

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

INTRODUCTION OF THE BUILDING, RENOVATING, IMPROVING, AND CONSTRUCTING KIDS' SCHOOLS ACT OF 2000

HON. JUDY BIGGERT

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 22, 2000

Mrs. BIGGERT. Mr. Speaker, the U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO] released reports in 1995 and 1996 outlining the deplorable conditions in many of our Nation's elementary and secondary schools. A sample GAO survey showed that America's schools are in need of an estimated \$112 billion in repairs and that \$11 billion alone is needed to get schools in compliance with Federal mandates requiring the elimination of hazards such as asbestos, lead in water and radon, and to improve accessibility for the disabled.

The decline in the condition of our Nation's schools is not limited to a particular region. Every State has schools that are in need of repair and modernization, and my home State of Illinois is no exception. Last August, the Illinois State Board of Education released the results of its own survey, which showed that over the next 5 years, Illinois' school districts will need more than \$7 billion in infrastructure work.

Mr. Speaker, as a strong supporter of local education, I believe that school construction and renovation are areas best directed by States and local communities. That's why I applaud those States that have passed measures designed to help schools replace and modernize their facilities. Illinois is one of those States that have stepped up to the plate in this regard.

In December 1997, the Illinois General Assembly passed a school construction law to address the shortage of classroom space brought on by population growth and aging buildings. To fund the program, the General Assembly approved the sale of \$1.1 billion in school construction bonds over a 5-year period. Just last year, Illinois Governor George H. Ryan's Illinois FIRST program increased funding for the school construction grant program by \$1 billion, adding another \$290 million for fiscal year 2000.

Despite the best efforts of Illinois and other States, the long-term costs of repairing and upgrading our Nation's schools are proving more than many State and local governments can bear. And in this era of budget surpluses, it would not be right for Congress to sit idly by and let schools fall into further disrepair and obsolescence.

That's why I rise today to introduce the Building, Renovating, Improving, and Constructing Kids' Schools (BRICKS) Act—legislation addressing our Nation's exploding need for elementary and secondary education school repair. This legislation is a slightly

modified companion bill to S. 1992, which was introduced in the other chamber by my friend and colleague, Senator SNOWE of Maine.

Here is what the BRICKS Act does. First, it provides \$20 billion in interest-free and low-interest Federal loans to support school construction and repair at the local level. These loans will be used to pay the interest owed by States and localities to bondholders on new school construction bonds that are issued through the year 2003. These loans will be interest-free for the first 5 years, with low interest rates to follow.

Second, the BRICKS Act allocates these school construction loans on an annual basis, using the title I distribution formula. Monies would be distributed to States at the request of each State's Governor and without a lengthy application process.

The money provided for under this bill is used to support, not supplant, local school construction efforts. These loans are designed to allow States and localities to issue bonds that would not otherwise be made due to financial limitations.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, these loans will be distributed in a fiscally responsible manner that does not take away from the Social Security program or the projected on-budget surpluses. Specifically, my bill will generate funding from the Exchange Stabilization Fund [ESF]—a fund that was created through the Gold Reserve Act of 1934 and that currently has more than \$40 billion in assets.

Finally, the school construction and modernization loans are not a government hand-out. The BRICKS Act requires a State entity or local government that receives funding under this legislation to repay the loan to the Exchange Stabilization Fund. At the same time, this proposal ensures that States and local governments will not be burdened by excessive interest rates—or be forced to repay the loan in an unreasonable amount of time.

After the first five interest-free years, the interest rates on these loans will be set at the average prime lending rate for the year in which the bond is issued, but it cannot exceed 4.5 percent. Again, no payment will be owed, and no interest will accrue for 5 years, unless the Federal Government prior to that time meets its financial commitment to funding 40 percent of the costs borne by local school districts for providing special education services, as is currently required by Federal law.

Mr. Speaker, the BRICKS Act is a fiscally responsible answer to a serious national problem. I am proud to offer this legislation for the House's consideration. I am more pleased to note how this legislation will help schools located in the 13th Congressional District of Illinois, which I represent. As my colleagues may know, the 13th district encompasses some of the fastest growing communities in the nation.

School administrators in my district have made it known that school construction and renovation have failed to keep pace with the

explosive population growth and increased rates of student enrollment. What's more, they tell me that the growth in tax revenues from new households has not kept up with the costs of construction needed to serve them. By providing schools and States with more fiscal flexibility and options, the BRICKS Act addresses this problem in my congressional district and in districts across the United States.

I urge my colleagues to support the BRICKS Act. This timely legislation makes responsible use of limited Federal resources and effectively meets a commitment to giving every child an opportunity to attend school in an environment that is physically safe and conducive to learning.

CHINA: THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CONTINUE—REBIYA KADEER SENTENCED TO 8 YEARS IN JAIL

HON. JOHN EDWARD PORTER

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 22, 2000

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to highlight on yet another incidence of the Chinese Government's blatant violation of human rights. 1999 was one of the worst years yet in recent Chinese history for arbitrary detentions, arrests, and human rights violations, and it is looking like 2000 will be no different.

This time the victim is a 53-year-old Uighur businesswoman, Rebiya Kadeer. On March 10, 2000, Ms. Kadeer was sentenced to 8 years in jail for "giving information to separatists outside the country."

Ms. Kadeer is a well respected businesswoman who was once officially touted as an inspiration to her fellow members of the Uighur ethnic group. Her efforts to business enterprises have been recognized by Chinese authorities as contributing to the overall economic and social development of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. So respected was she by the Beijing establishment that she was chosen in 1995 as part of China's official delegation to the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

However, in 1997, Ms. Kadeer was stripped of her passport, and with it the right to freedom of movement as well as subjected to continual police harassments. These actions were clearly aimed at silencing her husband, Mr. Sidick Rozi, a former political prisoner who has been an outspoken critic of China's treatment of the Uighur minority in western China. Mr. Rozi, now living in the United States, has made numerous statements on Radio Free Asia, Voice of America and testified last July before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus concerning the extremely harsh discriminations suffered by the Uighur minority. Ms. Kadeer was made a hostage in her own country, unable to join her husband and a number

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