

over 295,000 tons of air pollution each year just in the 2-mile radius around schools in Texas. So it is not at all unusual to hear a proposal that would say let us soil the environment in Alaska. He has been willing to do it in his home State of Texas as well.

But this debate is not one that is just going on on the Presidential level. We here in Congress have been fighting it and the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for longer than I have.

There were calls in this Chamber over and over again to reduce the amount that we fund for renewable energy. In fact, George W. Bush on September 22 said that we should spend more for energy conservation. He would not have probably voted yes on any of his Republican colleagues' budgets that pass through here because conservation programs have been funded by over \$1.3 billion under the President's request since 1995.

In 1995, Republicans cut energy efficiency programs by 26 percent. For those who say we should see around the corner a little bit to see these problems coming, it is clear that that was not going on in this Chamber. If Republicans did not cut the weatherization programs in this country, over 250,000 more households today would have the benefit of those programs, reducing our dependency on oil and, frankly, energy of all kinds and increasing conservation.

Repeatedly around here we have heard calls by Republicans that say do not do anything to support domestic producers when prices are low. It was almost comical to listen to the Republicans grind their teeth and gnash their teeth and wring their hands about the release of petroleum from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

Putting aside that George Bush, Sr. did a similar thing, and at the time he said it was to stabilize economic pressures, the idea that we have tried to encourage, especially those of us in the Northeast as a time when oil was inexpensive, was cheap, we did not seize the opportunity to increase the amount that we had in reserve. Why did we not do that? Because Democrats were proposing it and the Republicans were continually shooting it down.

So as we watch this debate go on on the Presidential level, we have to remember that, in each and every one of our congressional districts, this debate should be happening on a smaller level.

It is often said, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, every 4 years we hear our constituents say, "You know what, every 4 years it seems like the candidates are getting closer and closer, and it seems like one giant party in this country. It seems like we are choosing the lesser of two evils."

This year, even the most creative thinker cannot say that about these two candidates. They are very far apart. There are extraordinary dif-

ferences. The issues that affect livable communities and choosing between having a picture like this of pristine mountains in Alaska or having an oil rig pulling into this part of the country, that is clearly what is at stake in this election. I commend the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for calling attention to it.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the gentleman from New York (Mr. WEINER) adding his voice and his concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I yield again to the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER).

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, just quickly, because I want to follow on a point that the gentleman from New York (Mr. WEINER) made, and that is that this is not an abstract discussion. As he has pointed out and as other speakers have pointed out, when Governor Bush says that his answer is to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, that is a matter that has been proposed and has been reported out of committee by the Republicans in the United States Senate.

The reason it will not happen this year is because of the veto threat of the Clinton-Gore administration not to do it. But that is what stopped it the last couple of years. This is not something that people are thinking about later on. They are actively trying to do it. We have seen it in our committee, in the Committee on Resources.

We have seen effort after effort reported out by the Republicans in the Congress to undermine clean water, to undermine clean air, to undermine the Endangered Species Act, to undermine the Superfund Act. The reason they have not become law is because of the Clinton-Gore administration because they say they will not accept it, that they will veto those bills, and the Republicans have to back down.

Just in the bill we passed yesterday, there were over 20 damaging environmental riders on that bill. This is not abstract. That was yesterday on a vote. The reason those riders did not end up on that bill is because the President and the Vice President said they would not accept them.

Now think, now think of Washington, D.C. and we have President George W. Bush. No threat of a veto. Agreement on this policy. What do we end up with? We end up with, like the gentleman from New York (Mr. WEINER) pointed out, we end up looking like Texas. We end up looking like Texas.

That is not what America wants. It is completely out of step, not with the Democrats, but with America. American people do not want this kind of environmental wrecking crew ranging across the very bedrock laws of this Nation that protect our environment, that protect our quality of life, that protect our communities, and just throwing them out because the timber

industry, the mining industry, the oil industry, the chemical industry are not happy with these laws.

It does not matter if one lives in New York City, if one lives in the San Francisco Bay area or Portland or lives in Upstate New York or one lives in the South or one lives in Florida. It does not matter. If one is going to drill in the Arctic, what is it that keeps Mr. Bush from drilling off the coast of California where the citizens have said no, off the coast of Florida, off the coast of the Carolinas, where people have said no we do not want our areas spoiled. If he is prepared to go into the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, what keeps him from going off the coast of Florida and California?

What keeps those places from being drilled today? The Clinton-Gore administration, because they are the ones, they are the ones that have continued to fight for those moratoriums.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I do hope that this will be an opportunity over the course of the remaining month of this election for the American public to focus keenly on these issues. I think the record is clear. I think that goals that the American public want are available to us, and I am hopeful that they will figure largely in the result next November.

H-1B VISA LEGISLATION PASSES IN DARK OF NIGHT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ISAKSON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, obviously we are having the opportunity to have vigorous discussions on the floor of the House. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to draw my colleagues' attention to the time. It is 3:15 Eastern Standard Time, and we are now engaged in what we call special orders, an opportunity to speak to our colleagues and others on very important issues.

I raise this point of time because yesterday in the dark of evening, with barely a 10-minute to 15-minute notice, it was found necessary to bring to the floor of the House a major piece of legislation disallowing any debate by the procedure of suspension which disallows debate and amendments to improve on the status of the legislation, and it passed in the dark of night with no official rollcall vote. That legislation is H-1B nonimmigrant visas.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, I realize that there is a great need to deal with the necessity of employment in our high-tech industry. In fact, as I look at the cap, the number of H-1B visas that would have been allowed, 195,000, I am sure if we would have been allowed to debate this legislation, we might have seen a consensus of increasing the number.

But yesterday, our Republican majority saw fit in the dark of night to bring it up when many Members were not noticed about it. What we find that has occurred, Mr. Speaker, is that American workers go longing.

American workers are not protected by ensuring that those who come into this country have the minimum salary being paid to them so that they do not come in and be underpaid what American workers can have. There is nothing in the bill that requires employers to recruit or hire or train American workers.

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It is known that African American workers are only 11 percent of the high-tech industry, and they continue to be underemployed. There is nothing in the bill that requires the high-tech industry to file their EEO-1 forms just to ensure us that they are hiring Hispanics, African Americans and women and other minorities. There is nothing in the bill that requires employers to take constructive steps to recruit qualified American workers and to cross-train and to work with Hispanic-serving institutions and historically black colleges. There is nothing in the bill which requires the employers to comply with the Department of Labor regulations, and there is nothing in the bill that provides fairness and amnesty for certain of those who are requiring such.

But my point, Mr. Speaker, is this. This bill was worthy of a vigorous discussion. There is nothing in the bill that deals with how do we help rural Americans. Even though the economy is booming, there are certain pockets of our Nation where there is double-digit unemployment. I believe the high-tech industry has a lot to offer, so it would have been prudent for us to be on the floor of the House to tell the American worker we are not forgetting them; that as we bring in necessary immigrant workers on nonimmigrant visas from other countries that we value their contributions.

This is not an effort to start a bashing of those who serve well in this industry, but it is a disappointment to me that those of us who had other viewpoints, among the many pieces of legislation that could have been offered in amendments, we were not given the opportunity. Therefore, our constituents are left in the dark, holding the bag of unemployment because this Congress refused to discuss major legislation impacting Americans in the broadness of light.

Interestingly enough, there was a legislative, a particular initiative, that included in that the employer would undertake an obligation not to displace United States workers, obligation of petitioning employers. So there was language in another bill that did not get discussed that would require those

high-tech industries to at least document that they were not displacing an American worker. Can we do any less?

And then, Mr. Speaker, I would like to cite Mr. John William Templeton, a co-convenor of the Coalition for Fair Employment in Silicon Valley: "It is asserted that the digital divide has become a convenient excuse for some firms to avoid training and hiring hispanic and black workers. Instead, these companies prefer to hire foreign workers, such as those brought in under the H-1B program, who often command lower salaries." That is unfair to them as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, I offer my enormous disappointment and my commitment to continue working until the last day of this session to make sure that Americans as well as those who are needed by the industry are treated fairly; that our institutions of higher learning, who voluntarily want to participate in the high-tech industry, can get involved and that we can close the digital divide and ensure that those who are here, who want to be trained, our children in schools in both urban and rural areas, Mr. Speaker, can be the kind of skilled workers that will provide the employment base for the high-tech industry.

Good Evening, Mr. Speaker. I approach the debate on the H-1B visa program with a very heavy heart. Why? Because I have spent a considerable amount of time this year in my capacity as Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims in trying to come up with a reasonable H-1B bill that would protect American workers and meet the needs of the business community.

I have said on numerous occasions, that I support the Hi-tech industry but I also support our American workforce. I worked very hard in the House Judiciary Committee to come up with a bill that would protect American workers, and I am saddened that the bill that passed yesterday evening falls short of that requirement. The bill that passed out of the Judiciary Committee contained provisions that compelled employers to take certain steps that would protect American workers. However, what is most glaring for me are the lack of any provisions that protect minority American workers who are grossly under represented in the High-tech industry. Nothing in the bill establishes an opportunity for the hi-tech industry to work with HBCU's and Hispanic-Serving institutions and recruit minority workers.

African Americans are especially impacted by discriminatory hiring practices in the information technology field. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the hiring of African Americans in high technology has improved only slightly during the past decade. According to a 1999 report, Silicon Ceiling: Solutions for Closing the Digital Divide, approximately 80% of the high technology companies in Silicon Valley do not file EEO-1 forms or affirmative action reports with the Joint Reporting Committee representing federal civil rights enforcement agencies. Clearly there's work to be done to ensure that African Americans have fair access to the lucrative

high tech labor market. There is nothing in the current bill that ensures that. Democrats or Republicans did not get a chance to offer any amendments; we were not afforded an opportunity to go to the Rules Committee; and we were not allowed to effect the process, to change the legislation. Democracy was absent in the consideration of this bill.

I would have surely offered an amendment that would require the H-1B employers to report to the Department of Labor how they are recruiting and hiring American workers, particularly those who are members of under represented minority groups. I do not see anything wrong with holding the High-tech community accountable for not only who they hire, but who they do not.

I am very concerned about raising the cap of these H-1B visas. Although it is true that in recent years the high tech industry has fueled enormous growth in the United States and has benefited the corporate information technology, and raising the cap on these types of specialty workers should include an increased commitment to training of U.S. workers. The growing workforce of our country and the strength and growth of the high tech industry in particular can be met effectively by fully developing the skills of our own workers as a first priority, before hiring highly specialized foreign workers. We can have the best of both worlds—expert foreign workers (which create more jobs in America) and trained professional American workers prepared to work in the most sophisticated sectors of the Hi-tech industry.

There has been a lot of discussion in recent months about including immigration provisions with the H-1B legislation. On the Senate side, they call it L.I.F.A., the Latino Immigration Fairness Act. The work "fairness" is in the title because how can we possibly lift the cap, and bring in 585,000 foreign hi-tech workers, and ignore the people who are already here? Where is our sense of justice, of equality, of fairness? This H-1B legislation should have: provided relief to late amnesty applicants who have significantly contributed to the American economy; providing parity through the 1997 NACARA law by offering amnesty to Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Haitians.

Our immigration law contains a provision called "registry"—that gives immigrants who have been here without proper documents an opportunity to adjust to permanent status if they have been here for a long enough time and have nothing in their background that would disqualify them from immigrant status. This year, a bill that I have sponsored, H.R. 4172, the "Legal Amnesty Restoration Act of 2000", is before the Congress. This legislation updates the cutoff date for the "statute of limitations," which is now set at 1972. In fact, the majority of immigrants who would benefit from updating the registry date are those who qualified to apply for legalization in the mid-1980s, but the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) misinterpreted the law. If their applications had been accepted and processed properly when they should have been, many, if not most of these immigrants would already be citizens. It is unfair and incorrect to refer to these people as "illegal aliens."

Instead, they have been fighting the immigration bureaucracy for more than a decade

and are now threatened with deportation. The provisions in my bill which should have been included with the H-1B legislation, or considered for independent House floor action would ensure that the registry provision is continuously updated by moving the registry cutoff date to 1986. If these people are not given relief, hundreds of thousands of people will be forced to abandon their homes, will have to separate from their families, move out of their communities, be removed from their jobs, and return to countries where they no longer have ties.

The Congress also needs to address Central American and Haitian parity. It is long past time to offer Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Haitians the same opportunity to apply for permanent residence as was extended to the Nicaraguans and Cubans in 1997. Because immigrants from these countries have experienced similar violence and hardship, it is unjust to continue providing unequal treatment. Additionally, while these immigrants have been waiting for their cases to be resolved, they have been contributing to our economy and are needed to support the workforce needs of this country.

I believe that the current high demand market for certain technical specialties is that it should encourage us to retrain displaced workers, attract under represented women and minorities, better educate our young people, and retrain willing and able older workers who have been forced into unemployment.

I am very pleased that Section 12 of this bill provides much needed funding to help close the Digital Divide by putting computer learning centers in Boys and Girls clubs across the country. I sponsored and introduced with Congressman LAMAR SMITH H.R. 4178, the "Kids 2000 Act", that would authorize \$20 million from the Violent Crime Reduction Trust Fund each year for the next five years to operate the PowerUP program in Boys and Girls Clubs across the country. I am pleased that the exact language from both my bill and the Senate companion version is in this bill.

This bill does not have language to ensure proper training of our incumbent workers. I believe we need more workers and we need to train more American workers as I come from a city that has over 1000 companies that specialize in information technology. This should be a non-partisan issue.

In conclusion Mr. Speaker, we need to approach the H-1B visa specialty program with two eyes wide open. One eye focused on looking out for our American workers to ensure proper training, and the other eye focused on the under representation of minorities and women in the high tech industry who currently comprise our American workforce.

I support H-1B visas, to improve our hi-tech industry but I also support our American workers. Thank-you Mr. Speaker.

H-1B VISAS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ISAKSON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, I want to express my appreciation to the gen-

tleman from Colorado (Mr. McINNIS) and the other Members on the other side who are allowing me to proceed.

Mr. Speaker, last night, under the cloak of darkness, without notice, without the opportunity to participate by voice vote on an unwritten suspension calendar, after we had been told there would be no further votes for the day, at a time when most Members had left the Chamber for evening activities, the House passed S. 2045, legislation related to the increase of H-1B visas.

I was not necessarily opposed to the bill, formally entitled the American Competitiveness in the 21st Century Act. I was opposed to not having a debate about it.

But with such vitally important legislation, in an area of critical importance to this Nation, immigration policy, this House should have had a chance to debate this matter, air the many views that emerged during the House committee consideration of a similar measure, and voted in the light of day on the bill.

It is wrong, Mr. Speaker. It is inexcusable. And the American people deserve to know what some in this House did. The Senate bill increased H-1B visas, in the light of day, to allow some 200,000 additional high-tech workers to come to America from other countries, to work over the next 3 years. I had amendments prepared to expand this legislation to provide these same employment opportunities and training opportunities to the United States workers in rural communities.

Professionals who work in specialty occupations are admitted to the United States on a temporary basis through the H-1B visa category, the largest category of temporary foreign workers. The increase was pushed by many in the business community, especially those in the information technology area, which is experiencing an economic explosion and unprecedented job growth.

The amendments I had prepared would have made sure that those living in rural America would have the opportunity to secure a position in this rapidly expanding job market before employers look outside the United States to bring in foreign workers. Not that we are against bringing in foreign workers, we just want the same opportunity for those who live in rural America.

The House Committee on the Judiciary marked up and reported H.R. 4227, the Technology Worker Temporary Relief Act. Among the many bills introduced, there were three others related to the same subject, increasing numerical limitations on H-1B visas, that also should be considered. Those bills were H.R. 3983, H.R. 4402, and H.R. 4200.

Despite the rosy economic picture in America, too many Americans are being left out. For those Americans, many of them living in rural America

over at least a 20-year period, there has been a troubling trend, a trend that affects the very quality of their life. During these 2 decades, income and wealth inequality, the disparity in income and wealth due to wages, accumulated wealth, investments and returns, have been well documented.

It is an alarming and disturbing trend because among those rural Americans left behind, fewer can afford healthy meals, fewer can afford health care for their families, and fewer can afford a college education for their children. It is an alarming and disturbing trend because rural America has been disproportionately affected. Consequently, rural America lags far behind other communities in personal access to the Internet as well as the total use of the Internet.

This disparity exacerbates the persistent poverty, high unemployment, inadequate health care and education resources. Thus, as the economy rapidly expands, rural communities find that it is far more difficult to participate.

Moreover, technological advances, which could provide some solutions to these conditions, elude rural communities because of digital disenfranchisement. Such advances as telemedicine, distance education and electronic government, depend upon Internet access.

It is clear that the competition among service providers that is driving the Internet explosion is not as concentrated in rural communities. The lack of population densities, the absence of essential infrastructure and the fact that rural communities are often spread over great distances are reasons cited for this lack of enthusiasm. Even the Department of Commerce has concluded in its Report, "Falling Through The Net," that, "Disparities clearly exist (and) . . . access comes hardest for Americans who are low-income . . . less educated, single-parent families, young heads-of-households, and (those) who live in the South, rural areas and central cities."

However, these barriers should not, must not remain as impediments. A rising tide should lift all boats.

It is for these reasons that this House should have had the opportunity to debate, vote on and support amendments that would require education and training for American citizens who reside in rural and other depressed areas; amendments that would require both public and private sector entities to make reasonable and diligent efforts to find American citizens who are willing to be trained in information technology positions; that would raise the H-1B visa fees; and that would use those increased revenues to, in part, carry out the other amendment mandates.

Mr. Speaker, this House has not had the will to pass a modest increase in the minimum wage, an increase to help move millions of America's workers out of poverty. But we did find the will to pass a bill that mandates that foreign workers earn a minimum of \$40,000 a year. That is what the H-1B Bill that passed provides.

Late last night, Mr. Speaker, those who favor large business interests won. But, the