

the Republican Party has introduced legislation that will take us down the path to true freedom when it comes to education. The notion that we can take billions of dollars out of Washington and send it back home, whether Staten Island or Brooklyn, where I am from, or anywhere else across America, I think is common sense to the ordinary American. Because the average, ordinary American says, I think that my community, with the teachers and the principals and the administrators and the local PTAs, if given that money, would be in a better position to determine what is best for their children. Perhaps it would be smaller classrooms, perhaps more money dedicated to math and science. It could be a range of issues. It could be more money dedicated to arts.

But, sadly, the model that has been created over the last number of years is let us send billions to Washington with strings attached, with endless reams of red tape and bureaucracies that make it almost unreasonable to deliver quality education to the folks back home.

So that is why I think when we provide flexibility and reduce the amount of red tape and send that money back home to the communities that need the money and to the classrooms where that money belongs we are doing the right thing for America and for the families and the children across America. And at the same time we should demand appropriate accountability from school districts that too often are unaccountable to anybody.

So I think we have to move down this path of getting funds away from Washington. Because this money does not just fall out of the trees. The reality is that people get up every morning and go to work and at the end of the week, or every 2 weeks, out of that paycheck goes money to Washington. And that money stays here. But we want to send that money back home to where Americans really are.

I hope everyone will listen to the debate in the next few months. It could even go on for a year, because there are a lot of defenders of the status quo here. There are a lot of defenders of the status quo who believe in their heart that taxpayer money is better spent here in Washington by people who will never set foot in the communities of those taxpayers. They believe they know what is best for all America's children and all America's families.

And I just throw that out there; that if we believe that wherever we are in America, that our local school districts and our local communities and schools are in the best position and the best able to determine what is best for their children, then we should support common sense legislation like Straight A's: demands accountability and sends the money back home. However, if we do not believe the status quo is serving

our children correctly, if we believe that there should be as many strings attached to the decision-making at the local level, if we believe that folks in Washington know best what is going on in Staten Island or Kansas or Texas or Alaska, if we believe that, then we probably do not support this legislation and we do not support initiatives to move to the path of freedom when it comes to education.

Madam Speaker, the next several months will underscore, I believe, this Congress' desire to improve education and raise academic standards. I would only hope all Members would support this legislation.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE HONORABLE RICHARD A. GEPHARDT, DEMOCRATIC LEADER

The Speaker pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Honorable RICHARD A. GEPHARDT, Democratic Leader:

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, June 18, 1999.

Hon. J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to Section 591(a)(2) of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1999 (112 STAT. 2681-210), I hereby appoint to the National Commission on Terrorism: Honorable Jane Harman of Torrance, California and Mr. Salam Al-Marayati of Shadow Hills, California.

Yours Very Truly,
RICHARD A. GEPHARDT.

PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. EMERSON). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Madam Speaker, let me say that this evening my plan is to discuss the Democrats' Patients' Bill of Rights.

I think many of my colleagues know that within the Democratic party we have, for several years now, highlighted and prioritized HMO reform as one of the major issues that we would like to see addressed in the House of Representatives, and our answer to the need for managed care/HMO reform is a bill called the Patients' Bill of Rights. And we call it the Patients' Bill of Rights essentially because it is a comprehensive way to provide protections to patients against some of the abuses that we have seen within managed care and within HMOs.

The reason I am here tonight, Madam Speaker, is because I want to highlight the fact that once again in this session of Congress, and just like the last session of Congress, Democratic Members, including myself, have been forced to

resort to a petition process, what we call a discharge petition, that many of us signed. Today we started the process, this morning, and I believe now there are 167 Members, Democratic Members, who have signed a discharge petition at this desk over here near the well, because we have not been able to get the Republican leadership, which is in charge of the House of Representatives, to have a hearing or have a committee markup or bring to the floor the Patients' Bill of Rights.

That is an extraordinary procedure, to move to the discharge petition. It is something that the minority usually is not required to do because the majority party allows debate, or should allow debate, on issues that are of importance to the average American. But in this case, once again, I would suggest that the reason is because the Republican leadership is so dependent on the insurance industry and so determined to carry out the will of the insurance industry that they have been unwilling to let the Patients' Bill of Rights be considered in committee or come to the floor.

In fact, what we saw last year in the House and what we are seeing again this year in the House is essentially a three-pronged strategy by the Republican leadership to deny a full debate and vote on the Patients' Bill of Rights.

First of all, they simply delay for 6 months, since January, by not allowing the bill to be heard in committee or marked up in the committee. And then, when that seems to fail because the pressure gets too strong that they have to do something, they come forward with what I call a piecemeal approach.

Just the other day, about a week ago, in the Committee on Education and the Workforce, one member of the Republican leadership brought eight individual bills that were purported to deal with the need for HMO or managed care reform. But those were individually bills or collectively bills that did not add up to much in terms of adequate protections for patients in HMOs. And I would say that, once again, this piecemeal approach is a way to avoid having the comprehensive bill, the Patients' Bill of Rights, heard.

In fact, when the ranking member, the senior Democrat on the Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education, Training and Life-Long Learning, that sought to bring up the Patients' Bill of Rights, he was essentially gavelled down and told that he was out of order in trying to raise the Patients' Bill of Rights in committee.

And what happened today, my understanding is, that even some of the Republicans on the committee, who are not in the leadership and basically did not support the Republican leadership, threatened if they were not allowed to