposal this year. His new proposals would cost American taxpayers $10 billion, that is capital B-I-L-L-I-O-N, $10 billion more in new spending over the next 5 years.

And it is a phony proposal. Why do I say phony? Because it assumes that the Federal Government is going to get a windfall from this settlement of the large class action tobacco lawsuit brought by the State governments against the tobacco companies. Well, anyone who has followed those discussions or those negotiations having to do with the tobacco settlement knows that the outcome of those negotiations is very problematical.

I think it is very doubtful whether we will see any money from the tobacco companies in the next Federal fiscal year, yet the President is proposing to use that money to help fund $10 billion in new spending over 5 years. We think it is wrong to mislead American families into thinking that they will have new programs funded by a tobacco settlement that may never come to pass, number one; and, number two, if we do get a settlement of the tobacco lawsuit, the proceeds of that settlement ought to be used for anti-tobacco initiatives aimed at our young people.

The proceeds from that lawsuit ought to be used to discourage and prevent tobacco addiction on the part of our young people. They ought to be used also for more medical research into the causes of cancer in the hopes we can find a cure to cancer, because that would have a tremendous effect of reducing public health costs in our big Federal programs, Medicare and Medicaid.

So I do not think we can make a just argument that the tobacco settlement proceeds should be used to pay for a host of new programs. And by the way, it appears that the American people are very leery of new Washington spending. According to a recent Louis Harris poll, 45 percent of all Americans said we should use the budget surplus to reduce the debt. That was their top priority in terms of spending any actual Federal budget surplus, and we still have a ways to go before we run a surplus back here in Washington. Forty-one percent said they wanted to reduce taxes by the amount of any surplus. And only 13 percent of the public said that they would increase spending on, quote, valuable government programs, with a Federal Government surplus.

I also am concerned that the President is putting Washington in charge of our schools. It is clear when we look at his proposals that he wants to nationalize education by federalizing initiatives and solutions to our educational concerns and problems back here in Washington. It is almost as if he wants the United States Congress to become the de facto national school board, and we do not think that is the way to go. No matter how these programs are designed and funded, they will ultimately come with Federal regulations attached. That is the one absolute given. That is what happens here in Washington.

Now, President Clinton would rather fund programs that support the Washington education bureaucracy than programs that send funds directly to teachers in classrooms. That is the philosophical conflict between the Democratic party and the Republican Party, and it is a conflict that plays itself out in debate in this House and in the committees of this House on a daily basis.

In fact, the President wants to cut funding, and here is another area where he proposes to cut education funding, something that we do not hear from the administration and we do not hear often from the news media. The President wants to cut $476 million in Federal education aid that goes directly to communities. He wants to cut $476 million in Federal education aid that goes directly to communities in the form of a block grant while increasing, while increasing the U.S. Department of Education activities by $143 million.

His budget proposal flies in the face of the priorities of local control in education and empowering parents to choose the schooling and the education that is right for their children. The President wants to completely eliminate the Title VI State block grant which provides funds for teacher training, technology and education reform. This is a program that is used by school districts around the country to buy much-needed computers, to develop school technology, and to implement parental involvement activities.

□ 1630

In fact, last year 191 Members of this body, the House of Representatives, voted for my legislation, the HELP scholarships legislation, that would have allowed States and local communities to use funding under this Title VI State block grant, to also provide scholarships, tuition scholarships or vouchers, to low-income families. And now we learn, perhaps as a result of that proposal, that the President wants to eliminate the program altogether.

So here we have the President talking about reducing funding for special education, eliminating the State block grants for education, and cutting money for the Even Start Family Literacy Program. He wants to cut two of the most effective programs that drive money to the local level, the Even Start Family Literacy Program and the Block Grant Program, as well.

Now, the President's new spending proposals also duplicate existing Federal programs. The President has proposed, like I said earlier, a host of new or expanded teacher training initiatives in technology, in urban areas, and in bilingual education. We do not understand why these priorities cannot be funded by existing programs, programs that we already have on the books, programs that we are already funding, like the Eisenhower Professional Development Program or those Title VI block grants that I just mentioned.

He is also proposing a new program called the Educational Opportunity Zones Initiative that looks an awful lot like the existing Title 1 program, which is a 30-year program that provides remedial education to our disadvantaged children. So it is hard not to be a little skeptical, even cynical, about the President's proposal because it seems to us, again, to be largely a poll-driven proposal full of catchy sound bites in an election year, and an attempt to use this particular issue, education, which is so important to our country and so near and dear to the heart of American parents, to use that issue for partisan political advantage during an election year. And I would have sworn I heard the President say in his State of the Union that we ought to make sure that partisan politics stop at the schoolhouse door.

We recognize that teaching is important, and that is why in the coming weeks, House Republicans, we will be putting forward our own proposal in the area of teacher training and classroom size reduction. But we are not going to be creating new programs as we do it, we are going to do it in the context of the higher education bill that is now pending in the Committee on Education and the Workforce; and we are going to make sure that it is fully paid for.

By that, I mean we are going to make sure that the cost of creating this new teacher training and classroom size reduction initiative is offset by cutting spending somewhere else in the Federal budget. We are very committed to improving the quality of teaching in America. Let me stipulate that I believe that teaching is a missionary calling. I believe the old saying that a teacher can affect eternity because he or she never knows where their influence might end.

But the point with respect to teaching is very simple; we want quality, not necessarily quantity. The administration takes the opposite approach; it

is quantity not quality, they say. That is why they are talking about 100,000 new teachers, when in reality we do not believe that there is a teacher shortage on a national basis in America, that the teacher shortage, where it exists, exists in just a few areas of our Nation and then it is a shortage in getting good quality teachers.

We also believe that we have to focus on more effective ways to improve student learning, and the best way to do that is to improve in traditional teacher training at colleges and universities. We focus a lot on how to teach, but not enough on what to teach in American education today.

So we are going to see our proposal coming forward in the next few weeks. We hope it can be bipartisan. But we will have more of an emphasis on quality rather than quantity when it comes to improving teacher preparation and teacher training in America today.

I also want to touch one of the President's other initiatives, and that is school construction. Now, we Republicans recognize the concerns of parents who live in those communities that have overcrowded and/or crumbling schools or schools that are deteriorating because of a lack of maintenance. They already have a lot of deferred maintenance, a lack of funding to keep abreast of maintenance needs and certainly a lack of funding to help expand schools in those communities that have a growing school-age population.

However, asking the Federal Government, Federal taxpayers to become involved in what is traditionally a State and local responsibility; that is to say, the funding of school facilities, raises a host of new concerns. And rather than ram something through the Congress, we want a careful, deliberate, thorough debate about school construction and the role of the Federal Government and Federal taxpayers in addressing that concern.

We believe that the President's proposal could erode local support for public schools because, once again, it would place Washington in the driver's seat with Congress as a national school board determining which communities would qualify for school construction assistance from Federal taxpayers and which would not, conversely.

A lot of States, including my own State of California, have already passed new construction initiatives. And I worry that this new Federal Construction Program for local schools would, in essence, punish States and communities that support their schools and reward those that do not. So we want to have a very careful, thorough discussion of the school construction needs of American communities and a debate about the legitimate Federal interest and role in addressing that need before we even consider creating yet again another Federal Education Program at considerable expense to Federal taxpayers.

I wish we could focus more when we talk about education on local control and more accountability, as I said in my opening comments, through competition and choice. I am very proud of the work that we have done in this Congress on charter schools. Charter schools are independent public schools that are free of a lot of the usual red tape and regulations that all too often strangle innovation and flexibility and site-based decision-making in education.

We were able to pass a bill through the House of Representatives. Once again, it is now like so many of our other initiatives pending in the other body, the Senate, that would help States and local communities create more charter schools, which is the first step on the road to full parental choice in education today.

I cannot think of a better way, though, to empower parents and teachers than through the idea of independent public choice schools, like charter schools, where more decisions can be made, not just at the local level, but actually at the site level on that school campus. That is one reason why I like the idea of charter schools.

I also favor the idea of tuition tax credits and opportunity scholarships. I think it is, perhaps, time that we built on the centerpiece of last year's tax relief legislation and the centerpiece of the Contract with America, I might add, which, despite the opposition of so many of our Democratic colleagues in the Congress, is slowly but surely becoming law.

I think it is time that perhaps we built on the centerpiece of the tax relief legislation and the Contract with America, the $500 per child tax credit for families with dependent children, and credit a new $500 per child tax credit, but this one specifically and solely for education purposes. It would be a $500 per child tax credit that any family could use to meet the educational needs and expenses of their children.

They could use it at a public school, or they could use it at a private or parochial school. They could use it for any legitimate education purpose as they see fit and as they deem appropriate for their child, because that is very much in keeping with the idea of parental choice.

It respects the idea of the fundamental truism that it is their money, and it is their child. It is their future that we are talking about when we discuss parental choice in education.

I mentioned our literacy grants for parents that are already in our reading excellence bill. That has passed the House once again; now pending in the other body. I believe that we ought to go one step further and reform our Federal bilingual education programs this year in this Congress, with a goal of every child being able to read and write by the end of first grade in English, the official, the common and commercial language of our country.

My pending legislation to reform Federal bilingual education programs would give parents the right to decide whether their child participates in a bilingual education class. It would require that local school districts and local schools obtain the written consent, the permission of the parent before their child could be enrolled in a bilingual education program.

Lastly, I want to say on education that I am concerned that so many of our young people are losing out in today's economy. Mr. Speaker, we have somewhere in the neighborhood of 350,000 to 400,000 unfilled good paying jobs in our economy today, with our economy creating more jobs, more jobs because the economy is prosperous, creating more such jobs with every passing day.

What are these jobs, and where are these jobs you might ask? These are information technology jobs. They are relatively high skill. They pay a high entry-level wage, a living wage, I guess you could say, a living wage in the range of $40,000 to $60,000, with generous benefits at the companies that have these unfilled positions, with the opportunity for rapid advancement and a promotion to salary in the range of $80,000 to $100,000 a year.

Yet, all around us, we have young people who lack the education and job skills necessary to take advantage of these kind of jobs. These are jobs that require that a young person, young person graduating high school today, or if they go on to college, a young person who, after their 13th or 14th year of education, be technologically capable and computer-literate.

These are jobs that are all over the country, but they appear to be especially concentrated in my home State of California, many of the jobs, of course, in the Silicon Valley, which, in many respects, started our whole electronics revolution and helped create the information and knowledge-based economy of today and of the 21st Century, which is right around the corner.

But there are jobs that are also found in Austin, Texas. There are jobs that can be found in the research triangle of North Carolina. There are jobs that can be found in just about any metropolitan community in the country today. There are jobs that can be found within a few miles of the United States Capitol, just across the Potomac River in Northern Virginia, or just around the corner in Suburban Maryland.

Yet, think about all the young people in the District of Columbia, which has a, like I said earlier, a very dismal graduation rate, a very high dropout rate. About 50 percent of the kids who enter the District of Columbia public schools in the ninth grade, their freshman year, actually graduate 4 years later.

Think about those young people trapped and failing in underperforming schools and relegated to a life of poverty, all too often anyway, poverty, joblessness, hopelessness. Why can they not take advantage of those jobs that are just literally, 15, 20, 30 miles away? It is an absolute tragedy.

Why should they be sentenced to living an adult life of dependency or worse? Why should society, taxpayers as a whole, bear the cost for the failure of the school system to prepare those young people for the jobs of tomorrow? They are really not the jobs of tomorrow because, like I said, they are here and now, 350,000 to 400,000 such jobs over the country, with the economy creating more of these types of jobs, these living-wage jobs with every passing day.

Why are not our schools preparing our young people to compete and succeed in a knowledge-based economy? Well, we are struggling with the answers to that, but it all comes back down to a lack of academic preparedness for our young people.

I personally despair a great deal because I know in my heart of hearts that we, as a country, cannot afford to lose another generation of urban school children. I only see change coming about when we shift the focus in education, as I said earlier, to parents and students.

For those of us who believe that we will only get reform and real improvement when we embrace the idea of school choice, I would cite these statistics. This is a recent Gallup poll that was done for a group called Phi Delta Kappa International. In the poll, 72 percent of black parents, 72 percent of African Americans favored parental choice, including taxpayer-paid vouchers for private school.

□ 1645

Sixty-three percent of Hispanic American parents favored the idea.

Mr. Speaker, I want to submit that we cannot leave those young people behind. We cannot relegate them to failing or underperforming schools. We have to give them a way out. We have to ensure that they have the knowledge and the education and the job skills to take advantage of this economy and these kind of jobs, and that our failure to do so will be nothing less than a national disgrace. But for those young people, the have-nots of tomorrow, the future have-nots of the 21st century, for those young people, it is a personal tragedy.

I submit that we have to have more choice in education in order to empower parents. Ultimately, we have to recognize that parents are responsible as the first and best teacher of their children, and responsible for the education that their children receive. I guess it is almost as simple as really, if we are going to give students a chance, we have to give parents a choice.

The other thing I want to do, Mr. Speaker, in closing out my comments under this special order, is to talk about an even more fundamental lesson in education, and that is the moral lessons that we teach our kids. I personally believe that there is nothing more important than personal morality. I am concerned that our young people today, in part because of events here in Washington, D.C., may not be receiving that message.

I am here today to stand and say unequivocally to our young people, and I can say this as the father and parent of three children myself, that the truth matters and that character counts. There is nothing more important, nothing more important in your life than your personal morality and your ability to influence other people around you by your own moral example.

The problems that plague our Nation today, aside from the education problems that I have talked about for most of the past hour, the problems that plague our Nation today arise primarily from bad moral decisions made by adults, illegitimacy, crime, drugs, divorce, drug abuse, child abuse and child neglect, even pornography, abortion. All those problems reflect poor moral decisions, poor choices made by adults.

I also submit that the most pressing issue affecting child welfare in America today is the breakdown in the family. If the family breaks down, of course whole societies or whole communities are going to begin to disintegrate. You do not have to walk very far from where we are gathered now, the Nation's Capital, the shrine of democracy, to see evidence of that kind of family breakdown and social disintegration.

We need good role models probably more than ever before. Given again recent events here in Washington, we need good role models in American society.

Let me stipulate that politicians, those of us who hold elective office, should be role models. We should be held to higher standards because, whether we like it or not, we are role models for our constituents and for our children. Our children represent our common hopes, our common dreams and our common mission as a country.

I want to talk a little bit about the importance of morality. I want to note that less than a month ago, we celebrated President's Day, which was created to celebrate the birthdays of Presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. That is the day recently when we honored, as a country, two great men who led this country at very unique times. I would not say that any of us who serve in the Congress today could put ourselves in the same category as a Washington or a Lincoln, but I would say it is their qualities of leadership and strength of character that every person running for or serving in elective office should try to emulate.

First and foremost, both were men of great integrity and fortitude. Secondly, both were men who were willing to do the right thing for their country, regardless of the political consequences. George Washington said, ''Let prejudices and local interests yield to reason. Let us look to our national character into things beyond the present period.''

Abraham Lincoln said in his last public address, ''Important principles may and must be inflexible.''

Both men believed in being patriotic citizens first and politicians second. That is a goal or a vision that I think is too often lost in modern American politics. Both men believed in putting principle over politics. They triumphed over adversity and numerous setbacks. The value of courage, persistence and perseverance has rarely been illustrated more convincingly than in the life story of these two men that we revere, and both of those men, when you read their writings, recognized that their perseverance was a gift of God.

I want to stress again the importance of setting the right example, teaching our young people the right lessons. It is in that context that I would hope that some of the recent actions by the administration could be viewed. I took great exception the other day when the White House press secretary, a man by the name of Michael McCurry, actually compared Ken Starr, the independent counsel, to Saddam Hussein, if you can imagine. In fact the exchange was, a reporter asked him, does the White House have any delight in or feel responsibility for a CBS News poll that shows Ken Starr with an approval ratings of 12 percent. And Mr. McCurry responded by saying, ''Where was Saddam?''

I am sure he thought he was being cute, even funny, when he made those comments, but I do not think those are responsible comments. I think he should be rebuked for making those kinds of comments.

I would remind Mr. McCurry and the other people who are participating in what seems to be an orchestrated or concerted strategy by this administration with respect to the truth to first deny it and then stonewall and then attack, it is the old shoot-the-messenger theory, that the best defense is a good offense.

I would remind Mr. McCurry and his ilk that Mr. Starr has a very important job to do, that he has obtained a number of indictments and guilty convictions, that with respect to his mandate to investigate the so-called Whitewater real estate matter that he has already obtained convictions of two of the individuals directly involved in that particular venture, the two people who were business partners of the President and the First Lady. He has also obtained a conviction of the President's immediate successor as the governor of Arkansas, a gentleman who from all appearances is now cooperating with the investigation.

So I think Mr. McCurry ought to think twice before making those kinds of comments, even if he does want to appear to be very witty and clever as he banters with the media.

I also want to go on record as saying once again, and our rules here in the House are structured so as to preserve comity—c-o-m-i-t-y, not comedy, c-o-m-e-d-y—but I do want to say that I

personally believe, since it has now been well over 40 days since the President promised to clear the air and tell the American people the full truth, in fact I think he promised more rather than less, sooner rather than later, I want to say that I do believe that the President owes us all as fellow Americans, since we are all his constituents, he is the only elected official who represents every American, that he owes us all a complete explanation.

I also want to tell my colleagues that it is my interpretation of the law that it is simply not true, as the President claims, as the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BARR) said the other day, that the rules of law or the rules of any court prohibit him, the President, from commenting, or from clearing the air and telling the truth.

I do not believe that the law or any court order constrains the President from following through on his promise to the American people to tell more rather than less and sooner rather than later. I believe that it is his choice, his decision alone, that keeps the President from commenting on the matters that swirl around him and keep the President from telling the American people the whole truth.

By the way, I personally believe that you can trust the American people with the truth, even when it is bad news. All I can say is that I would hope that the President will come forward soon and speak to the American people.

I also again just want to tell our young people that there is nothing more important than your personal morality, your word. There is nothing more important than the character you are developing now as you go through school and the character you will display as a young person. I want to say that character does count.

I salute those who are coming forward now, such as the American women who had a rally last week here in Washington on March 5, a week ago today, in John Marshall Park. The theme of their rally was very simple; it was, Character Does Count, exclamation point.

These women, I think, are really to be commended, because they came forward. They are asking their fellow Americans to add their voices to those who believe that the American people deserve leaders of honesty, faithfulness and integrity, leaders who respect rather than dishonor and undermine marriage and the family. I want to tell those ladies that I admire them; I think that they are sending a very important message to our young people.

I personally believe that Americans do care. I know that I care personally, and that together, if enough of us care, we can demand leaders who will tell the truth, obey the law and who are worthy role models for our children.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. GOSS (at the request of Mr. ARMEY) for March 10, 11 and 12, on account of personal reasons.

Mr. REDMOND (at the request of Mr. ARMEY) for March 10, 11 and 12, on account of personal reasons.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

The following Members (at the request of Mr. PALLONE) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:

Mr. FILNER, for 5 minutes, today.
Ms. NORTON, for 5 minutes, today.
Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD, for 5 minutes, today.
Mrs. MALONEY of New York, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. LANTOS, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. RANGEL, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. ALLEN, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. BARCIA, for 5 minutes, today.

The following Members (at the request of Mr. WELDON of Florida) and to include extraneous matter:

Mr. PETERSON, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. WELDON of Florida, for 5 minutes, today.

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

By unanimous consent, permission to revise and extend remarks was granted to:

The following Members (at the request of Mr. PALLONE) and to include extraneous matter:

Mr. KIND.
Mr. MARKEY.
Mr. EVANS.
Mr. TOWNS.
Mr. ROEMER.
Mr. SHERMAN.
Mr. BERRY.
Mr. MASCARA.
Mr. MENENDEZ.
Mr. SCHUMER.
Mr. BORSKI.
Mr. KUCINICH.

The following Members (at the request of Mr. WELDON of Florida) and to include extraneous matter:

Mr. DIAZ-BALART.
Mr. OXLEY.
Mr. BOB SCHAFFER of Colorado.

The following Members (at the request of Mr. RIGGS) and to include extraneous matter:

Mr. GINGRICH.
Mr. WEYGAND.
Ms. HOOLEY of Oregon.
Mr. STARK.
Mr. PASCRELL.
Mr. EVANS.
Mr. RUSH.
Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD.
Mr. RADANOVICH.
Mr. FORBES.
Mr. KANJORSKI.
Mrs. MORELLA.
Mr. PACKARD.
Mr. LOBIONDO.

SENATE BILLS REFERRED

A bill of the Senate of the following title was taken from the Speaker's table and, under the rule, referred as follows:

S. 1605. An act to establish a matching grant program to help States, units of local government, and Indian tribes to purchase armor vests for use by law enforcement officers; to the Committee on the Judiciary

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 4 o'clock and 58 minutes p.m.), under its previous order, the House adjourned until Monday, March 16, 1998, at 2 p.m.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

Under clause 2 of rule XXIV, executive communications were taken from the Speaker's table and referred as follows:

7923. A letter from the Assistant Secretary for Reserve Affairs, Department of Defense, transmitting a report entitled ''Reserve Component Update, FY 1999 Budget''; to the Committee on Appropriations.

7924. A letter from the Under Secretary, Aquisition and Technology, Department of Defense, transmitting a copy of the Department's determination that it is in the public interest to use other than competitive procedures for the procurement of the supplies described therein, pursuant to 10 U.S.C. 2304(c)(7); to the Committee on National Security.

7925. A letter from the Under Secretary for Acquisition and Technology, Department of Defense, transmitting a report entitled ''Restructuring Costs Associated With Business Combinations,'' pursuant to Public Law 105—85; to the Committee on National Security.

7926. A letter from the Secretary of Defense, transmitting a report on the number of military technician positions that were held by non-dual status military technicians on September 30, 1997, pursuant to Public Law 105—85; to the Committee on National Security.

7927. A letter from the Assistant to the Board, Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, transmitting the Board's final rule—Loans to Executive Officers, Directors, and Principal Shareholders of Member Banks; Loans to Holding Companies and Affiliates [Docket Number R–0940] received March 4, 1998, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Banking and Financial Services.

7928. A letter from the Managing Director, Federal Housing Finance Board, transmitting the Board's reports entitled ''1998 TF Salary Structure'' and the ''1998 TS/TM Salary Structure''; to the Committee on Banking and Financial Services.

7929. A letter from the Federal Register Liaison Officer, Office of Thrift Supervision, transmitting the Office's final rule—Mutual Holding Companies [98–23] (RIN: 1550–AB04) March 4, 1998, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Banking and Financial Services.

7930. A letter from the Assistant General Counsel for Regulations, Department of Education, transmitting the Department's final rule—Notice of Final Funding Priorities for Fiscal Years 1998–1999 for Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers received March 4, 1998, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Education and the Workforce.