

STATEMENT ON CHILD LABOR TO
THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND THE WORKFORCE

HON. TOM LANTOS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, on March 28th, I submitted a statement to the Committee on Education and the Workforce during hearings on H.R. 1, the "No-Child-Left-Behind" education proposal. The purpose of my testimony was to call attention to the negative effects that working long hours at after school jobs is having a serious negative impact on our nation's teens. Recent studies have shown that a correlation exists between working long hours after school and decreased academic performance as well as increased drug and alcohol use by teenagers.

Mr. Speaker, the Young American Workers' Bill of Rights Act (H.R. 961) which I introduced earlier this year sets sensible limits to the number of hours teenagers can work during times when school is in session. H.R. 961 would assist both families and teenagers' struggling with the competing interests of holding a job while gaining an education.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my statement with our colleagues in the House, and I request that my testimony to the Committee be placed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

STATEMENT BY CONGRESSMAN TOM LANTOS, THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, H.R. 1, "NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND," MARCH 28, 2001

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member and distinguished members of the Education and Workforce Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to share my views with you today. As you begin to consider the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), I urge you to keep in mind the negative effects that working long hours is having on our children's education.

Working during the school year has become much more commonplace among America's youth over the past decades. Currently, nearly 25 percent of 14-year-olds and 38 percent of 15-year-olds have regular scheduled employment during the school year (as opposed to casual baby-sitting or yard work). A recent National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) indicates that almost two-thirds of high school juniors are employed during the school year and that these students work an average of 18 hours per week. Another study, published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in December 1999, reports that the number of working teens has grown by 15 percent in the past five years and that nearly seven million teens age 16-19 were employed in all sectors of the United States economy.

Mr. Chairman, as you and your colleagues know, American students continue to score at or below average on international tests. The Third International Mathematics and Science Study showed that American high school seniors on average spend slightly more than three hours a day working at a paid job—more than their counterparts in any of the other 20 nations studied. Some experts believe that such intense work schedules might explain the poor showing of U.S. students on international tests. In both math and science, even America's best 12th graders scored well below the international average.

Laurence Steinberg, a professor of psychology at Temple University recently con-

ducted a three-year study (1987 to 1990) of 20,000 students at nine high schools in northern California and in Wisconsin. He determined that a work-load of more than 20 hours seems to mark the point at which work is increasingly linked to a drop-off in the amount of time students spend on homework an increase in their feelings of detachment from school. His research is backed up by Wendy Piscitelli, head of the foreign language department at Hatboro-Horsham High School in Horsham, PA. She states, "once they get up into 20 or 25 hours. . . they can't keep up the extracurricular activities, and they don't get enough sleep." These conclusions are shared by a teacher at the Governor Livingston Regional High School in Berkeley Heights, N.J., who discussed a problem she is having with one of her students who regularly works past midnight at a local diner. The student, a senior, has trouble making it to school on time, and when confronted about falling asleep in class responds, "but I am making money, Mrs. Tonto."

These students, who are placing after-school employment above their education aren't getting enough sleep at night and are catching up during the day, in the classrooms. A 1999 National Sleep Foundation survey found that 60 percent of children under the age of 18 complained of being tired during the day, and 15 percent reported sleeping at school during the past year. Mr. Chairman, I ask you, how can we expect our children to learn when they are sleeping through the school day? Another problem that arises when students are working more than 20 hours a week is that they begin to cut corners with their school work to accommodate their job. This accommodation manifests itself in many ways, often in the form of cheating, or taking a less challenging schedule.

Moreover, a number of studies document that long work hours are associated with all sorts of undesirable teenage behavior. According to a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), working more than 11 hours a week has a strong correlation with the likelihood that teenager will smoke and drink. Working more than 26 hours per week has the same correlation to use of marijuana or cocaine. An earlier CDC study found that students who worked more than 11 hours a week had significantly higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. There is also ample evidence that when the number of work hours exceeds 15 hours per week during the school year, academic pursuits suffer. On average, grades go down and truancy increases. When work and school obligations conflict, the great majority will give top priority to their jobs.

Mr. Chairman, studies have shown that the majority of children and teenagers who hold jobs in the United States are not working to support their families, but rather are employed to earn extra spending money. I see nothing wrong with minors working to earn extra spending money and I think we all can agree that it is important for children to learn the value of work. I do think, however, that it is a serious problem when teenagers spend almost the same amount of time working at an after school job as they spend in school. We need to set sensible limits on the hours that minors are permitted to work when school is in session so that our children can focus on their primary job—earning a good education.

Mr. Chairman, under current Federal law, minors aged 14- and 15-year-olds may not work for more than three hours a day and a maximum of 18 hours a week, when school is in session. It is also unlawful for 14- and 15-year-olds to work before 7 a.m. and after 7 p.m. so that work will not interfere with

learning. Minors who are 16 and 17, however, face no federal restrictions when it comes to the number of hours they can work, and they often are required to work late into the night.

I recently introduced legislation, H.R. 961, the Young American Workers Bill of Rights, which would set sensible limits to the hours teenagers work in addition to their academic schooling. Mr. Chairman, I urge the Committee to consider including the provisions of this bill in your reauthorization of the ESEA. My legislation would reduce the hours 14- and 15-year-olds would be allowed to work while school is in session, while also setting standards for the number of hours that 16- and 17-year-olds can work while school is in session. My legislation caps the hours of 14- and 15-year-olds at fifteen hours per week. The hours for 16- and 17-year-olds would be limited to 20 hours per week. When one adds these hours onto the average amount of time a teenager spends in school, the student is still putting in close to 40 hours a week. This does not include time spent on homework, extracurricular activities, or time spent just being a teenager. I think we can agree that too many teenagers are working long hours at the very time they should be focusing on their education.

Mr. Chairman, let me state unequivocally that I, and supporters of my legislation, do not oppose children taking on after school employment. We firmly believe that children must be taught the value of work. They need to learn the important lessons of responsibility, and they need to enjoy the rewards of working. Furthermore, it is not our aim to discourage employers from hiring young people. Rather, our goal is to ensure that the employment opportunities available to young people are meaningful, safe, healthy, and do not interfere with their important academic responsibilities. A solid education—not after-school employment—is the key to a successful future.

Mr. Chairman, as you and the rest of your committee began to debate the reauthorization of the ESEA, I strongly urge you to consider the sensible labor standards that my legislation sets forth. These common-sense limits provide American teenagers the ability to have both a valuable academic instruction, while learning the value of work.

TRIBUTE TO BEECH ISLAND
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HON. JAMES E. CLYBURN

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. CLYBURN. Mr. Speaker, on April 28, 2001, in Granville South Carolina, the Beech Island Historical Society will host the Fifteenth Annual Beech Island Heritage Day Celebration. As in the past, the theme of Heritage Day is 315 years of Beech Island history. To illustrate that history, the society invites artists and craftsmen to demonstrate ancient skills practiced by Native Americans and early American skills that settlers brought with them to Beech Island. Re-enactors also recreate Beech Island history from Colonial days to the Civil War era.

The theme of this year's 15th Heritage Day is the history of "Silver Bluff—A Celebrated Place." Silver Bluff, located on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River about 10 miles from Beech Island, was visited in the 1500's-1700's by Spanish and English explorers and was the site of Irishman George