

are currently working on a bipartisan package of legislation that we intend to have designed to improve the foster care system: Expecting more educational stability and high school completion for foster children, improving health outcomes, keeping siblings together, and extending and improving a current incentive program that rewards States for increasing adoptions. These legislative changes would implement many of the recommendations our subcommittee has heard for improving the lives of children in foster care. But even with these improvements, the tens of thousands of dedicated foster parents and those who support them will continue to remain the backbone of our foster care system. On our Nation's effort to support children who cannot safely live with their own parents, we owe them our thanks and our continued support.

Mr. Speaker, I urge an "aye" vote for this important resolution.

I reserve the balance of my time.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 1185.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. CARDOZA. Mr. Speaker, I rise to join my colleague, Mr. MCDERMOTT, and urge the support of H. Res. 1185. Since being elected to public office, I have been in advocate for children in foster care; in part because 8 years ago my wife and I adopted two of our children from foster care.

As a result, we became intimately aware of the status of America's foster care system. This resolution commends the hard work and sacrifice of the thousands of American families who care for foster children. As an adoptive foster parent, I know the joy these children bring. I also know that caring for children who, in some cases, have survived atrocious abuse and neglect can be extremely challenging. Many foster parents open their hearts and homes to children with the trauma and pain of a broken past. Many times these caregivers receive little or no support from the Federal government as they take in our Nation's most vulnerable young people.

Despite record food prices, foster families across America stretch their budgets to feed additional children that they have welcomed into their homes. Despite rising gas prices; foster families do their best to drive children to schools, take them to doctor's appointments, and attend little league games—because they know that's the kind of support these children have never had. They do a great service for America, Mr. Speaker, and deserve to be commended for their efforts.

While we recognize and commend their service, we need to do more to ensure a better future for these children when they leave foster homes. We need to do more to heal the minds and bodies of these children, so that the investment that foster parents have made in their lives is not lost to homelessness, drug addiction, and gang involvement that so many

of these children turn to when they are abandoned again as they exit foster care.

The public may not be aware that on the night of their 18th birthday, most states terminate all services for foster children. Parents know that most children in our society are not self-sufficient the day they turn 18. For example: we don't expect our children to afford health coverage when they turn 18. In fact, most parents retain their children under a family policy until age 23. Yet for the 26,000 vulnerable young Americans who age out of the foster care system, we eliminate their healthcare coverage the moment they turn 18. Mr. Speaker, we need to do better. We need to extend healthcare coverage for children in foster care to age 21. The pathway to extend coverage already exists in current law, but only 17 states have implemented this option and I believe it is a moral and societal imperative to make this the standard across our Nation. Without proper healthcare many of these youth end up another sad statistic.

I know my good friend from Washington, Mr. MCDERMOTT, and I see eye-to-eye on this issue. Both he and I have introduced legislation that would make these necessary changes to healthcare coverage for foster children. Mr. Speaker, I urge the rest of my colleagues to support this resolution and to do better for America's foster children.

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, according to 2006 data, nationally, 799,000 children have spent at least 24 hours in foster care and, on any given day, roughly 510,000 children were in the Nation's foster care system. In Nevada, there are currently 5,450 children receiving foster care, including 3,947 in Clark County.

My district has faced some unique challenges recently. As Southern Nevadans, we recognize the need for a nurturing environment when biological parents abuse or neglect their own children. Foster families graciously open their doors, and offer love and guidance in the most difficult of circumstances. It is critical we honor these unsung heroes.

I would like to thank Chairman MCDERMOTT for introducing this bipartisan legislation honoring the selfless service of foster families recognizing the critical role these individuals play in communities across the nation. In addition, the resolution will mark May as National Foster Care Month. I encourage all of my colleagues to support the generosity of foster parents in their districts and throughout the nation during the month of May.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Washington (Mr. MCDERMOTT) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 1185.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the

following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 3035. An act to temporarily extend the programs under the Higher Education Act of 1965.

SENSE OF HOUSE REGARDING FORMER FOSTER CARE YOUTH

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 1208) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that youth who age out of foster care should be given special care and attention.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 1208

Whereas 12,000,000 Americans spend time in foster care;

Whereas every year, more than 24,000 youth turn age 18 while in foster care;

Whereas the safekeeping of most youth who age out of foster care is the responsibility of the State governments, which receive Federal funding to assist them in doing so;

Whereas family reunification, kinship care, and adoption are the preferred solutions for children who are placed in foster care;

Whereas Congress created a new Independent Living initiative in 1986, and expanded the program by passing the Chaffee Foster Care Independence Act in 1999 to assist youth who are emancipated while in foster care: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) supports former foster care youth as they overcome many emotional, physical, and social obstacles in the pursuit of healthy, independent, and fulfilling lives;

(2) recognizes former foster care youth organizations for their dedication to reforming and improving the foster care system;

(3) appreciates individuals, mentors, and social workers who provide assistance to former foster care youth beyond resources available through Federal, State, and local services; and

(4) encourages reviews of Federal and State programs conducted under title IV of the Social Security Act that would improve services to help former foster care youth succeed in their transition to adulthood and independence.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H. Res. 1208.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today to ask my colleagues to support House Resolution 1208. This

resolution is very simple. It recognizes the many problems that face young people who spend time in foster care, and it thanks the many others who work to ease their transition from foster care to adulthood and independence.

In Georgia, there are thousands of children in foster care. Living in foster care is not a choice. These young people of all races, ages, and backgrounds were victims of neglect and abuse. Child welfare services share a common goal of finding safe, stable, and loving homes for these young people. Unfortunately, this dream is not always realized.

I have the privilege to serve on the Ways and Means Income Security and Family Support Subcommittee chaired by my good friend and colleague, Mr. MCDERMOTT of Washington.

Last year, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. MCDERMOTT) invited two young people from our congressional district to testify about what it is like to transition from foster care to adulthood. Anthony Reeves and Shalita O'Neal both aged out of the Georgia foster care system. They shared with us how difficult it is to find housing, health care, education, liveable wages, jobs, security, and stability.

At a young age, when most are still relying on financial and emotional support from their parents and family, these young people have no one to fall back on. Mr. Speaker, these are the stories that break your heart.

Today, we honor those like Anthony and Shalita, and Kevin Brown, a recent graduate of Clark Atlanta University, who are determined to find their way despite so many problems before them.

We also pay tribute to the mentors, volunteers, parents, organizations, and many others who fill in the gaps in Federal and State coverage to help these young people during the most difficult times of their young lives.

Most important, this resolution sends a message to the half million young people currently in the foster care system. Congress tells them: You are not alone. We love you. We support you. You are not forgotten. There is hope. You will survive. And you will succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I urge all of my colleagues to support this very simple resolution.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 1208 on foster care youth aging out of care, an important resolution before us today. I join my colleagues in support of the more than 500,000 children who are in foster care today and in support of this resolution. I hope we can craft substantive bipartisan legislation to help address the challenges in our Nation's foster care system.

One of the greatest challenges is helping the more than 24,000 youth who age out of foster care each year. Projected outcomes for too many of these young people are sobering: lower high

school graduation rates, higher rates of homelessness, and a higher chance of becoming incarcerated than of other youth of their own age.

In hearings before our subcommittee, the Income Security and Family Support Subcommittee, which I serve as ranking member, we have been privileged to hear from many outstanding young men and women who have personally shared their personal stories of life in our Nation's child welfare system.

For instance, Jamal Nutall, a young man from the congressional district which I represent, has worked as an intern in my office. He testified before our subcommittee about the challenges he faced in foster care and the progress he was making towards completing his college education. More recently, we heard from Misty Stenslie with the Foster Care Alumni Association which represents former foster youth. Listening to these stories and understanding what they tell us reveals how much more needs to be done to help those who spend the longest time in foster care, including the thousands who age out of the system each year.

A good place to start would be to ensure that every young person in foster care completes at least their high school diploma. Last year, I introduced House Resolution 733, which recognizes the importance of improving the high school graduation rate of foster youth. I thank the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) for being one of the bipartisan cosponsors of this legislation. We can and should make improving the educational outcomes of foster youth a key test in measuring any legislation designed to help foster children.

Congress is not alone in recognizing the importance of high school graduation for today's youth. America's Promise Alliance, an organization founded by former Secretary of State and General Colin Powell and his wife, has launched a dropout prevention campaign to combat the Nation's high school dropout crisis. The Alliance noted alarming statistics in an April 2008 report. Nearly one in three U.S. high school students drops out before graduating. Approximately 1.2 million students drop out each year, and about 7,000 students drop out each and every day.

To improve the high school graduation rate of foster youth, increased coordination between child welfare and educational agencies is necessary. New foster family placements should not necessarily mean a new school, and foster children should have to be able to remain in a single school in their own community so they can build lasting relationships with friends, teachers, and mentors.

All these steps can and should contribute to raising graduation rates and increasing chances of future success for foster children, especially those who age out of the system.

I urge all Members to join me in supporting this important resolution

today. But we should also commit ourselves to producing bipartisan legislation to improve the Nation's foster care and child welfare programs and improving the high school graduation rates and other educational outcomes for children in foster care. Without that simple step, too many will continue to face a desperate future. We owe them far better.

Mr. Speaker, I urge an "aye" vote.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I now recognize the gentleman from Washington (Mr. MCDERMOTT), the chairman of the subcommittee, for such time as he may consume.

(Mr. MCDERMOTT asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to join with my colleague and friend JOHN LEWIS in fighting to do what is right for America's foster kids.

Every year, an estimated 24,000 foster kids reach their 18th birthday. Instead of a celebration, they hit a dead end. Try and remember what it was like when you were 18 years old. As it stands today for foster kids, the support system simply stops for those kids on the day at a point when they are not quite ready for everything they are going to face in the world. No place to live, no money for food, no money to go on for education, no place to live while they finish high school. All of those things are what face our youngsters in foster care today when they hit 18 in many States in this country.

Many of these children do not have access to critical support services like health care. If they are on medication, it ends that day.

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They don't get the Medicaid, they don't get the coverage after that. There is no transition for these young people at all. Many are not connected to an adult who can serve as a mentor or someone who can be someone to get advice from when they go on. The system simply discards them. Not surprisingly, trouble can be the end result. Far too many become disconnected from the educational system and the labor force and become much of the homeless that we see on the streets of our city. Many of them wind up in our jails.

When the State removes a child from their biological parents because of abuse or neglect and places that child in foster care, we become the foster parents. Now, most of us did not have parents who threw us out on our own on the day we were 18. In fact, the whole boomerang idea of going back to your parents when you've been through college is very common in this country. We continue to have contact with our children when they're gone, after they're 18. Eighteen is not some magic date. And I believe a child in foster care deserves no less than anyone else's children. So we have some work to do to deliver on that promise, and we can take a big step by approving this bill.

Like many other young people, foster kids need the guidance and support of a caring adult that will last a lifetime. It's our job to make that happen. One way is to transition a child out of the system. We should make sure that when a child leaves foster care, they have a connection with someone, perhaps a lost sibling or some other relative that can be a source of love and support for them. Nurturing doesn't stop at 18, and if it continues, the odds for that foster kid doing well rise dramatically.

We should also provide a significant support system for these children after they become 18. The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program was partly designed to fill this need. But additional supports are needed to provide these young people with skills and resources they need to become successful adults. It's time for Congress to follow suit and ensure that when a child leaves foster care they have an opportunity to prosper as an adult.

I thank Congressman LEWIS for offering this important resolution, and urge my colleagues to support it and to work with us to strengthen our Nation's foster care system, so that young people who age out of the system are not thrown out of it but instead have the same opportunities that other kids have.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time. I urge bipartisan support.

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I have no additional speakers. I urge all my colleagues to support this resolution. I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 1208.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECOGNIZING PRISONERS OF WAR FROM THE VIETNAM CONFLICT

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 986) recognizing the courage and sacrifice of those members of the United States Armed Forces who were held as prisoners of war during the Vietnam conflict and calling for a full accounting of the 1,729 members of the Armed Forces who remain unaccounted for from the Vietnam conflict, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 986

Whereas recent world events have brought Americans closer together, while reinvo-

rating our patriotism, reminding us of our precious liberties and freedoms, and giving us a greater appreciation for the men and women of the United States Armed Forces who defend our homeland every day;

Whereas the honor and valor of past and present members of the United States Armed Forces inspire many young people to serve their country;

Whereas participation by the United States Armed Forces in combat operations in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam conflict resulted in more than 700 American military personnel being taken prisoner by enemy forces;

Whereas American military personnel who were taken prisoner were held in numerous prisoner of war facilities, the most notorious of which was Hoa Lo Prison in downtown Hanoi, Vietnam, which was dubbed by prisoners held there as the "Hanoi Hilton";

Whereas on January 23, 1973, the United States and North Vietnam jointly announced the terms of a cease-fire agreement, which included the release of prisoners of war;

Whereas the return of the American prisoners of war to the United States and to their families and comrades was designated Operation Homecoming;

Whereas on January 27, 1973, the first group of American prisoners of war were released at airfields near Hanoi and Loc Ninh, and the last Operation Homecoming repatriation took place on April 1, 1973;

Whereas many American military personnel who were taken prisoner as a result of combat in Southeast Asia have not returned to their loved ones and their fate remains unknown;

Whereas American military personnel who were prisoners of war in Southeast Asia were routinely subjected to brutal mistreatment, including beatings, torture, starvation, and denial of medical attention and outside information, and were frequently isolated from each other and prohibited from communicating with one another;

Whereas the prisoners, at great personal risk, nevertheless devised a means to communicate with each other through a code transmitted by tapping on cell walls;

Whereas the prisoners held in the Hanoi Hilton included then-Major Samuel R. Johnson, United States Air Force, now a member of Congress from the 3rd Congressional District of Texas, who was shot down on April 16, 1966, while flying his 25th mission over North Vietnam;

Whereas Samuel R. Johnson spent more than half of his time as a prisoner in solitary confinement, and conducted himself with such valor as to be labeled by the enemy as a die-hard resister, and, notwithstanding the tremendous suffering inflicted upon him, demonstrated an unflinching devotion to duty, honor, and country;

Whereas during Samuel R. Johnson's military career, he was awarded 2 Silver Stars, 3 Legions of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, a Bronze Star with "V" device for valor, 2 Purple Hearts, 4 Air Medals, and 5 Outstanding Unit awards;

Whereas Samuel R. Johnson retired from active duty in 1979 in the grade of colonel, and personifies the verse in Isaiah 40:31, "They shall mount with wings as eagles";

Whereas the American military personnel who were prisoners of war during the Vietnam conflict truly represent the best of America;

Whereas the 35th anniversary of Operation Homecoming begins on February 12, 2008, and ends on April 1, 2008;

Whereas the world acknowledges that the words inscribed by an American prisoner of war in a Hanoi Hilton cell, "Freedom has a taste to those who fight and die for it that

the protected will never know", are bitterly true and eternally appreciated; and

Whereas the Nation owes a debt of gratitude to these patriots and their families for their courage, heroism, and exemplary service: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) expresses its deepest gratitude for, and calls upon all Americans to reflect upon and to show their gratitude for, the courage and sacrifice of the brave members of the United States Armed Forces, including Samuel R. Johnson of Texas, who were held as prisoners of war during the Vietnam conflict;

(2) urges States and localities to honor the courage and sacrifice of those prisoners of war with appropriate ceremonies and activities;

(3) acting on behalf of all Americans, will not forget the 1,729 members of the United States Armed Forces and the 34 United States citizens who remain unaccounted for from the Vietnam conflict and will continue to press for a full accounting of all of these members; and

(4) honors all of the members of the United States Armed Forces who have fought and died in the defense of freedom.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) and the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) will each control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I might consume.

I rise today to urge my colleagues to support House Resolution 986 which recognizes members of the Armed Forces who were held as prisoners of war during the Vietnam conflict, and calls for a full accounting of the 1,729 members who still remain unaccounted for from that conflict.

"Never leave a comrade behind" is the motto of our Armed Forces. However, one of the regrettable results of war is the possibility of being forced to leave behind missing personnel or prisoners of war.

At the conclusion of the Vietnam War, 2,646 members of the Armed Forces were considered prisoners of war or were declared missing in action. While many servicemembers were returned, 1,729 of our soldiers, airmen, sailors and marines remain unaccounted for to this very day.

During the course of the Vietnam War, as many as 700 American military personnel were held by the enemy. One of the infamous prison facilities in Vietnam was referred to as the "Hanoi Hilton." Located in downtown Hanoi, the prison held American servicemembers including then Lieutenant Commander JOHN MCCAIN, now