

they are making the election between three basics, shelter, food and prescription.

Yet, we here in the Congress have an opportunity to do something about it, and we are resisting that. We are resisting that. We say because we want safe drugs we want to make sure that the pharmaceutical companies can indeed afford to provide that. Well, I support my pharmaceuticals. I am not against them, but I am also thinking that corporate America can do good and do well, not at the expense of senior citizens.

The bill that the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) has introduced, that has passed the House, has been improved in the Senate, so there is no reason to even fear the safety of those drugs.

Mr. Speaker, I just saw a magazine article, already the pharmaceutical companies are attacking the possibility that these drugs will be unsafe, that is a bogus, bogus, bogus claim. No one wants to have unsafe medicine. I urge this House to do the right thing, pass this bill so our seniors indeed can have affordable drugs.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Wisconsin (Ms. BALDWIN).

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY), for his incredible leadership on the issue of reimportation and getting a fair price for our seniors for prescription drugs; all people frankly. I wanted to come down to the floor today on behalf of my constituents, my constituents in Portage, Monroe, and Stoughton, Wisconsin and, all the other cities and towns and rural areas in my district who demand and need affordable, comprehensive prescription drug coverage.

Mr. Speaker, we are playing election-year politics with the health of our grandparents, our parents, aunts and uncles. We are ignoring the voice of the many constituents who have written us, me and all of my colleagues showing us in vivid detail their outrageously high prescription drug bills.

Our seniors need prescription drug coverage now. They need the passage of the bill of the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY). They need affordable drug coverage now. So no matter who you are, where you are or how sick you are, you will have the health care you need.

Mr. CROWLEY. I thank the gentlewoman from Wisconsin (Ms. BALDWIN) for the remarks. I appreciate that very, very much.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to thank you for the patience and your steadfastness, and I appreciate all of the speakers who gave their time this afternoon on the issue of prescription drugs.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to mention that this is not only on one side, there

are Members on the other side who I am working with, the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. EMERSON), the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. COBURN), the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT), as well as members in the other House. We are all working together to try to get this amendment that has passed here in the House passed in the Senate. It was improved in the Senate, approved in the conference committees, we have to do it now, we do not have much time left.

We are told we will be out of here in a couple of weeks. We need to pass this amendment so that seniors can get the prescription drugs that they need at a rate of 30 percent to 50 percent less than they are paying right now. We need to pass a patients' bill of rights, and we need to improve upon the Medicare coverage that this country provides to seniors throughout this land.

REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCES IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CANNON). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to what was just being debated, and I have an 85-year-old father, I have my in-laws in their 80s. And I am very much dedicated and understand very much the importance of providing Medicare coverage and prescription drugs. I certainly favor a patients' bill of rights.

Mr. Speaker, rather than talking about those issues today, I have taken my 60 minutes of time, which I do not get an opportunity to do very often, and I will not probably have another opportunity ever in this House of Representatives, to reflect for a few minutes on this institution and on the experiences that I have had here over the years that I have had the privilege to serve, because I am leaving this body at the end of this session of Congress after 20 years in the House of Representatives.

This is my last chance to reflect for a few minutes to my colleagues. I am very much aware of the great importance of the House of Representatives, the People's body.

I read a book recently on the life of John Quincy Adams, and I know that having been the President of the United States, having been a United States Senator, John Quincy Adams, who finished his life in this body as a House Member, always thought of the House of Representatives as his greatest experience, most rewarding experience.

I can assure anybody that this has been a very rewarding experience for me in many ways, satisfying principally because I have been given an opportunity very few people have to

serve in public office in the highest positions in this Nation, to make laws, to make life better for our children and our grandchildren, and to do things that many people would like an opportunity to do but very few people have the privilege.

I thank the voters of Central Florida who have given me that opportunity in election after election over the last several years. It has been something to reflect upon the young people that I have come in contact with in those years. It is my observation that while we often talk about our troubled youth that most of America's youth are bright and wanting to learn and very capable and that, contrary to a lot of opinions, the future is bright for this country, because we are the greatest free Nation in the history of the world. Because despite our weaknesses hither and yon, we have the greatest institutions of education and family that exist anywhere.

We need to make them better, but we need to recognize that our children not only are our hope for the future, but we have many who are doing very well, who are even living with single parents at some point, either a mother or a father, and despite all of the difficulties that there may be in that setting, even in the urban areas, in some of the worst living conditions in the country, young people are succeeding. They are learning. They are passing their courses. They are getting into positions of authority later in life. They are making their parents very proud, and I think they should be.

But I have seen quite a number of young people who have come here in this Congress to visit, either working in my office as a staff member, working in the office as a volunteer, as an intern, coming in on a high school intern program, making it to Washington because they have done an artwork for which they are being given some decoration, and in those faces, I have taken the most satisfaction, of knowing we are transferring to each generation a better knowledge of democracy and how it works and handing over to them a lot more of the keys to keeping this country the great free Nation that it is.

□ 1700

We often do not reflect on how much Congressmen do to further that cause and our staffs do to further that cause. Every year, since I have come to Congress, I have, with one exception, I think, the first year perhaps, I have had a high school intern program where one high school junior from every high school in my congressional district has come to Washington and has spent a week here, has spent a week meeting with my colleagues, meeting with various executive branch officials, having an opportunity to really learn what the United States

House of Representatives and Senate and our government is all about.

I look back on many of those, and I occasionally run into them and know each one of them not only learned a great deal here but went back to their high school and shared that with their friends, shared it with their family, have actually shared much of what they learned here with them in many ways and will forever carry with them what they learned here in that brief week. I also have sponsored a couple of pages here on the floor of the House. They have been here, some of them for the summer, a couple of them for an entire academic year.

I know from observing those young people and what they have learned how valuable it will be going back into whatever walk of life in the future they are involved with, in school, in college, and in business or whatever, and serve their communities better because of what they have learned here.

We also have had a congressional art program for many years that Congress has sponsored; and in my congressional district we have selected, through a judging process, the art work of many of the high schools. That art work is something to behold. I encourage anyone to go to any congressional district art competition when it is held annually, as it is in most congressional districts, and look at what the young people are producing, what wonderful talent they possess.

The only thing we are able to do with our congressional effort is to encourage that. Encourage it we do, legislatively in certain ways; but we particularly encourage it with our competition, where we take one high school art work out of each congressional district where this competition is held, and bring it to Washington every year as the outstanding work and put it on display in this Capitol so that the entire Nation can see it for a whole year.

There are many of those works today on display in this Capitol by young people from the last competition last summer, this past summer.

Each one of those students who has gone through the experience not only of winning and coming here but participating in one of those competitions is encouraged in terms of their artistic endeavors and encouraged to succeed in life and encouraged, in my judgment, with those things that are most valuable for a young person to have, and those are the tools of discipline, self-discipline, and confidence that they can succeed in whatever they try and they work at and really try hard enough to do.

That brings me to the basic point of my thoughts today, and that is we are a land of opportunity. We are a land of opportunity because our Founding Fathers gave us a great Constitution and a Bill of Rights and the checks and balances that go with it; and part of that

checks and balance system is this elective body, the 435 Members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

In the process of being this great Nation and land of opportunity, our role as legislators is to further the work of our Founding Fathers and those who came before us, in making sure that we properly oversee our government in its many facets; that the laws that are passed in this Nation ever increase opportunities for everybody, equal opportunities for everybody of all races, religions, colors, national origins, to be able to succeed if they have the kind of self-discipline to go forward, give them the opportunity, give them the chance, encourage them, provide the right environment for it.

Now, that may sound broad and we deal with specifics out here every day; but that is what we are about, making life better for the future, providing an opportunity for other people to succeed.

I have had a lot of experiences here with legislation. I have been involved with issues concerning the immigration questions that were greatly troubling our Nation, particularly in the mid-1980s. I participated in those debates thoroughly. I am a very big believer, having served on the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims, in legal immigration. I think that the foundation of this Nation is our immigrants. We all, in the broadest sense, came from somewhere, our ancestors did, to this country; and we are truly a melting pot, and we need to always remember that.

We need to encourage legal immigrants to come here, to contribute, to participate, and do it in an orderly fashion.

I am also a big opponent of illegal immigration. I think that undermines a lot of the values of this Nation and potentially undermines, of course, what we strive to do for those who come here legally to have a better life to contribute to our society.

I did participate in some very tough debates over the years, and I am sure those debates will continue to go on because immigration is the heart of this Nation. It is a critical centerpiece of what has made this Nation great and will always make this Nation great. We must keep our doors open. We must never close those doors. We must always encourage those who come here and give them an opportunity to contribute, and many, many do every day, to making this a greater country.

At the same time, we have to have the restrictions on those who would come here because the world is not always the nice place that we like it to be, because the economies of the rest of the world are not as great as ours and to take advantage of it in numbers that we could not absorb and assimilate properly. It is a balance question; it is a question of fairness.

There are many, many things that I have participated in debate over the years. I have also had a lot to do with issues involving the drug wars that have gone on. A lot of people have put that issue aside, though I know a number of our colleagues have discussed that from time to time here on the floor. I do not think for one minute that things are satisfactory the way they are. Too many young people are using drugs today in alarming numbers, cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, a drug that is so common in Central Florida today on the rave scene that is imported and fabricated. I believe in a balanced approach to the efforts to stop and discourage the use of drugs. I believe deeply that we have to have education of our young people; that we have to have drug treatment for those who get involved to get them away from their addiction. But we also have to give encouragement to our local communities and local law enforcement and what they do; and not the least, we must be prepared to put a blockade up to stop drugs from coming in here from foreign countries that come in by the tons every year and invade our Nation.

Now, there are those who will say that indeed, in fact, we can never stop the flow of drugs into this country and that we should legalize drugs. I will say, from having been chairman of the Subcommittee on Crime and been involved with this issue a number of years, that it is not in the best interest of our young people to have that happen. The youth of this Nation would be ill served because the studies show in those countries where that has been tried the number of young people who are and do become addicted to drugs has roughly doubled, maybe even tripled. I find that totally unacceptable. So while we may pay a price and may have to continue to work at it and may not always be successful, it is important that we continue that work and that we do everything we can to do things like the Western Hemisphere Drug Elimination Act that I was proud to have authored in the House a couple of years ago to provide the resources to discourage the drugs from coming in here and to try to do what that bill did and set a goal of reducing dramatically by 80 percent or more the drugs that come here from Latin America, in particular, but from anywhere in the world, because we are flooded with too much of that today.

So I am not leaving this body unaware that there are still many problems unresolved. The juvenile crime bill that I worked on a long time, it does not appear as though it will come out of this Congress in a fashion that gets enacted into law this time. I am sorry for that. It is caught up with other issues that it really unfortunately should not be, but it is. It was a bipartisan product, took many years of

work; but the problem that underlies that bill is still here with us today.

Despite all the good things I have said about young people today, I know there are many troubled youth out there and we need to do something about that. Juvenile crime is a problem for a lot of reasons; but it is a bigger problem than it needs to be because today our juvenile court systems are not working as well as they should be, and we need to come to grips with that fact around the Nation in the State legislatures, as well as here in Washington.

The legislation that I have worked on, and hope that in the next Congress successors will succeed in putting through, would be something that provides a grant program to the States so that they can provide additional assistance to get more judges into the juvenile court system, to have more probation officers, to have more diversion programs, to do the things that are necessary to remedy our overworked juvenile court system.

Why is that so important? Well, we find in the juvenile crime area that many young people who commit these crimes do it because they really do not think they are going to get punished. A lot of that goes back to a basic system, a lack of discipline at home or at school or wherever else for a number of these young people. They do not see that if they do something wrong that they are going to receive something in return that is not very nice.

Now, much of the time in juvenile law, the punishment is nothing more than probation with a requirement that they do community service; but whenever somebody as a juvenile and they commit a misdemeanor crime, I am absolutely convinced that every juvenile who commits that crime should receive some form of punishment, some form of knowledge that they are going to suffer a consequence for doing it. That means when this bill is finally passed and becomes law, that it must contain, for the grant money to be effective, a provision that says that every State who receives the money will at the very least require every juvenile that is guilty of a misdemeanor crime to receive some punishment in the juvenile system.

I think that is very important, and it was a bipartisan product when it came out of this body this last time; and I think that it should be a bipartisan product when it finally becomes law.

One other subject in that realm that is unfinished, that troubles me, is in the area of our prisons and prison industries. I have worked on this subject for a number of years. I remember when I first came to Washington, being invited by the late Chief Justice Warren Berger to serve on a commission that was looking into factories behind fences, an effort to try to bring our businesses into the prisons of this

country, State and Federal; to employ more prisoners, to gainfully employ them in a way that they could learn the skills that so when they ultimately left jail, ultimately left prison, that they would have something they could go out into the workplace with and do a job and earn a living and not come back into the prison system again with a high rate of return, which today unfortunately exists for virtually the vast majority of prisoners who leave prison in our Federal and State systems if they have not gone through some kind of prison industry work.

The sad story is that only about 20 percent of all Federal prisoners and about 7 percent or so of State prisoners are engaged in prison industries today. We have a huge debate going on in this body, and we will continue to have over the next few months, in all probability, over the question of what they call mandatory source preferences given to prison-made goods at the Federal level where the Federal Government agencies have to give some preference or priority to the prison goods that are made in the Federal prison system in terms of purchase. Now, I personally think we ought to phase that out. That should not be. On the other hand, there is a law that exists that says that no goods made in our prison systems in this country can be sold across State lines. That law has been around since the 1930s or so.

What I envision some day seeing is for businesses to come into the prisons, not having the prisoners under the prison system make goods and compete with the private marketplace, but rather have the private marketplace come into the prison, utilize the prison labor, paying a prevailing wage, paying a reasonable wage, providing that a good portion of that wage goes to pay the room and the board to save the taxpayer's money and at the same time training the worker, the prisoner in this case, with real job skills that they can go out in the real world when they get out of prison and utilize and allow, of course, the business that comes into the prison to be able to market the goods that they make or the services they provide just as they would if they were using any other labor.

We need to get away from the view that some seem to hold that somehow a prisoner should not work, is not an employee, is not a part of the labor force. In my judgment, we should return all prisoners, even while they are in prison, to the degree practical, to the workforce and it is one of the great weaknesses of our society that we fail to do that. In the process of failing to do that, we have also contributed to a lot more crime because people who get out of prison without those skills, without ever having learned the discipline of a real job, do not go out and find a job and keep it. They wind up, instead, coming back to prison.

In fact, most of the prisoners today in our prison system have never held a real job. They are young people who have been committing lives of crime from the very beginning, and we need to deal with that.

So that is one of the areas that over the years I have been concerned that has not been resolved, and I know that as I leave this body I wish my colleagues well in being able to complete that action in a fair and reasonable manner.

I want to reflect for a moment on a couple of things that have been well resolved, things that I have had great experiences with in my tenure here, and comment as well on what I think young people should take away from their observations and their studies about this body. For one thing, not everything here is highly partisan. The bill I just talked about, the juvenile crime bill, although some amendments made it into a controversy, was a totally bipartisan bill, as I mentioned. It came out of my Subcommittee on Crime with every Republican and every Democrat voting for it, and it would have gone through both bodies had there not been some unforeseen circumstances at a place out in Colorado with a shooting that got it caught up with a gun issue.

□ 1715

The reality is that we have lots of other bills that are not at all even this size where we work together and we do not debate much out here on the floor of the House because we come to resolutions on them in our own way and they come here and they get voted on as suspension bills or they are voted on with limited debate. Those are bills that are often very important.

One bill that is on its way to becoming law now that affects just my district and, in some ways, affects the whole State of Florida, the bill that makes the Wakulla River in Florida a wild and scenic river under our national system, only the second river in our State. In the Florida delegation, we often work together, Democrat and Republican alike, on bills and legislation and over the years I have been here that are important to our State, and those pieces of legislation very frequently are enacted and are enacted without, again, controversy and certainly not partisanship and get a lot less notice than they probably should. It is day in and day out that those things are done.

For example, every member of my delegation from Florida has been united over the years in wanting to restore the Everglades; fighting right now together for the resources to share a partnership, the State and Federal Government, to restore the Florida Everglades to its natural beauty and to protect our environment. Every Member since I have been in this Congress

in these years of both Democrat and Republican from my State have opposed offshore oil drilling off our coast because we collectively know the value of that pristine beach we have and that wonderful water that we have and we do not want to destroy the ecosystems or to put them at risk.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on with lists peculiar to Florida, but I could also go on with lists of those pieces of legislation where we have worked together jointly to accomplish good that was not partisan.

I can remember a bill, one that bore my name, back in 1986 that I managed to get a challenge from my then chairman, Ron Mazzoli, to be able to produce in the waning days of the Congress on marriage fraud and immigration in a way that would not require any vote, because it was too late in the session. It looked to him, I suspect, as though it would be very controversial. I was a Republican; he was a Democrat. We were the minority in those days. He was the chairman of the Subcommittee on Immigration, and I knew he favored what I wanted to do, but he did not believe probably that we could accomplish the refinement of a fairly comprehensive piece of legislation.

It dealt with the fact that we had a lot of people coming to this country under false pretenses, coming and marrying an American citizen just to get here; not because they were really in love with them, though obviously the American citizen thought otherwise. As soon as they came here and had been married, they became a citizen because of that marriage, and then they immediately separated, and the person who had been defrauded never saw them again, and the person, of course, who came here under those false pretenses, once they became a citizen, could stay. It was very difficult to ever remove them.

We did work out some provisions in the law that provided some remedies for this, to give a time delay, a period of time where the couple had to stay together after they were married and demonstrate that their marriage was viable; a lot of technical details. But that was worked out in a very accommodating fashion. I remember working with members of the other body of both parties; I remember working with the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK) to make sure that this was worked right and the language was done.

Then, disbelieving to many, we brought that through the committee process by a voice vote; we brought it to the floor of the House and we passed it without a single dissent. We got it passed in the other body, and we managed to get it to the President's desk and get it signed into law in the last few days of the Congress, even though it was potentially a very controversial bill. It was very bipartisan and done in

a very accommodating fashion, got no real headlines. They later made a movie about some of the problems that one could see from that bill if one did not agree with it completely, and I certainly did for reasons of policy I stated, called Green Card.

I am proud of that bill, not just because it was a bill that I passed with my name on it, but because it represents the kind of bipartisan work that goes on every day here in this House of Representatives that many in the public never see, because they are focused on the big debates about the budget, about health care, about things that we do have partisan differences on, because some of us in each of our parties come from a different perspective on the role of government. I will address that in a moment as well.

Having said that, I want young people to look at this body and look at the tenure of service and hopefully be encouraged to participate. They need to study history, they need to learn their courses in school, and then as many as we can possibly get to be involved, we need to get them involved; not just to run for public office, not just to be a Congressman, though I hope many of them would do that some day, or try to do that, but because we need them involved in the communities, in the clubs, in the churches, in the community organizations, in helping other people who might run for the school board or other offices, and just by being a good citizen in whatever business or whatever they do in life by paying attention to the debates that go on and in making educated value judgments about those things that are important to making this Nation the great Nation it is today and keeping it that way.

It is, I am convinced, the word of mouth of those who really do pay attention that makes a difference in the elections and in the process of free government we have every year. All too few actually become educated in that sense. We need to encourage a whole lot more. And, in that process, I am reminded of having seen an editorial recently in the Tampa Tribune newspaper about a test that was given a few years ago in Salina, Kansas, 1995, if my recollection is correct, to eighth graders. They had to pass 44 questions in order to go from the eighth grade to the ninth grade. There were only 20 of them reproduced in the paper. I am not going to recite all of them today, but several of those questions dealt with specific dates in American history, dealt with being able to identify what happened on that date that was important, dealt with things in history, dealt with things in the English language which today, seemingly, is lost in many of our schools and among many of our children and young people that I come in contact with.

Mr. Speaker, we need to revisit that. We need not only to have the sciences

do well and all of our schools be improved around this country for purposes of continuing the great revolution in industry and high technology we have, but we need young people to also study the arts and literature and know the language and know history and know it well, because history does, as many have said, repeat itself. If one does not know the pitfalls of history, one will make those mistakes over again in the next generation or the generation after that.

History is not something well known. There are many other examples of that in current media reports about history tests that college students do not pass or could not pass on very simple, basic knowledge of American history, let alone world history.

Mr. Speaker, when I think about young people, I do not just think about the need for more history, I also think about the fact that when I have seen them come here to work, all too frequently for many years, they have not had the skills in the English language that we need, or that they really need. And as we live in a computer age, it is all too easy to use "spell check" and not actually know how to spell the word, or to leave it to somebody else while you are doing creative writing and not know punctuation. It is important when one comes to be a legislative aide and in many other endeavors in life to be able to write a letter, to be able to write a paragraph, to have the analytical skills to be able to understand what you are reading, and to then interpret it and put it on paper in some simplified form. That is very important in our government, and it is certainly important still today in many businesses.

That is not a skill that many young people are learning today, unfortunately. I would suggest that the best education that any young person can have for coming to work in a congressional office today is an English literature degree or a degree in journalism; in those subject matters where they have an intense exposure to learning writing skills, verbal skills, and the ability to communicate, and analytical skills that go with that. One does not have to be a lawyer to be a Congressman, one can certainly be a doctor, and we have several who are. One can be anything in the walk of life, which is the beauty of our Nation. So I am not suggesting that everybody have an English degree or everybody have a journalism degree that comes to Congress or works here, but I am suggesting that whether one gets a degree in it or not that you learn it as young people, that you really work at it, that you do not take it for granted that we do not pass by it because your teachers may not have emphasized it the same way they would have years ago, especially grammar and how you write paragraphs and you analyze and write whole compositions.

It is far more important than many seem to think it is today. As a skill, if we have lost it, and we need it every day, it seems to me that we can never fully make up, and it is affecting us in ways that are harder to describe or to discern than sometimes measuring the lack of a particular skill for doing a scientific job or a particular work place skill.

So that is an observation that I would like to leave with my colleagues as they encourage young people in the future, and as I am doing and have done in the years that I have been here in their interest in government to be involved. Be involved with history, be involved in studying, learning about everything you can. One of the greatest attributes for anybody serving here is a general knowledge and an interest in everything. I know I have that. I am curious. I am always curious about something. I want to know the answer to this or the answer to that. I cannot know everything; I am very dependent on my staff. I do not know always the answers to everything, but I learn, and I work very hard at it. But I need those skills and I need my staff to have the skills to be able to discern these things and to discern the answers as best as we possibly can quickly, accurately, and to be able to communicate them.

When it comes to the matters of public life too, I know that a lot of people think people around here make deals all the time, and I suppose there are some. But the other part of government that is so impressive to me at the House of Representatives is how many honorable people serve here, how many very dedicated people there are here. We always hear about the exceptions, and I guess that gets publicized, and occasionally someone writes an article about just that, that there are very few of those in comparison to the 435 House Members and 100 of the other body, but I can say that it is a high degree of competence that is here and some very fine people that are the rule and that are the norm.

In that process, we have worked together on the legislative side of this, but it also makes for a body that we call collegial, and that simply means that we get along really better than people imagine. We have had great debates, like over the impeachment of the President of the United States.

People often wonder, are you really angry at the other fellow? You are having a big argument over it. The answer is no. After the debate is finished, I know of rare instances, extraordinarily rare instances where that anger carries over. Individuals get along amongst themselves in professional ways, and we learn to disagree agreeably, and we do have to do that. That is an important skill to have in life, to be able to make the argument, to be able to make the case. Above all else, you do not compromise principle, integrity, char-

acter; principle, must be there. It is important that our leaders possess those qualities and that our young people carry that forward.

Those were the qualities of our Founding Fathers. Those are the qualities necessary for a republic to succeed. A representative government is very dependent on those qualities. As we look at all of those things that we admire in people, I would suggest one of those that we admire the most is people who are of independent judgment; who, while we might not always agree with them, we do know where they stand, and we know that they mean what they say and they say what they mean. I think those are qualities that those who possess them serve the public better than otherwise would be, and you would find it remarkable how many people actually possess those qualities that serve here, but often are not recognized for one reason or another.

In speaking of this body too, I cannot help but reflect on ways other than legislative that this body can accomplish many good things. I know that all of us in our districts are involved with helping people every day through our casework staff, helping them to resolve matters of great concern with the Federal Government. I mentioned on the floor of this body a few days ago my personal staff, and I pay tribute to them who served with me and have been employees over the years, because so many of them have helped people with immigration matters, with problems with the Veterans Administration, with problems relative to things like the tax laws or Social Security or Medicare, and because government is complicated and the forms are complicated, and I personally would like to see them a lot simpler, but because they are, there is a need for that service. So we do a lot more than legislate in that sense, and we do it through our staffs and individually every day.

We also get involved in helping resolve issues and matters that are greatly important to our districts in terms of those things that may not be legislative, but are important in public policy and in our communities. We are looked to to do that as leaders.

We also have a role in our committees in particular to oversee the Federal agencies and the arms of the Federal Government on the executive branch. As we know, our government is divided into the legislative, executive and judicial branches. We actually have some role in the judicial, although they are an independent group and they ought to be. But we oversee and we have a duty to question and to interrogate, to make sure that the laws are being carried out the way Congress intended, and that we do not have fraud and abuse, and that we have people who are held accountable.

□ 1730

I mentioned earlier juveniles in the juvenile court system. It is accountability that is important there, as it is here. It is accountability that is important in every agency. Everybody who is involved needs to understand there is going to be accountability. We cannot be the policeman every time, but we certainly have a public obligation to do that job.

Then there is one other aspect that has been especially appealing to me as I have served in this body. I have been able, from time to time, to do something that made this a very rewarding place, that went far down a different trail than legislative or committee oversight or helping my constituents on a daily basis. I got involved in this endeavor that I think of as the most rewarding of my entire tenure here because I served on the immigration subcommittee in 1984. I went to Latin America, to Central America, when we were having a lot of civil disturbances there. We had the Contras in Nicaragua; we had a Civil War going on in El Salvador.

We think about that as many years ago, and it was quite a while ago; but the Cold War was still on, the former Soviet Union was engaged in trying to make the countries south of us become Communists in their doctrine and the controlling powers in some of those governments, and we were very disturbed as a Nation about a lot of those things that were happening. I went down in part because of the refugee problems flowing into Florida and the rest of this country as those disturbances occurred. We had a flow of people coming here.

While I was in El Salvador, a little tiny country in Latin America and Central America, I had an occasion to observe what they call the *desplazados*. Those are the displaced people, in Spanish, who were displaced off the farms. They were not technically refugees because they had not gone to another country; and, therefore, they were not treated by the United Nations as refugees and there was no aid or assistance coming to them in the international world.

So I saw these camps with hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans in them, and children that had distended bellies and diseases and things that we would not expect in a modern world, especially not so close to the United States. And I asked the folks at our embassy in El Salvador what was the problem here. One of the principal problems was there were no antibiotics in the country and no way to distribute them. In fact, they even had a shortage of antibiotics in the embassy for our own personnel.

So I came home, not having a lot of knowledge about how to do anything on that subject, but I remembered that during the Vietnam War there had been

an effort to get drugs, donated by pharmaceutical companies, over to Vietnam and to the surrounding area. I called and inquired of a friend with one of those companies and asked if it would be possible for the pharmaceutical industry to donate free medicines for this purpose into this small country.

I was told that that was something that would be very difficult to do. Of course, it was possible; but it would require first and foremost that there be a security of the pharmaceuticals, the drugs, when they got in-country. And in a war zone, which El Salvador was considered, that was difficult to achieve; and he said, I do not know how you would do that, but you would have to do that. Second, there would have to be a distribution system that would ensure that these drugs were going to get to these kids and not be put on the black market or sent off somewhere else, and I do not know how you would do that. And, third, as a practical matter, these pharmaceutical companies, like any business, will want tax write-offs. They will have to have a 501(c)(3) or some other organization that will be tax deductible for them to make a contribution, and I do not know how you would do that, he said.

Well, I did not know either, but I remembered there was a Kissinger Commission going on at the time and Dr. Walsh, who was the head of Project Hope, was the head of that. The Kissinger Commission was involved in Latin America trying to resolve some of these differences and had been at work for some time. I did not know Dr. Walsh, but I called him and asked him if maybe Project Hope could do this. He was very famous for that. And he said, well, I wish I could, but we are spread too thin now and I really cannot do that. But if you come up with some ideas about how you can accomplish the goals and meet the criteria that the pharmaceutical companies have suggested, then I would be willing to allow you to have a facility here at Project Hope so they could get the tax-free benefit of their donations and maybe assist you in other ways.

Well, I did not know what I was going to do then; but I thought this was something of a light, a little hope, and I called a fellow who had given me a card in El Salvador who I had met at an embassy function while I was there for a day or two. He was a businessman there who had migrated to El Salvador many years before. I called and asked him, because I had his card, and I said what thoughts do you have about this? And he said well, Congressman McCOLLUM, I was the International Harvester distributor in El Salvador. But with this civil war going on, there are not any needs for my business, I am not selling anything, and I have a warehouse at the military airport and that warehouse would be something under

lock and key that would be absolutely secure. So if you bring some drugs down here for these kids, we could store them there.

Then he told me that he was a Knight of Malta. Well, I did not know what a Knight of Malta was. I am not Catholic, and I did not know what it was; but he quickly told me that they are one of the most famous charitable arms of the Catholic Church, and they are businessmen particularly all over the world who get involved in charitable causes. He said in many Latin American countries, and in El Salvador, there are clinics with nurses, not doctors, all over the countryside that the Knights of Malta and the Catholic Church operate; and if you could get us some assistance and get those drugs here, we could get them distributed and we could assure that those drugs would be brought to those children to use them.

Well, I thought, wow, this might really be doable. So I called Dr. Walsh back on the phone, said I am excited about this. I am not sure what the drugs ought to be, but we can do this. He said, if you are going to pursue this, I will send a doctor over from Honduras. He will analyze what is needed, and we will get that to you right away. Not only that, but here is how you go about this. Ask the pharmaceutical companies if they will donate the drugs to a central location, perhaps to your city of Orlando; I will donate the boxes and how to package it; I will even send my son down to help you package it if you find the transportation system.

Well, one thing led to another and, by golly, we did that. We actually within 4 days, which does not seem possible, had gone out with a letter to the pharmaceutical companies all over the country asking for them to make this donation, explaining the program that we had put in place, got some local business people to donate the cost of an old DC-3 aircraft we had to charter; and within a week, or 10 days at the latest, of the time I had been in El Salvador, we had a plane flying to El Salvador loaded with medicines and medical supplies donated free of charge to those children in El Salvador, those desplazados.

That actually grew into about a \$4 million program over several years. I got an award from the Catholic Church, that I believe is the highest honor they can give to a non-Catholic for humanitarian service, that I am very proud of. But even more than that, it led to what was later known as the McCollum airlift, when we got involved in the Afghanistan period, when they had a civil war. And somebody said, well, you did that in El Salvador and the State Department knew about it. Can you do that over here for the refugees from Afghanistan who are now in Pakistan? I said, well, I do not think I can do that. That is a huge number over there, and you have a long way to go.

But working together, Democrat and Republican, I offered an amendment, adopted here one day on the floor of the House, to a defense bill that provided \$10 million to provide airlifts all over the world to military bases to acquire nonlethal excess military supplies and fly to Pakistan for the benefit of the Afghan refugees. There were over 100 of those McCollum airlift flights over a period of the years from about 1986 to 1990, and many of those flights had returns to the United States with young children on those flights who had been injured in land mines inside Afghanistan, who had come out. We had doctors who donated all over this country their time, plastic surgeons in particular, to repair many of these wounds to make them cosmetically presentable again to give new life and new hope to those children.

Now, that went on and it is past history, it is not today; but it is something that I am prouder of than anything else that I have done as an individual Congressman since I have been here in this body. And I will never forget the opportunity that being a Congressman gave me to do that, to be involved in El Salvador and Afghanistan and in other ways. Those are things that Congressmen can do, that Members of this House can make a difference with.

I know others who are here who have done that as well. I will not start naming them, but I know there are many who have great humanitarian spirits who are in this body and when given the opportunity, whether in the minority or in the majority, makes no difference, you have the opportunity to do things with your public office that you just simply would not have if you did not take advantage of it and you were not in this position.

So I leave those thoughts with my colleagues about the office itself, of being a Member of the House of Representatives. It is an awesome responsibility you are delegated. You are elected to represent the people, probably 600,000 or so people in the United States, to come here and devote, but to do so many other things. And in that process, one who is a House Member has an obligation, not a privilege but an obligation to the public and to future generations not only to conduct him or herself honorably, and to vote on legislation wisely and in the best interests that you can possibly think of for the public as a whole, not some special interest group, to vote even on the tough votes when you know you are right but they may not be popular; but you also have an obligation, it seems to me, to use the office to further good causes. And opportunities do come along to do that, both at home in your district and in many ways it could even be abroad.

These opportunities I challenge each of my colleagues to do who will succeed

me. And those who serve now, I know many of them are doing things like that. And I ask young people who study history, who study this body, to reflect on the potential that is here for good public service of any persuasion you might be.

Now, I want to close by commenting a little bit about the present. I know that we are in the waning days of this session of Congress; that when we have an election in a presidential year that we have difficulties passing good legislation at the end; mostly getting a spending bill or two out and negotiating a big end-of-the-year spending bill; but I am still hopeful that in this Congress we will produce some of the substantive legislation that is long overdue.

We have the opportunity still, if we get together and work hard, to produce a bankruptcy bill. It is in conference. There are some disagreements, but we should produce one and we should produce the right one and have the President given it to sign.

We have a chance to produce hate crimes legislation. I know that some on my side of the aisle do not agree with me on this, but I strongly believe that anybody who commits a crime, a crime based solely or principally upon the race or the religion or the sexual orientation of another person, should receive an extra enhanced sentence, just like somebody who commits a crime with a gun should receive extra punishment simply because of that crime on top of and in addition to the punishment they are going to receive for the underlying crime. Obviously, if somebody gets the death penalty for murdering somebody, that will be the ultimate punishment regardless of whether it is committed with a gun or knife or hate crime or otherwise.

I find hate crimes particularly egregious because they are crimes not committed just against an individual; they are committed against a class of people. They are committed against those who are of a certain status. And they are done in a way that tears at the fabric of America, that tears at the very basic principles of our Nation.

And I do not think the issue, as some have framed it, is an issue about gay rights or racial rights or religious rights. It is about our responsibility to discourage and deter crimes that are crimes of violence based on bigotry. That is what it is about. And whatever your views on other issues related to the hard and volatile subjects that are conducted to this, it seems to me to be a common bond that we should all have that we pledge ourselves and find a way in these waning days to pass that legislation and put into enactment a Federal provision in law that enables every offense of that nature throughout this Nation to be prosecuted and punishment to be meted out in an extra fashion that those proposals would allow.

I also would like to believe somehow that the juvenile crime bill that I mentioned earlier could be resolved. I am one of those who believe in closing the gun show loophole. I have always believed in that. I brought a bill out here on the floor of the House to do that once connected with the juvenile crime bill, unfortunately. I say that, because I know were it not for that issue, we would have had that bill passed long ago.

That bill that I proposed was a very simple thing that said, look, in the 25 States or so that have a provision in law that provides for the accounting of the results of somebody who has been convicted of a felony, in those cases, whether they were convicted or they were acquitted, if their name pops up on a computer check, which should be done anytime anybody goes to buy a gun because I do not think anybody who is a convicted felon should be allowed to buy a gun, then in those States an instant check could be done at a gun show, just like at a gun dealer and resolve the question right there.

In the other 25 States or so that do not have those results, they simply have a name pop up, you have the record and the FBI files in the computer that the person was indeed arrested for a felony, you have to wait till the courthouse opens on Monday morning, or Tuesday morning after a 3-day weekend, and then you call the courthouse and find out was it plea bargained, were the charges dropped, was he convicted, and you will know.

□ 1745

So I proposed a 72-hour waiting period. Three business days is fine with me. We did not resolve it that way. We had a big battle on the floor over two different amendments that had different viewpoints to them completely. One of them prevailed and they are still fighting in the conference committee over that. I wish somebody would get together and just do the common sense thing and let us have that bill.

There are others like that that are out here facing us, the Medicare prescription drug issue that is so volatile right now and people are debating it, and the issue over the patients' bill of rights. We should have legislation on those before we go home.

Those who are our senior citizens, and I mentioned earlier at the beginning, I have an 85-year-old dad, I have my in-laws that are in their 80s, I know the importance of making sure that Medicare and Social Security are preserved and protected for everybody who is retired or approaching retirement just as it is today. And for those involved with retirement who cannot afford, which no one who is retired really can afford today, prescription drugs we need to provide a subsidy through Medicare. I do favor Medicare prescription drug coverage.

There is huge debate over the details of how we do it. There are several options on the table about it. I voted for one out here a few weeks ago. I think that is a good proposal. There may be other alternatives that may be good, too. We need to resolve that. We need to provide that coverage. We need to do that in this Congress. We need to do it now. And then we need to come back after this election after the politics wanes and the rhetoric dies down. And we need to remember that money alone will not solve all the problems, that bigger government is not the answer, better government is the answer, that we can do better with this huge historic surplus that we have with Medicare and Social Security and other things that we have.

If we have a \$4.5 trillion or so surplus over the next 10 years, as many are projecting, we should take two-thirds of that, use it to pay down the debt of this Nation so our children and grandchildren will not have the high interest payments that they have to pay. We should at the same time preserve and protect Social Security and Medicare and reform them in the sense of making them viable for future generations.

We should take the other third of that huge sum of money, it is hard to believe we will have that large a surplus but that is what is projected, take that other third, take a substantial part of it, not half of it, not a third of it, but a substantial part of it and use it to rebuild our military that has been built down way too far. And the balance of it we should use to give back to the taxpayers who paid it in in the form of across-the-board cuts and marginal tax rates and in the form of making a change to completely reform our Tax Code to make a real difference.

I am convinced that we can have a simpler, fairer Tax Code and that some day, whether it is a flat rate income tax or national sales tax, keeping the home mortgage deduction, the charitable deduction or some variation of it, we can actually have a code where we can fill out our taxes every year as citizens on a single sheet of paper and send it in and do away with the Internal Revenue Service as we know it today altogether.

We have that historic opportunity now and particularly after this election to do that. It is important for this body to consider the ways of doing it.

If it comes to the debt, we have about a \$5.5 billion total debt. There is a division between public and private debt and so on. But the interest on all of this, however it is defined, is enormous for our children and our grandchildren.

So while we have the opportunity to pay down that debt with no magic and a particular date to pay it down, we need to pay it down so they will not have to pay that interest. And we should let them keep the savings from that interest. There are those that

would propose using that savings to put it into some other Government program.

Let me tell my colleagues, that is tax dollars for our children. That is interest they should not have to pay. That is why we want the debt paid down. So we should make sure that when we pay the debt down that the interest that the children of this country will not have to pay in the future goes back to them so they can use it as they want and not as the Government decides.

When it comes to Social Security, I have said I have had my dad who is up in years and my in-laws and I want to preserve it today for anybody who is retired or approaching retirement, but I have a 19-year-old, a 25-year-old, a 28-year-old son and I want to see the day when they have a better retirement system, when they have one where they do not have the small amount that many have to live on or almost have to live on, and in both cases, those who are fortunate enough to have supplemental other income retirement, it is great, but I want my young sons to be able some day and my colleagues' too to have a system where they have savings accounts where they can take 2 percent or 4 percent of the payroll taxes, set it aside, let it be invested in a conservative investment and grow for 30, 40 or 50 years so they will have a larger retirement to retire on and have a better Social Security. I do not know any grandparent who does not want that for their grandchild.

The same is true with all of health care. We need choices. Every patient should have a choice of a doctor, every doctor a choice of the treatment for their patient; and everybody in this country should have a choice of health care plans, whether it is under Medicare or whether it is out in the rest of the world. We have an enormous task to undertake in the next Congress to assure that is so. And money pumped into ever bigger government programs is not the answer. We have got to find a way to bring competition into the system and choices above all for all Americans.

When it comes to defense, I served 4 years on active duty, 20 more years in the Reserves in the Navy as a judge advocate general, a JAG officer. I then have spent the last 6 years on the House Committee on Intelligence. And at no time since I first went on active duty in 1969 have I seen the morale among active duty personnel as low as it is today. We need to do something about that. There are those that think it is not so, but it is.

We have built down our military too far in the last 8 years. We have gone from a Navy that had about 540 ships to 320. We have gone from 18 Army divisions to 10. We have fewer men and women in uniform today than we did at the time of Pearl Harbor, and we spread them all over the world in more

operational events in the last 8 years than at any comparable 8-year period in history.

Is it any wonder morale is low? And we are not paying them enough.

We should never again have a family in the military on food stamps. We should pay them well. We should put the resources we need to rebuild properly and modernize not all the way back up to the Cold War level strength, we do not need do that, but we need to make it better. We need to improve and modernize our service.

I would challenge anybody to ask anybody today they know who is on active duty or has a child or relative on active duty or any retiree or veteran who follows these issues if I am not wrong. This is an all-time low in modern time since the Vietnam War of morale in our services, and we need to address that problem. And we need to have a missile defense system.

And then, with the rest of the questions on tax law I mentioned earlier, there is no reason we cannot have the tax laws of this Nation reformed in a way that is much simpler than we have today and still provide the revenues.

It strikes me that the first place to start is to remember that a few years ago, under Ronald Reagan, we had marginal tax rates that everybody who pays taxes paid that were much lower than they are today, and that if we adopted a cut in all the marginal rates across the board and lowered everybody's income tax rates, then we would be benefiting mostly those who are lower and middle income. They get the biggest benefit, not the wealthy people, under that proposal but the lower-income people who pay the bulk of the taxes. That is the first step.

The second step, then, is to do the things we need to do like repeal the estate and death tax once and for all that is unfair to small businesses or to those who want to carry on and let the children inherit the property that they worked so hard in their life to do. It is almost un-American to have this tax the way it is today. And to end the marriage penalty.

Those are things that are simple, we all ought to be able to agree on it, end the tax on Social Security earnings that makes no sense. And I think ultimately to encourage savings and investment, we should end the tax on capital gains and the tax on earned interest and the double taxation on dividends. And the easiest way to do that when we have this huge surplus, and we have plenty to do what we need to do, is to be reforming the whole code and go to that simpler code, a flat rate or a sales tax or something simple by sunseting the code, getting a commission, coming to some common understanding. That is a challenge for the next Congress.

I would like to close by saying a couple of things about the overall picture.

We are a Nation of laws. Big government is not what it is all about. We are a Nation of better government, and we should be.

I have a friend who used to talk about less taxes, less spending, less government, and more freedom. Our Nation was founded on the principle that government's best is closest to the people. The school board is where educational decisions should be made. We have a role to play. But categorical and targeted grants are not a good idea in many of these cases because they are too restrictive whether it is in education or other areas.

We should look forward to days when laws are in place where money that comes from the Federal Government like the 6 or 7 percent of education dollars are given back in accountability grants where improvement of our schools and education academic performance is required, but where those local school boards and the parents and the teachers make the decisions about what they do with the money and not have to apply for a grant for more teachers or a grant for school construction or whatever and have to follow all the rules and the regs.

We need to simplify Government. We need to come down with those rules. And we need to get back to basics and let local government do most of this, county commissioners make decisions, school board members make the decisions they can, city commissioners they can, State governments where they have to, and go back to the principles that were so important to our Founding Fathers that leave only to Congress and the Federal Government those things that the States and the local governments truly cannot do.

And that plate is big enough. We do not need to add to it. Government is big enough. We do not need bigger government. We need better government. That is the message I would like to leave with this body.

My tenure here has been a wonderful experience. I have had the great pleasure of knowing many of my colleagues and others who preceded us very well. I have enjoyed my companionship, the relationships, the camaraderie, the many events I got to attend, the experiences, the things I have learned, the chance to learn so much about so many things. But most of all, I have enjoyed being able to be part of a body that has given me the opportunity to really and truly contribute to making the life in this country and this great Nation better for our children and our grandchildren.

This is the greatest free nation in the history of the world. If we keep it there, and we certainly can, it will be because people like those who served with me in this body today continue to be vigilant and because the children and the grandchildren who do study will learn history, do learn English, do

their homework in all other areas, and continue what they are doing today, and that is being the wonderful kids that we all know that they are and the inheritors of this great Constitution, Bill of Rights, and greatest free nation in the history of the world.

I thank my colleagues so much for letting me serve.

QUALITY OF LIFE IN OUR ENVIRONMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CANNON). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I certainly join my colleagues in wishing our friend the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) well.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to spend a few moments this evening discussing elements that deal with our quality of life in our environment.

After a seemingly interminable and preliminary process which has been seemingly going on since the last elections 2 years ago, we are now entering into the political home stretch.

As the candidates move past the debate on debate and the skirmishing that occurs here on Capitol Hill about budgets and health care, there is an overarching theme that is yet to be comprehensively addressed, the livability of our communities and the role the Federal Government can play in making our families safe, healthy, and economically secure.

The long-term implications for the environment have raised many areas of concern for citizens across the country. I find that it is interesting that it is not just a concern for college towns or for traditional urban centers. We find that these are very significant issues in areas like the mountain States of Colorado and Arizona and Utah.

People have been facing development and fear the situation is going to deteriorate overtime. I would like to take this opportunity this evening to discuss some of those items in greater detail.

But I would like to begin, if I may, by yielding to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON), the delegate from the District of Columbia. She, I think, has perhaps one of the most difficult challenges that any of us face, representing the District without a vote, without Senate colleagues, and facing some of the very difficult environmental and development issues.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) to elaborate on some of her concerns.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for yielding to me.

That is a most generous gesture and in keeping with the special attention he has devoted to the capital of the United States. He joins us in so many activities that we share in common with his own constituents.

I want to particularly thank him for joining our bike ride just the other day where we are trying to work with his livability caucus to make the Nation's capital more livable for people who walk and ride and run.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I cannot let the occasion pass without congratulating the gentlewoman on leading the pack of some 3,500 cyclists just 2 weekends ago and a marvelous experience for so many people from the Metropolitan area, not just from the District of Columbia.

I did want to point out that tomorrow morning, again with the cooperation of the office of the gentlewoman, the bicycle caucus is going to have a tour of the south waterfront redevelopment and we will be leaving at 7:30 from the Rayburn horseshoe to be able to combine some bicycle work with understanding some of the development challenges that are being faced by the District.

□ 1800

Ms. NORTON. Indeed so. We invite Members to join us. I will be riding in my skirt because I have a hearing right afterwards. I thank the gentleman for helping us show off our waterfront which we are trying to get in better shape.

I thought I would come to the floor, and I appreciate the opportunity that the gentleman from Oregon has given me, to give a status report to Members on important developments in the District of Columbia. I try to give a status report every so often. This is an important time to do so because it is the appropriation period.

There are new Members here who perhaps think they have been having an out-of-body experience because they have had to vote on the floor on a local city's budget, on a budget raised in the District of Columbia. No, that is the way they do it here. They should not do it anywhere. Some of you have been local legislators. You would never abide that in your district. If I could get out of it, I would. I think that there is going to come a time very soon when there will be ways to modify the present system.

I wanted, though, to begin by thanking the chairman of the District subcommittee, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. DAVIS), and the vice chair, the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA), for going with me to the Committee on Rules last week to ask for the return of the vote to the District of Columbia that was retracted along with the votes of the other delegates when the Republicans took the

majority. As a constitutional lawyer, I had written a memorandum that showed that even as I had the full vote in committees, I could have it in the Committee of the Whole, the creation of the rules of the House, the Democrats were in power then, by a vote I had won it. The Republicans sued us and both the District Court and the Court of Appeals indicated that this was constitutional.

When the vote was retracted through the rules, there were a considerable number of Republicans who came up to me and said that at least for the District of Columbia, which is third per capita in Federal income taxes, if we had been severed, they would have voted to retain the vote of the District. The fact that Chairman DAVIS and Vice Chair MORELLA went with me to plead for the return of the vote for the District I think indicates that we are dealing here with a matter above political considerations, not bipartisan but non-partisan; but because we are talking about the vote, my single vote cannot make a difference, particularly since the rules require a revote if the delegate's vote makes the difference. Of course no one vote makes the difference very often. There cannot be half a dozen times in the session when that occurs. Nothing is lost by the Republican majority should they retain the majority. Everything is gained for my residents who still are smarting under the notion that anybody would take the vote while accepting their Federal income taxes.

There are other reasons as well. Uniquely, this body assumes the privilege of voting on my local budget; yet I have to stand there with no vote on the amendments as I had when I had the vote in the Committee of the Whole, and of course there is the unique requirement that every law passed by the local city council come here to lay over and perhaps to be overturned. So in the name of the half million tax-paying Americans I represent, I ask that my vote be retained, and I appreciate the bipartisan support I have for that proposition.

Let me say just a word about the District itself. Its basic health needs to be reported to this body because this body saw the District go down in 1995. Since then, there have been 4 years of balanced budgets plus surpluses. The District came into balance 2 years ahead of the congressional mandate. The control board is sunsetting. Next year's CAFR will report a balanced budget. That signals the end of the control board. At the same time the city council has revived its oversight functions so that it is now a full functioning city council with all of the vigilance that this body, for example, has over Federal agencies, keeping the new reform mayor on the reform path.

Finally, the school board, which is perhaps where the Congress has had its