

no bill for school construction. There was no rhetoric down here on the floor about the need to deal with kids. There was no concern about the people teaching in portable classrooms like I did for 7 years. There was no concern about falling ceilings. What are they telling us? All that occurred within the last 5 years?

The fact is, this is nothing more than political rhetoric. The first 2 years that the Democrats controlled the House and the Senate and the White House when they could have done anything they wanted, they did not even propose a bill to deal with school construction. This Congress has. With a bipartisan piece of legislation that we are going to pass, and hopefully this President will sign, we will do what a responsible Congress could have done 7 years ago, and that is deal with the issue of the need for modernization of our schools.

So I bring up this reality check, Mr. Speaker, because unlike most of my friends who are attorneys who never taught in the classroom, I taught in the classroom for 7 years. I know what it is like to teach in a portable classroom with 2 trailers bolted together, with kids who cannot go outside because when you open the door, the cold is right there. My point is I think a lot of what we heard today is nothing more than shallow rhetoric.

DEMOCRATS DEMONSTRATE SERIOUS COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION

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

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I did not intend to address this issue earlier today, but I came over and after the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) spoke just a minute ago, I felt it incumbent to do so. I too was a classroom teacher. I taught for 9 years, I say to the gentleman from Pennsylvania, 2 more than he did, and I have lived in those classrooms and even had the experiences of the roof falling in, only this was not a roof, it was only a blind that fell and cut my face. We had to evacuate students from classrooms in my building because the walls leaked so badly that the kids could not sit in there because there was so much water.

Granted, that was a couple of decades back. I thought we had pretty much addressed all of that stuff.

Interestingly enough, my daughter today teaches sixth grade math, in Beaumont, Texas, the same school district in which I taught. She has children who do not have chairs in her classroom. They will fix it. They are in portable buildings right now. They are making the repairs in the regular school building.

The problem is that so many school districts do not have the ability to take care of these problems today, and it is incumbent upon this United States House of Representatives to try to help create the type of innovative financing to help school districts take care of themselves at home. In our State, there is a limit on how much one can raise in property taxes from a property taxpayer.

I was a county school tax assessor collector also for a while following the time that I taught, and I know that they have difficulty raising those dollars. I know what it is like to be a taxpayer, a property taxpayer at home and not be able to pay or afford to pay all of the taxes that we have to try to accomplish the many things that we have to do within our schools to keep our children learning and give them the opportunity to be good productive citizens and not end up either victimizing somebody or being victims themselves or going to jail.

Mr. Speaker, we have not made the right commitment, and that is what this debate is all about. Obviously, we all want to see our schools better. When are we going to make it the priority and do it? Our colleagues on the Republican side clearly have not done that.

Our own State of Texas has a plan in the Republican platform for its State to abolish the U.S. Department of Education. That to me does not speak to a commitment to make education better in this country.

Mrs. THURMAN. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. LAMPSON. I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Mrs. THURMAN. Mr. Speaker, I too listened to the other speaker and I too am I classroom teacher. I taught for 9 years, middle school math, in a very poor, rural area.

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, that is what my daughter teaches.

Mrs. THURMAN. Mr. Speaker, I too worked in one of those places that nobody wants to talk about, those portables. But I say to the gentleman, I am tired of hearing on this floor about how we controlled the House and we controlled the Senate for those first 2 years with the presidency. We were paying down a debt. There was no money. There could be no discussion about these issues. And on top of that, we had our States, because at that time I was in the State Senate in the 1980s, and this country was going through a recession. There was no money in the States to deal with these problems. So these things just went up and up and up.

Now, they want to come and say well, you did not do anything about it. Well, this is the first time we have had any surpluses to even be able to talk about it, and now what we are trying to talk about is \$25 billion to do school con-

struction, and the rest of the K through 3 program where we have been putting teachers.

I am also tired of hearing about how we are taking this away from the local level, it is their issue, they ought to be able to control it. Ask them to go look in their State legislatures. How many of them have adopted the goal to make K through 3 education top priority in reducing class size? How many States in this country are doing after-school programs? How many of these? In fact, just 2 years ago, when this whole school construction came up, our State legislature was having to call a special session to deal with the issue of school construction.

Yes, we are talking about it now because we have an opportunity to talk about it.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman yielding me this time.

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the gentlewoman's comments.

It is clear, there is a difference in commitment to this issue. The Democrats indeed want to attempt to make a real difference, and I hope that instead of asking, as the gentlewoman well stated, instead of asking the question, where were you while we were in control, well, why has there not been some commitment, some effort to truly explain what the Republican commitment is while they have been in control of this House of Representatives in the last several years. I think we are doing so, and we are doing so in a responsible manner; and I hope that with our continued push that we will achieve that.

IMPROVING HEALTH CARE FOR AMERICANS

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

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank my Democratic colleagues who have joined me on the floor today for this Special Order hour. We are here this afternoon on a beautiful fall day, here in this House Chamber, trying to urge this Congress not to adjourn for the year until we finish the job of meeting the health care needs of America's families.

Democrats in the House have worked for the entire 2-year session of this Congress to give America's families a strong Patients' Bill of Rights to ensure that you and your family make your health care along with your doctor, rather than having some insurance clerk who has never had a day of medical training, decide the treatment that you need. We have worked to make sure that when you are ill and when you are fighting for your life,