

I see my friend, Senator WELLSTONE from Minnesota. He has taught for many years and is an expert in the field of education. I will not try to steal his thunder on this issue. But I will state that as I read about the history of education in America, there are several things we should learn, not the least of which is the fact that at the turn of the last century, between the 19th and 20th century, there was a phenomena taking place in America that really distinguished us from the rest of the world.

This is what it was: Between 1890 and 1918, we built on average in the United States of America one new high school every single day. This wasn't a Federal mandate. It was a decision, community by community, and State by State, that we were going to expand something that no other country had even thought of expanding—education beyond the eighth grade. We started with the premise that high schools would be open to everyone: Immigrants and those who have been in this country for many years. It is true that high schools for many years were segregated in part of America until the mid-1950s and 1960s, but the fact is we were doing something no other country was considering.

We were democratizing and popularizing education. We were saying to kids: Don't stop at eighth grade; continue in school. My wife and I marvel at the fact that none of our parents—we may be a little unusual in this regard, or at least distinctive—went beyond the eighth grade. That was not uncommon. If you could find a good job out of the eighth grade on a farm or in town, many students didn't go on.

Around 1900, when 3 percent of the 17-year-olds graduated from high school, we started seeing the numbers growing over the years. Today 80 or 90 percent of eligible high school students do graduate.

What did this mean for America? It meant that we were expanding education for the masses, for all of our citizenry, at a time when many other countries would not. They kept their education elite, only for those wealthiest enough or in the right classes; we democratized it. We said: We believe in public education; we believe it should be available for all Americans. What did it mean? It meant that in a short period of time we developed the most skilled workforce in the world.

We went from the Tin Lizzies of Henry Ford to Silicon Valley. We went from Kitty Hawk to Cape Canaveral. In the meantime, in the 1940s, when Europe was at war fighting Hitler and fascism, it was the United States and its workforce that generated the products that fought the war not only for our allies but ultimately for ourselves, successfully.

That is what made the 20th century the American century. We were there

with the people. We invested in America. Education meant something to everybody. People went beyond high school to college and to professional degrees. With that workforce and the GI bill after World War II, America became a symbol for what can happen when a country devotes itself to education.

Now we come into the 21st century and some people are resting on their laurels saying: We proved how we can do it. There is no need to look to new solutions. I think they are wrong. I think they are very wrong. Frankly, we face new challenges as great as any faced by those coming into the early days of the 20th century. We may not be facing a war, thank God, but we are facing a global economy where real competition is a matter of course in today's business.

We understand as we debate this H-1B visa bill, if we are not developing the workers with the skills to fill the jobs, then we are remiss in our obligation to this country. Yes, we can pass an H-1B visa as a stopgap measure to keep the economy rolling forward, but if we don't also address the underlying need to come to the rescue of the skill shortage, I don't think we are meeting our obligation in the Senate.

(Mr. GORTON assumed the chair.)

Mr. WELLSTONE. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. DURBIN. I am happy to yield to my colleague from Minnesota.

H-1B VISAS

Mr. WELLSTONE. I wanted to ask the Senator—I know Illinois is an agricultural State, as is mine. Many of our rural citizens, for example, desperately want what I think most people in the country want, which is to be able to earn a decent living and be able to support their families. At the same time we have our information technology companies telling us—I hear this all the time; I am sure the Senator from Illinois hears this—listen, we need skilled workers; we don't have enough skilled workers; and we pay good wages with good fringe benefits. Is the Senator aware we have people in rural America who are saying: Give us the opportunity to develop these skills? Give us the opportunity to be trained. Give us the opportunity to telework. With this new technology, we can actually stay in our rural communities. We don't have to leave.

Is the Senator aware there are so many men and women, for example, in rural America—just to talk about rural America—who are ready to really do this work, take advantage of and be a part of this new economy, but they don't have the opportunity to develop the skills and to have the training? Is that what the Senator is speaking to?

Mr. DURBIN. The Senator is right. I am sure he finds the same thing that I

do in rural Illinois when he goes through Minnesota. There are towns literally hanging on by their fingernails, trying to survive in this changing economy, and some of them are responding in creative ways. In Peoria, they have create a tech center downtown, jointly sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, the local community, and the community college, where they are literally bringing in people, some our ages and older, introducing them to computers and what they can learn from them. So they are developing skills within their community, the life-long learning that I mentioned earlier.

Down in Benton, IL, which is a small town that has been wracked by the end of the coal mining industry, for the most part, in our State, they have decided in downtown Benton not to worry about flowers planted on the streets but rather to wire the entire downtown so they will be able to accommodate the high-tech businesses that might be attracted there. They are trying to think ahead of the curve.

I am not prepared to give up on American workers. I know Senator WELLSTONE is not, either. We need to address the need for more training and education in rural and urban areas alike.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Could I ask the Senator one other question? I am in complete agreement with what the Senator is saying. I had hoped to introduce an amendment to the H-1B bill that dealt with the whole issue of telework. I think we could have gotten a huge vote for it because this is so important to what we call greater Minnesota.

I wish to pick up on something the Senator said earlier. He talked about his own background. The last thing I am going to do is to go against immigrants and all they have done for our country. I am the son of an immigrant. I have a similar background to that of my colleague, but I wanted to give one poignant example. I think we both tend to draw some energy just from people we meet.

On Sunday, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission—and I give Chairman Kennard all the credit in the world—came out to Minnesota to do a 3-day work session with Native Americans. When we talk about Native Americans, we are talking about first Americans, correct?

Mr. DURBIN. Yes.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Do you know what they are saying? They are saying: In our reservations, we have 50-percent-plus poverty. In fact, they are saying it is not only the Internet; they still don't have phone service for many. What they are saying is they want to be part of this new economy. They want the opportunity for the training, the infrastructure, the technology infrastructure.

Yet another example: I am all for guest workers and immigrants coming

in. But at the same time we have first Americans, Native Americans—I see my colleague from Maryland is here. We talk about the digital divide—who are way on the other side of the digital divide. There is another example which I think we have to speak to in legislation at this time.

Mr. DURBIN. I agree with Senator WELLSTONE. As he was making those comments, I thought to myself, that is right up Senator MIKULSKI's alley, and I looked over my shoulder and there in the well of the Senate she is. Senator MIKULSKI addressed this issue of providing opportunities to cross the digital divide so everybody has this right to access. I invite the Senator to join us at this point. We were talking about the H-1B bill that addresses an immediate need but doesn't address the needs of the skill shortage which she raised at our caucus luncheon, or the digital divide. I would like to invite a question or comment from the Senator from Maryland on those subjects.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I thank the Senator for his advocacy on this issue.

First of all, I acknowledge the validity of the high-tech community's concerns about the availability of a high-tech workforce. The proposal here is to solve the problem by importing the people with the skills. I am not going to dispute that as a short-term, short-range solution. But what I do dispute is that we are precluded from offering amendments to create a farm team of tech workers. This is what I want to do if I would have the right to offer an amendment.

We do not have a worker shortage in the United States of America. I say to the Senator, and to my colleagues, we have a skill shortage in the United States of America. We have to make sure the people who want to work, who have the ability to work, have access to learning the technology so they can work in this new economy.

The digital divide means the difference between those who have access to technology and know how to use technology. If you are on one side of the divide, your future as a person or a country is great. If you are on the wrong side, you could be obsolete.

I do not want to mandate obsolescence for the American people who do not want to be left out or left behind. That is why I want to do two things: No. 1, have community tech centers—1,000 of them—where adults could learn by the day and kids could learn in structured afterschool activities in the afternoon. Then, also, to increase the funding for teacher training for K-12, where we would have a national goal that every child in America be computer literate by the time they finish the eighth grade. And maybe they then will not drop out.

That is what we want to be able to do. I do not understand. Why is it that farm teams are OK for baseball but

they are not OK for technology workers, which is our K-12?

I share with the Senator a very touching story. A retail clerk I encounter every week in the course of taking care of my own needs was a minimum wage earner. I encouraged her to get her GED and look at tech training at a local community college. She did that. In all probability she is going to be working for the great Johns Hopkins University sometime within the month. She will double her income, she will have health insurance benefits, and it will enable enough of an income for her husband to take a breather and also get new tech skills.

But they have to pay tuition. They could do those things. I think we need to have amendments to address the skill shortage in the United States of America.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the Senator from Maryland. She has been a real leader on this whole question of the digital divide. She caught it before a lot of us caught on. Now she is asking for an opportunity to offer an amendment on this bill. Unfortunately, it has been the decision of the leadership in this Chamber that we will not be able to amend this bill. We can provide additional visas for these workers to come in from overseas on a temporary basis, but they are unwilling to give us an opportunity to offer amendments to provide the skills for American workers to fill these jobs in the years to come.

Alan Greenspan comes to Capitol Hill about every 3 or 4 weeks. Every breath he takes is monitored by the press to find out what is going to happen next at the Federal Reserve. On September 23, he gave an unusual speech for the Chairman of the Federal Reserve. He called on Federal lawmakers to make math and science education a national priority. Who would have guessed this economist from the Federal Reserve, the Chairman, would come and give a speech about education, but he did. He called on Congress:

... to boost math and science education in the schools.

He said it was "crucial for the future of our nation" in an increasingly technological society.

He noted 100 years ago—the time I mentioned, when we started building high schools in this country at such a rapid rate—only about 1 in 10 workers was in a professional or technical job, but by 1970 the number had doubled. Today those jobs account for nearly one-third of the workforce.

Greenspan said just as the education system in the early 20th century helped transform the country from a primarily agricultural, rural society to one concentrated in manufacturing in urban areas, schools today must prepare workers to use ever-changing high-technology devices such as computers and the Internet. . . .

"The new jobs that have been created by the surge in innovation require that the workers who fill them use more of their intellectual potential," Greenspan said. . . ." This process of stretching toward our human

intellectual capacity is not likely to end any time soon."

If we acknowledge that education and training is a national problem and a national challenge, why isn't this Congress doing something about it?

Sadly, this Congress has a long agenda of missed opportunities and unfinished business. This is certainly one of them. For the first time in more than two decades, we will fail to enact an Elementary and Secondary Education Act. At a time when education is the highest priority in this country, it appears that the Senate cannot even bring this matter to the floor to debate it, to complete the debate, and pass it into law.

It is an indictment on the leadership of the House and the Senate that we will not come forward with any significant education or training legislation in this Congress.

We will come forward with stopgap measures such as H-1B visas to help businesses, but we will not come forward to help the workers develop the skills they need to earn the income they need to realize the American dream.

I remember back in the 1950s, when I was a kid just finishing up in grade school, that the Russians launched the satellite, Sputnik. It scared us to death. We didn't believe that the Russians, under their Communist regime, and under their totalitarian leadership, could ever come up with this kind of technology, and they beat us to the punch. They put the first satellite into space.

Congress panicked and said: We have to catch up with the Russians. We have to get ahead of them, as a matter of fact. So we passed the National Defense Education Act, which was the first decision by Congress to provide direct assistance to college students across America. I am glad that Congress did it because I received part of that money. I borrowed money from the Federal Government, finished college and law school, and paid it back. And thousands like me were able to see their lives open up before them.

It was a decision which led to a stronger America in many ways. It led to the decision by President Kennedy to create the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, putting a man on the moon and, of course, the rest, as they say, is history.

Why aren't we doing the same thing today? Why aren't we talking about creating a National Security Education Act? Senator KENNEDY has a proposal along those lines. I would like to add to his proposal lifetime learning so that workers who are currently employed, as Senator WELLSTONE said, have a chance to go to these tech centers that Senator MIKULSKI described, to community colleges, and to other places, to develop the skills they need to fill these jobs that we are now going to fill with those coming in from overseas.

Make no mistake—I will repeat it for the RECORD—I have no objection to immigration. As the son of an immigrant, I value my mother's naturalization certificate. It hangs over my desk in my office as a reminder of where I come from. But I do believe we have an obligation to a lot of workers in the U.S. today who are looking for a chance to succeed. Unfortunately, we are not going to have that debate. The decision has been made by the leadership that we just don't have time for it.

Those who are watching this debate can look around the Chamber and see that there are not many people here other than Senator WELLSTONE and myself. There has not been a huge cry and clamor from the Members of the Senate to come to the floor today. The fact is, we have a lot of time and a lot of opportunity to consider a lot of issues, and one of those should be education.

I might address an issue that Senator WELLSTONE raised earlier, as well as Senator MIKULSKI. How will workers pay for this additional training? How can they pay for the tuition and fees of community colleges or universities? It is a real concern.

In my State, in the last 20 years, the cost of higher education has gone up between 200 and 400 percent, depending on the school. A lot of people worry about the debt they would incur. I am glad to be part of an effort to create the deductibility of college education expenses and lifetime learning expenses. I think if you are going to talk about tax relief—and I am for that—you should focus on things that families care about the most and mean the most to the country.

What could mean more to a family than to see their son or daughter get into a school or college? And then they have to worry about how they are going to pay for it. If they can deduct tuition and fees, it means we will give them a helping hand in the Tax Code to the tune of \$2,000 or \$3,000 a year to help pay for college education.

I think that is a good tax cut. I think that is a good targeted tax cut, consistent with keeping our economy moving forward, by creating the workforce of the future. It is certainly consistent with Alan Greenspan's advice to Congress, as he looks ahead and says, if we want to keep this economy moving, we have to do it in a fashion that is responsive to the demands of the workplace. Many Members have spoken today, and certainly over the last several months, of the importance of skills training.

Robert Kuttner, who is an economist for Business Week, wrote:

... what's holding back even faster economic growth is the low skill level of millions of potential workers.

I think that is obvious. As I said earlier, in visiting businesses, it is the No. 1 item of concern. The successful busi-

nesses in Illinois, when I ask them, What is your major problem? they don't say taxes or regulations—although they probably mention those—but the No. 1 concern is, they can't find skilled workers to fill the jobs, good-paying jobs. It really falls on our shoulders to respond to this need across America.

The sad truth is, we have allowed this wonderful revolution to pass many of our people by. We have to do something about American education. It is imperative that we look to our long-term needs, expanding opportunities in our workforce.

This means providing opportunities in schools, but also it means after-school programs, programs during the summer, worker retraining programs, public-private partnerships, and grants to communities to give the workforce of the future a variety of ways to become the workers of the 21st century.

As far as this is concerned, I say, let a thousand flowers bloom, let communities come forward to give us their most creative, innovative ideas on how they can educate their workforce and students to really address these needs.

We have to improve K-through-12 education. I will bet, if I gave a quiz to people across America, and asked—What percentage of the Federal budget do you think we spend on education K through 12? Most people would guess, oh, 15, 20, 25 percent. The answer is 1 percent of our Federal budget. One percent is spent on K-through-12 education.

Think about the opportunities we are missing, when we realize that if we are going to have more scientists and engineers, you don't announce at high school graduation that the doors are open at college for new scientists and engineers.

Many times, you have to reach down, as Senator WELLSTONE has said, to make sure that the teachers are trained so that they know how to introduce these students to the new science and the new technology so that they can be successful as well. That is part of mentoring for new teachers. It is teacher training for those who have been professionals and want to upgrade their skills.

I would like to bring that to the Senate floor in debate. I would like to offer an amendment to improve it. But no, we can't. Under this bill, all we have is the H-1B visa. Bring in the workers from overseas; don't talk about the needs of education and training in America.

In addition to improving K-through-12 education, we also have to look to the fact that science and math education in K-through-12 levels really will require some afterschool work as well.

It has been suggested to me by people who are in this field that one of the most encouraging things they went

through was many times a summer class that was offered at a community college or university, where the best students in science and math came together from grade schools and junior highs and high schools to get together and realize there are other kids of like mind and like appetite to develop their skills. I think that should be part of any program.

The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress has noted that we are doing better when it comes to the number of students who are taking science courses. We are doing better when it comes to SAT scores in science and math. But clearly we are not going to meet the needs of the 21st century unless we make a dramatic improvement.

Teacher training, as I mentioned, is certainly a priority. In 1998, the National Science Foundation found that 2 percent of elementary schoolteachers had a science degree—2 percent in 1998; 1 percent had a math degree; an additional 6 percent had majored or minored in science or math education in college. In middle schools, about 17 percent of science teachers held a science degree, 7 percent of math teachers had a degree in mathematics; 63 percent of high school science teachers had some type of science degree; and 41 percent of math teachers in high school had a degree in that subject.

It is a sad commentary, but a fact of life. In the town I was born in, my original hometown, East St. Louis, IL, I once talked to a leader in a school system there. It is a poor school system that struggles every day.

He said, he'd allow any teacher to teach math or science if they express a willingness to try, because they couldn't attract anyone to come teach with a math and science degree. We can improve on that. We can do better. There are lots of ways to do that, to encourage people to teach in areas of teacher shortages and skill shortages, by offering scholarships to those who will use them, by forgiving their loans if they will come and teach in certain school districts, by trying to provide incentives for them to perhaps work in the private sector and spend some time working in the schools. All of these things should be tried. At least they should be debated, should they not, on the floor of the Senate? And we are not going to get that chance. Instead, we will just limit this debate to the very narrow subject of the HB visa.

We also need to reach out to minorities. When it comes to developing science and engineering degrees, we certainly have to encourage those who are underrepresented in these degree programs. The National Science Foundation reports that African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans comprise 23 percent of our population but earn 13 percent of bachelor's degrees, 7 percent of master's degrees, and 4.5

percent of doctorate degrees in science and engineering.

Recruiting young people in the high-tech field will require initiatives to not only improve the quality of math and science education but also to spark kids' interest. I talked about the summer programs in which we can be involved, but there are many others as well. The National Defense Education Act should be a template, a model, as the GI bill was, for us to follow. It really was a declaration by our Government and by our people that the security of the Nation at that time required the fullest development of the mental resources and technical skills of its young men and women. That was said almost 50 years ago. It is still true today. The time is now for the Congress to step up to the plate and reaffirm our commitment to education.

Mr. President, how much time do I have remaining?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Approximately 13 minutes.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the Chair.

Let me close by addressing another critically important amendment which is not being allowed with this bill. It is one of which I am a cosponsor with Senators KENNEDY and JACK REED of Rhode Island and HARRY REID of Nevada. It is entitled the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act. There are many issues which come to the floor of the Senate, but there are few that enjoy the endorsement and support of both the AFL-CIO and the national Chamber of Commerce. This bill is one of them.

What we wanted to propose as an amendment was a change in our immigration laws to deal with some issues that are truly unfair. While we look to address the needs of the tech industry, we should not do it with blinders on. There are many other sectors of this robust economy—perhaps not as glamorous as the latest “dot-com” company but still very much in need of able and energetic workers—that have difficulty finding workers they need in the domestic workforce. Oddly enough, many of these workers are already here. They are on the job. They are raising families. They are contributing to their communities. They are paying taxes. But they are reluctant to step forward.

I am speaking now of immigrants who come to this country in search of a better life. Many immigrants left their homelands against their will. They left because of the appallingly brutal conditions they encountered, whether at the hands of despotic Central American death squads or in the chaotic collapse of much of Eastern Europe. To stay there in those countries meant death for themselves and their families.

I am reminded of those immortal words of Emma Lazarus on our Statue of Liberty: Give me your tired, your

Maybe some of these immigrants are tired. Who could blame them? Many of them are poor. I can tell you this: Whether people come from other lands to work in high-tech jobs, as the H-1B visa bill addresses, or clean the offices, wash the dishes, care for our children, care for our grandparents and parents in nursing homes, these are some of the hardest working people you will ever see. As Jesse Jackson said in a great speech at the San Francisco Democratic Convention: They get up and go to work every single day.

Here they are in this new land, looking to make the best new start they possibly can. But for many of these immigrants, we require them to make that effort with one hand, and maybe even both hands, tied behind their backs. I am afraid our current immigration laws are so cumbersome, so complex, and so inherently unfair that thousands of immigrants to this country are afraid to become fully integrated into the workforce, afraid because our laws, our regulations, and sometimes the unpredictable policies of the INS have created a climate of uncertainty and fear.

Employers are looking for workers. The workers are looking for jobs. But they are afraid to step forward. There are thousands upon thousands of people in this country, this great country of ours, who are being treated unfairly—people who have lived here now for years, sometimes decades, but are still forced to live in the shadows, where they are loathe to get a Social Security number, respond to a census form, or open a bank account. People who are an essential component of this thriving economy—everybody knows this. People who are doing jobs that most other people simply do not want to do. Yet we refuse them the basic rights and the opportunities that should belong to all of us.

There is no other way to say it: This is simply a matter of an unfair system, created by our own hands here on Capitol Hill, that is ruining lives, tearing families apart, and keeping too many people in poverty and fear. We have the means at hand to change this. With an amendment to this bill, we can rally the forces in the Senate to change the immigration laws and make them fairer. My good colleagues, Senators KENNEDY and REED, and I have made a vigorous effort to bring these issues to the floor. We have been stopped at every turn in the road. We want to have a vote on the bill, the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act.

I can't go back to my constituents in Illinois and tell them, yes, we made it easy to bring in thousands of high-tech workers because Silicon Valley had their representatives walking through the Halls of Congress and on the floor of the Senate and the House, but we couldn't address your needs because you couldn't afford a well paid lob-

byist. No, we have to do the very best we can to be fair to all. That is a message that will inspire confidence in the work we do in the Senate.

Let me tell you briefly what this bill does. This bill, the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act, supported by both organized labor and the Chamber of Commerce, establishes parity; that is, equal treatment for immigrants from Central America and, I would add, from some other countries, such as Liberia, where Senator REED of Rhode Island has told us that literally thousands of Liberians who fled that country in fear of their lives, by October 1 may be forced to return to perilous circumstances unless we change the law; where those who have come from Haiti, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Eastern Europe, and other countries, who are here because of their refugee status seeking asylum, may see the end of that status come because the Congress failed to act. We will have their future in our hands and in our hearts. I hope the Senate and Congress can respond by passing this reform legislation.

We also have decided, since 1921, from time to time to give those who have been in the United States for a period of time, sometimes 14 years, and have established themselves in the community, have good jobs, have started families, pay their taxes, don't commit crime, do things that are important for America—to give them a chance to apply for citizenship. It is known as registry status. The last registry status that we enacted was in 1986, dating back to 1972. We think this should be reenacted and updated so there will be an opportunity for another generation.

Finally, restoring section 245(i) of the Immigration Act, a provision of the immigration law that sensibly allowed people in the United States who were on the verge of gaining their immigration status to remain here while completing the process. This upside down idea has to be changed—that people have to return to their country of birth while they wait for the final months of the INS decision process on becoming a citizen. It is terrible to tear these families apart and to impose this financial burden on them.

I hope we will pass as part of H-1B visa this Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act. It really speaks to what we are all about in the Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Many people have said they are compassionate in this political campaign. There are many tests of compassion as far as I am concerned. Some of these tests might come down to what you are willing to vote for. I think the test of compassion for thousands of families ensnared in the bureaucratic tangle of the INS is not in hollow campaign promises. The test of compassion for thousands from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Haiti refugees

asking for equal treatment is not in being able to speak a few words of Spanish. The test of compassion for hard-working people in our country who are forced to leave their families to comply with INS requirements is not whether a public official is willing to pose for a picture with people of color.

The test is whether you are willing to actively support legislation that brings real fairness to our immigration laws. That is why I am a cosponsor of this effort for the 6 million immigrants in the U.S. who are not yet citizens, who are only asking for a chance to have their ability to reach out for the American dream, a chance which so many of us have had in the past.

These immigrants add about \$10 billion each year to the U.S. economy and pay at least \$133 billion in taxes, according to a 1998 study. Immigrants pay \$25 billion to \$30 billion more in taxes each year than they receive in public services. Immigrant businesses are a source of substantial economic and fiscal gain for the U.S. citizenry, adding at least another \$29 billion to the total amount of taxes paid.

In a study of real hourly earnings of illegal immigrants between 1988, when they were undocumented, and 1992 when legalized, showed that real hourly earnings increased by 15 percent for men and 21 percent for women. Many of these hard-working people are being exploited because they are not allowed to achieve legal status. The state of the situation on the floor of the Senate is that we are giving speeches instead of offering amendments. It is a sad commentary on this great body that has deliberated some of the most important issues facing America.

Those watching this debate who are witnessing this proceeding in the Senate Chamber must wonder why the Senate isn't filled with Members on both sides of the aisle actively debating the important issues of education and training and reform of our immigration laws. Sadly, this is nothing new. For the past year, this Congress has done little or nothing.

When we see all of the agenda items before us, whether it is education, dealing with health care, a prescription drug benefit under Medicare, the Patients' Bill of Rights for individuals and families to be treated fairly by health insurance companies, this Congress has fallen down time and time again. It is a sad commentary when men and women have been entrusted with the responsibility and the opportunity and have not risen to the challenge. This bill pending today is further evidence that this Congress is not willing to grapple with the important issues that America's families really care about.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. WELLSTONE pertaining to the introduction of S. 3110 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

H-IB VISAS

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I would like to also speak now about the H-1B bill on the floor.

I ask unanimous consent that I have 10 minutes to speak on that legislation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SMITH of Oregon). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I thank the Chair. I will not speak a long time. But I want to raise a couple of issues that other colleagues have spoken to as well.

I come from a State with a very sophisticated high-tech industry. I come from a State that has an explosion of information technology companies. I come from a State that has a great medical device industry. I come from a State that is leading the way.

I am very sympathetic to the call on the part of business communities to be able to get more help from skilled labor, including skilled workers from other countries. I am more than sympathetic to what the business community is saying. I certainly believe that immigrants—men and women from other countries who help businesses and work, who stay in our country—make our country a richer and better country.

I am the son of a Jewish immigrant who was born in Ukraine and who fled persecution from Russia. But I also believe that it is a crying shame that we do not have the opportunity—again, this is the greatness of the Senate—to be able to introduce some amendments: an amendment that would focus on education and job training and skill development for Americans who could take some of these jobs; an amendment that deals with telework that is so important to rural America, and so important to rural Minnesota.

I hope there is some way I can get this amendment and this piece of legislation passed, which basically would employ people in rural communities, such as some of the farmers who lost their farms, who have a great work ethic, who want to work, and who want to have a chance to develop their skills for the technology companies that say they need skilled workers. They can telework. They can do it from home or satellite offices. It is a marriage made in heaven. I am hoping to somehow still pass that legislation. I hope it will be an amendment on this bill because, again, it would enable these Americans to have a chance.

My colleague from New Mexico is one of the strongest advocates for Native Americans. This was such an interesting meeting this past Sunday in Minnesota. I give FCC Chairman Kennard a lot of credit for holding a 3-day workshop for people in Indian country who not only don't have access to the Internet but who still don't have phones. They were talking about guest workers and others coming to our country. These were the first Americans. They were saying: we want to be a part of this new economy; we want to have a chance to learn the skills. We want to be wired. We want to have the infrastructure.

I hope there can be an amendment that speaks to the concerns and circumstances of people in Indian country.

Finally, I think the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act is important for not only the Latino community but also for the Liberian community. I am worried about the thousands of Liberians in Minnesota who at the end of the month maybe will have to leave this country if we don't have some kind of change. This legislation calls for permanent residency status for them. But I am terribly worried they are going to be forced to go back. It would be very dangerous for them and their families. I certainly think there is a powerful, moral, and ethical plan for the Latino and Latina community in this legislation. We had hoped that would be an amendment. Again, it doesn't look as if we are going to have an opportunity to present this amendment. I don't think that is the Senate at its best.

I will vote for cloture on a bill that I actually think is a good piece of legislation but not without the opportunity for us to consider some of these amendments. They could have time limits where we could try to improve this bill. We can make sure this is good for the business community and good for the people in our country who want to have a chance to be a part of this new economy, as well as bringing in skilled workers from other countries. I think we could do all of it. It could be a win-win-win.

The Senate is at its best when we can bring these amendments to the floor and therefore have an opportunity to represent people in our States and be legislators. But when we are shut down and closed out, then I think Senators have every right to say we can't support this. That is certainly going to be my position.

I yield the floor.

HEALTH CARE LEGISLATION PROVISIONS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes.