EXPRESSING SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL CHARACTER COUNTS WEEK

SPEECH OF
HON. CONSTANCE A. MORELLA
OF MARYLAND
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Monday, September 24, 2001

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of establishing a National Character Counts week. Developing strong character in our children today ensures the foundation of our Nation for the future.

Today's youth experience events that were unimaginable 40 or 50 years ago. Public scandals, violence by and against youth, and now for the first time in their lives they have seen a hatred for the character of our Nation. This exposure to negative influences threatens their physical and psychological well-being. Recognizing the importance of strength of character through this legislation can help us combat these negative influences.

I support funding character education and I am pleased that the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act included language authorizing the Secretary of Education to make grants for the design and implementation of character education programs. Our youth deserve our support for developing the strength of character necessary to maintain a strong nation.

Maryland has been a shining example of the benefits character education programs bring to schools. Three Maryland schools have been recognized as National Schools of Character under the Character Education Partnership. In fact, these schools reduced the number of discipline referrals and suspensions, within a caring learning environment. Also, as a result of the program, student test scores and parent involvement in student education increased.

Character education programs help students identify and develop character traits that prepare them for life. Through trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship, and honesty, our children can possess the tools for leadership. In addition, the program allows at home with parents and family.

It is the responsibility of all adults to demonstrate good character traits to our young people. This includes faith communities, schools, and youth, civic, and human service organizations. All of us are responsible for the character and conduct of our young people because each of us reflects the values of our society.

Therefore, I urge all Members to support this legislation and encourage schools around the Nation to participate in character education programs, and our young people to become responsible citizens for today and tomorrow.

This legislation provides $5 billion in direct aid to the airlines, $10 billion in loan guarantees to airlines, government aid with insurance for airlines, and caps the airlines' financial liability. I support all of these provisions.

However, I believe it would be irresponsible not to also address safety issues and employee issues. After all, we cannot have a strong and vibrant airline industry in this country without people who want to fly, and that will require both people who have money in their pockets to buy airline tickets, and a dramatic improvement in consumer confidence that will only come with real safety improvements.

This legislation will cost over $15 billion. I find it unbelievable that we could not find one dollar to cushion the blow for the workers who will be affected—by latest estimates, approximately 100,000 workers will be laid off as a direct result of the attacks on September 11. Bolstering the airline industry so that we can minimize these layoffs is imperative, but the sad truth is, even this $15 billion will not save very many of the jobs lost due to the terrorist attacks. Many workers in my district, who work at Boeing's 737 plant in Renton, fear a layoff notice as early as next month. I'm sure the thousands of Alaska Airlines and SeaTAC Airport employees in my district are worried too.

I have faith that the industry and the economy will recover, but that won't help with these workers' mortgage, electric bill, or car payment.

Right now, if a group of workers can prove that their job was lost due to trade, they are eligible for a series of benefits including job training and income support. Why can't we extend the same benefits for the thousands of workers who will lose their jobs and have trouble finding a new one right away? Can't we send just a few dollars to the men and women who will no longer fly the planes, sell the tickets, load the bags, attend to the passengers, or build the planes?

Before he passed away, my father was one of those men. He worked for thirty years as a ramp serviceman for United Airlines at SeaTac Airport, so I know firsthand how important these jobs are to Americans, and I can't imagine what my father would have said if, after this attack, Congress had passed a relief package that gave $15 billion to the airline industry and not a dollar for the thousands of workers who will be impacted within the next weeks.

Let me just say a few words about safety and security issues. I strongly support the U.S. airline industry, and I believe that we should, at this critical moment in history, stand behind them. However, I think we have to fairly and reasonably examine the events of September 11. Our current airport security system allowed four U.S. planes to be hijacked by men with