Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, once again, the needs of children and families do not make a priority in this House. They have left our children out in the cold on the number one issue of our community and that is education. Their proposal to block grant Head Start which provides money without guidelines for States and local implementation diverts attention from the critical needs of this program.

What happened to the issue of local control when it comes to Head Start? What happened to the fact that Head Start has been working well as it is now? Why now send that money to the States?

The only reason we decided to establish Head Start was because the States were unwilling, Mr. Speaker, unwilling to come up and respond to the needs of these children, unwilling to prepare them.

The State of Texas, for example, is still a State that only funds kindergarten half a day. The local community taxpayers have to come up with the rest of the money in order to pay for half day kindergarten, not to mention that they do not provide anything for early childhood. So Head Start is a critical program that has been there, and there actually has been a Head Start for a lot of the Hispanic community. Where 50 percent of our youngsters are still dropping out, Head Start has been there for them to make sure and the statistics show that kids that go to Head Start are less likely to drop out or more likely to finish when they should and go beyond.

Head Start has been a proven program, so why try to mess with it? Why try to destroy Head Start the way we know it now?

One of the top educational priorities of the members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus is to ensure that Hispanic children enter school ready to learn. Hispanic children represent the fastest-growing school age population in the Nation. Unfortunately, they are the least likely to have the participation in preschool programs, opening an achievement gap before the first day of school begins.

Soon Congress will again decide funding levels for Head Start, the premier level, early childhood education program that presents us with an opportunity to close that gap for Hispanic and African American children and low-income children.

For over 35 years, the Head Start program has proven itself. It has enjoyed great success in meeting the comprehensive development needs of low-income children. Head Start programs achieve school readiness for these children through the holistic approach and intense parent involvement, and that includes working with the parents. It includes reaching out, making sure that they understand how important education is, which is critical for those youngsters staying in school.

The range and intensity of service is assured because of the national program standards that it has. If we rely on the States for full implementation, it would fatally undermine these national standards, jeopardizing access to comprehensive services as well as making Head Start ineffective in serving low-income children and their families. Yet that is just what the Bush administration has proposed and the Republican Congress intends to do and that is to begin to destroy Head Start the way we know it now, put it into the form of a block grant.

Instead of looking for ways to remove themselves of their responsibility for Head Start, the administration and the Congress should put Head Start on the path for full funding. Currently, Head Start serves about 60 percent of their eligible children. They need additional resources to make sure we cover the other kids that are not covered by the existing program.

Migrant and seasonal Head Start programs only reach 19 percent of the eligible children. The State educational agencies are not equipped to reach out to these youngsters that are out in the field a lot of times. As a Nation, we must do better. For migrant and seasonal farm work families, access to Head Start is a public health and safety issue.

In 1992, the General Accounting Office found that at least one-third of all migrant children as young as 10 work in the fields. This is in 1992, where there are still kids working in fields with their families and either contribute to their family income or because no child care was available. Children in the field are at risk from injuries from farm equipment, overexposure to the elements, as well as pesticide poisoning and, of course, long-term health risks associated with exposure to chemicals. In many cases, if slots are not available to migrant seasonal Head Start programs, no programs exist in the area, there is no alternatives but to take the children to the fields and perhaps leave them unattended at the labor camps.

The administration's proposal to block grant Head Start would do nothing to strengthen the growing numbers of limited English proficiency children in communities across this Nation; and we now see them in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas and a lot of the States where we had not seen them before. As we have seen, with the implementation of the President's No Child Left Behind Act, States look to the Federal Government for assistance and guidance in providing services to these populations.

The recent phenomena of emerging Hispanic communities poses a challenge to Head Start providers and participants. As children move into the areas of the U.S. where there have been Head Start programs operating but without experience in servicing, it is important that we continue to provide these resources.

In addition, let me just close by saying it is important that we keep Head Start. It is important that we remain on track. It is important that this program also remain within the Department of Health and not be moved to the Department of Education.

I also want the congratulate the Congressional Black Caucus on their efforts under the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS), and I thank him for being here tonight.

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

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

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

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

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

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

FUTURE OF HEAD START

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CUMMINGS. 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. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus have come together tonight to address issues that confront our children, and when I say our children, I mean all children who unfortunately may not have the funds to get off to a good start before they start school officially in the kindergarten.

I will have a lot to say about this subject as we go through this hour, Mr. Speaker, but I want to yield first of all to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SCOTT), who has been at the forefront of addressing issues with regard to Head Start and faith-based issues and constitutional issues that confront us and has made it his business and has vigilantly stood guard with regard to making sure that programs that are put forth are ones that do not discriminate against people with our own tax dollars.