

TED STEVENS,
 PETE V. DOMENICI,
 BARBARA A. MIKULSKI,
 PATRICK LEAHY,
 FRANK R. LAUTENBERG,
 TOM HARKIN,
 ROBERT C. BYRD,
 HARRY REID,
 DANIEL K. INOUE,

Managers on the Part of the Senate.

LEADERSHIP LACKING ON HMO REFORM

(Mr. GREEN of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks).

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted a one minute at an unusual time of the day because this House has passed one of the strongest HMO reform bills that I have seen. We passed it over a year ago, and yet this bill still languishes in its House-Senate conference committee. Obviously we need more effort to make sure that we pass a national HMO reform bill.

This issue is important to the voters, and it has been, and that is why when I listened to the presidential debates last night, I heard it come up a number of times, how we needed a strong managed care reform or HMO reform bill.

Let me set the record straight: the Texas legislature passed a bill in 1995 that was a strong HMO reform bill. In 1995, the Texas legislature passed a strong HMO reform bill. It was vetoed by Governor Bush. In 1997, they passed another bill that became law without his signature. Last night, listening to the debates, you would have thought there had been a lot of exercise in leadership on HMO reform in the Governor's office in Texas.

What we need is strong leadership in the White House for an HMO reform bill, because it does not look like it is going to happen this year. So next year we will need it. Our bill, the Dingell-Norwood bill, was actually patterned after the Texas law of 1997.

So, just like you want to hear the rest of the story, the whole point is that we need strong HMO reform legislation, it needs to pass the House and the Senate, and it needs to have the aggressive activity from a chief executive in the President of the United States. I would hope that the people would realize for the record who is embellishing their record now.

FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A further message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 4461) "An Act making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Ad-

ministration, and Related Agencies programs for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2001, and for other purposes."

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

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

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to speak this evening on an issue that is critically important for communities throughout my district and across this country and that is school construction.

I am pleased to be joined this evening by several of my Democratic colleagues in a series of special order speeches to call on the Republican leadership to pass real school construction legislation before this Congress adjourns.

Since the beginning of my service in the United States House nearly 4 years ago, I worked hard with members of both bodies across the partisan aisle to craft a creative legislative response to the urgent problem of overcrowded schools, run-down facilities and the widespread use of trailers and closets as classrooms.

Mr. Speaker, across my district and many places in this country, our schools are bursting at the seams. Just about every day I hear from teachers, parents, students and others that the need for better schools for our children to learn and teachers to teach are desperately needed.

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Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that so many Members have come together to support a common sense bipartisan piece of legislation to address this problem.

H.R. 4094, the Rangel-Johnson-Etheridge bill, has enjoyed the support of 228 cosponsors in the House, Republicans and Democrats alike. This important bill would provide about \$25 billion in new school construction bonds for communities throughout this country.

We now have a clear majority of the Members in the U.S. House who will vote for this bill if we can just get it to the floor for a vote; but, unfortunately, the Republican leadership continues to keep it tied up in committee.

Mr. Speaker, this refusal to act on this common sense bipartisan bill to build and renovate schools stands in sharp contrast to the blatant manipulation of the appropriations bills to

bring pork back to their home districts.

For example, the Transportation appropriations bill is full of earmarked projects for the House districts of powerful Members of the Republican leadership. Senator JOHN MCCAIN of the other body stood on that floor, and I quote, said "there were over \$700 million in transit earmarks in the Chicago Metropolitan Transit Authority in the home district of the Speaker of the House, and yet the Republican leadership refuses to allow an up and down vote on our modest proposal to provide tax credits to help finance just a few neighborhood schools."

The Transportation appropriations bill also reported earmarks of \$102 million for something called the U.S. 82 Bridge across the Mississippi River in Greenville, Mississippi, in the home State of the majority leader of the other body; and yet the Republican leadership of this Congress refuses to have a vote for simple school construction for the children of this country.

Mr. Speaker, as the former chairman of my State's House Committee on Appropriations, I know well the need for government investment in certain projects to help give people a hand up, but I also know that budgets and appropriations represent more than just items on the balance sheet. They represent our values.

What does it say about the values of this Congress that the leadership refuses to allow a vote on a bipartisan school construction bill, while at the same time it loads up must-pass bills with these special-interest pork projects?

The Interior appropriations bill contains many special items earmarked. For example, there is \$500,000 for a National First Ladies Library in Ohio for a senior ranking member. It contains \$176,000 for the Reindeer Herders Association, and it contains \$1.5 million to refurbish the Vulcan Statue in Alabama.

Mr. Speaker, these projects may have their merit. I am not an expert on every line item in an appropriations bill; but as the former superintendent of my State schools, I do know that our schools are bursting at the seams. Our communities need our help to help build and modernize schools, reduce classroom sizes and relieve overcrowding and enhance good order and discipline in classrooms and improving education for all of our children.

H.R. 4094 will not solve all of our problems, but it is a good step in the right direction; and I urge the Republican leadership of this House to bring this common sense bill to the floor without further delay and let us pass it.