

people reach their fullest potential. And we cannot let it slip away.

Because education is so important to my constituents and to me, I sought and received an assignment on the Education and Workforce Committee when I arrived in Congress. And 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.

One of the things I hear time and again is the importance of a well-prepared teacher in every classroom. Sadly, some people like to blame teachers for all the problems in education. But that is not the answer. The reason I know this, is because I have seen many great teachers in action.

Last year, our Committee invited a number of young teachers who had graduated two to three years earlier to testify. And they told us, "We love our jobs. We love to teach. We do our best." But they also told us that once they graduated, they weren't ready to deal with all the pressures in the classroom. They said they needed more support, more mentoring.

So last year, I introduced the America's Teacher Preparation Improvement Act. This bill will strengthen the federal government's commitment to teacher preparation. It focuses on three critical areas—recruiting new teachers, making sure they are well-prepared while in school, and then supporting them in their first years on the job. It also encourages colleges to set up partnerships with school districts so that teachers can move from the lecture hall to the classroom.

I am pleased to say that in a bipartisan vote, Congress approve the provisions of my bill as a part of the Higher Education Act reauthorization, and the President signed it into law last week.

But there is more to do. The number of kids enrolled in school is growing, and many current teachers are getting ready to retire. We will need 2 million new teachers in the next decade alone just to handle the load. But fewer people are entering the profession, and grade schools in many parts of the country are facing severe teacher shortages.

Improving how we prepare our teachers won't help students if there aren't new teachers to prepare. That is why it is so important that we approve the President's plan to fund 100,000 new teachers. If we are serious about education, then we must ensure that we have a dedicated corps of new teachers ready to enter the classroom.

Just as our students need well-prepared teachers, they deserve school buildings that are conducive to learning. I have seen firsthand that many schools are overcrowded or in poor condition. When I visited one school in my district, the Washington Rose School in Roosevelt, I was shocked to see kids learning in hallways, surrounded by crumbling roofs and windows. Even worse was its library, which had makeshift shelves, few seats, and poor ventilation.

What kind of message do we send kids about reading when we make them read in a room like that? And what message do we send to teachers when we ask them to educate children in overcrowded, run-down classrooms?

These problems surprised me, because suburban areas like mine are not supposed to have overcrowded and run-down schools. But

they do. Last Fall, I conducted a survey of the schools in my District, asking them about the physical condition of their schools. I learned that our schools do need financial support to repair and rebuild their buildings.

That is why the President's initiative to provide tax incentives to fix school buildings is so important. And that is why I support the plan to reduce class sizes in the first through third grades. Again, if we are serious about education, then we should pass these initiatives.

We all know what it will take to improve our education system: Well-prepared teachers. New buildings. Less crowded classrooms. It's time that we show our young people that we are committed to their education, and to their future.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MILLER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

#### RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR 105TH CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, I look back over the last 2 years, and I am pretty proud of the record of accomplishment for this Congress, a record of accomplishment where we accomplished a lot of things that people said we could not do.

I remember when I was elected to Congress as part of that class in 1994 who came to Washington to change how Washington works, to do things that Washington had failed to do for over a generation, things that families back home do every day, like balancing the budget and working to raise take-home pay and working to lower the tax burden on the middle-class and working to change a failed welfare system.

On every one of these initiatives, we were told by certain newspapers in the East and by my friends on the other side of the aisle that we could not do that. We could not balance the budget; that we could not cut taxes for the middle class; that we could not reform our welfare system; that we could not help our schools; that we could not change the tax collector and reform and restructure the IRS.

As I look back now over the last 2 years, I am pretty proud of what we accomplished, because we did all of those

things they said we would not be able to do.

We balanced the budget for the first time in 28 years this past year. And the budget is so well balanced now, we are now projected to have over \$1.6 trillion in extra tax revenue over the next 10 years.

We cut taxes for the middle-class for the first time in 16 years, and for a traditional family of mom and dad and two kids on the south side of Chicago in the south suburbs, those middle-class tax cuts can mean an extra \$10,000 in higher take-home pay over the next few years.

Those are big victories for the middle-class: Balancing the balance and cutting taxes. And we also reformed the welfare system for the first time in a generation, taking an outdated, outmoded welfare system that placed more children in poverty than ever before in history. It was time to make a change, and I am proud that the first real welfare reform in a generation has reduced our Nation's welfare rolls by 20 percent.

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People often say, that is pretty good. That is a pretty good record of accomplishment for the Congress in the last 2 years, balancing the budget for the first time in 28 years, cutting middle class taxes for the first time in 16 years, reforming welfare for the first time in a generation. What is next? What is Congress going to do in 1998?

I am proud to say we have also made a lot of progress in 1998. We restructured and tamed the tax collector, shifting the burden of proof from the backs of the taxpayer onto the IRS, giving you the same rights with the IRS that you have in the courtroom. We passed legislation just yesterday and sent it to the President to protect kids from those who would prey on them via the Internet.

I am also proud to say that we continue to make education a priority. In fact, that balanced budget that we produced last year, the first balanced budget in 28 years, made education a priority. In fact, education was one of the big winners in the first balanced budget in 28 years. We increased funding for education by 10 percent, a \$5.4 billion funding increase. Now, thanks to this Republican majority in the Congress, we have the lowest student loan interest rates in 17 years. We have doubled Pell grants to twice what they were when I was elected, to help more low income students go on to college. We have made mandates where we have told our local schools we want you to do something. We have actually provided the funding, increased funding for special education, for example, by \$500 million.

Those are big victories for education. I am proud of what we have been able to do in the last two and last four years in this Congress. I, too, have visited a lot of schools in the south side of Chicago and the south suburbs. I speak often and listen to the concerns of