HEALTH CARE SERVICES TO UNDOCUMENTED RESIDENTS

HON. GENE GREEN
OF TEXAS
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 25, 2001

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce legislation which would allow states and localities to provide primary and preventive health care services to undocumented residents.

According to some estimates, there are as many as nine million undocumented residents currently living in the United States. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) prohibits public hospitals from providing free or discounted preventive service to undocumented immigrants—even if they pay for such services with State or local funds. PRWORA does, however, allow public hospitals to provide emergency room services.

This system has created a crisis in our nation’s emergency rooms. Because undocumented residents cannot afford to see the doctor for routine physicals and preventive medicine, they arrive in the emergency room with costly, often preventable, health problems. The Federation for American Immigration Reform estimates that 29 percent of this population uses hospital and other emergency services in a given year, compared to the 11 percent use by the general U.S. population.

The costs of this broken system are especially burdensome for our nation’s public hospitals. Harris County Hospital District, in my hometown of Houston, Texas, estimates that emergency room care for undocumented residents cost taxpayers, insurance companies, and patients $225 million over the last three years. Hospitals in New York State provide a total uncompensated care for undocumented residents of $300 million to $380 million each year—almost one third of uncompensated care for the state.

Mr. Speaker, people should not enter any nation illegally. But I cannot understand a health care system that forces patients to let their health problems escalate into full fledged emergencies before it will provide them care.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

Woudn’t it make more economic sense to cover preventive services rather than let illnesses develop into painful and expensive complications? Most importantly, should the federal government be telling states and localities how they can and can’t spend their own health care dollars?

That is why I am introducing legislation which would allow—not require—state and local programs to provide preventive and primary health care to undocumented aliens. This legislation would not provide a new benefit for undocumented residents. However, it would make sure that our health care dollars are spent more wisely by preventing emergencies—not treating them.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

AUTHORIZING CONGRESS TO
PROHIBIT PHYSICAL DESecaRATION
OF THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES

SPeECH OF
HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN
OF RHODE ISLAND
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 17, 2001

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of our American flag and as a cosponsor of H.J. Res. 36, which would amend the Constitution to allow Congress to protect the United States flag from acts of physical desecration.

Our flag occupies a truly unique place in the hearts of millions of citizens as a cherished symbol of freedom. As an international emblem of the world’s greatest democracy, the American flag should be treated with respect and care. I do not believe our free speech rights should entitle us to consider the flag as mere “personal property,” which can be treated any way we see fit, including physically desecrating it as a form of political protest.

The American flag is a source of inspiration wherever it is displayed, and a symbol of hope to all nations struggling to build democracies. As a proud member of the House Armed Services Committee, I deeply admire those who have fought and died to preserve our freedoms. These men and women have bravely defended our flag and the fundamental principles for which it stands. They deserve to know that their government treasures the flag and all it represents as much as they do.

For these reasons I, as well as a great number of Americans, believe that our flag should be treated with dignity and deserves protection under the law. I urge my colleagues to join me in protecting one of the most enduring symbols of our nation and our democracy by adopting this resolution today.