

thank him as a freshman here for that incredible opportunity to begin to understand and now to work as a member of the Committee on Armed Services to try to make this a safer place for everyone.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank our colleague. The people of Florida have sent us a great one. He is going to be a star in this body. We can already see it in the way he handled himself and the way he conducted himself in meeting with these foreign leaders. I thank the gentleman for his great leadership, and for what I know is going to be a very effective role in this Congress during his long tenure here.

Mr. Speaker, there it is, a summary of our trip. We are proud of what we did. We have no apologies to make: 41 meetings in five days in three different States, a number of cities, visits with the people on collective farms, in hospitals, going out and having dinner with ordinary people and future and emerging leaders, all of it designed to build better relations between America and the emerging former Soviet states.

I want to close, Mr. Speaker, with a brief outline of a meeting that I had with General Kavshnin. General Kavshnin is the equivalent to our General Shelton. The meeting was supposed to last for 30 minutes. He had all of his generals lined up there together across the table. We sat there for over 2 hours, a very animated discussion about where Russia is, the strength of the Russian military, the recent military exercise they were involved in, and what his vision of an American-Russian relationship will be in the future.

I will be candid, it was not the most warm discussion of our trip, but it was a candid discussion of Russia's concerns. We reassured him that America is not trying to drive Russia into the corner. To the contrary, we do not want Russia aligned more closely with China against us. We challenged General Kavshnin, based on discussions I had before going on the trip with Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld, who I have the highest respect for, and the general in charge of our missile defense organization, General Kadish, who I have equal praise for.

Their challenge from me to the Russians was: We are waiting for your response, Russia, to work together. That was the message we carried throughout our trip: We are waiting for you, Russia, to come back and tell us how we can work together on defending our people, the European people, and the Russian people from the threat of rogue states, states that do not abide by the norms.

In that meeting with General Kavshnin, we opened the door for further dialogue.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we were disappointed with one aspect of the trip:

We did not get to meet President Putin. We had had a commitment before we left that we would meet with him. We were told when we arrived that, because of the bombing of Iraq, he would not meet with us. It was disappointing, because I had been on Air Force One the previous Tuesday, I had told President Bush of our trip to Russia, and he said to me, Congressman, make sure you tell President Putin and the Russians that we want to be their friends. We have no quarrel with the Russians. We want to work together.

That was the message, Mr. Speaker, that I wanted to deliver to Mr. Putin personally with our delegation. We were not able to do that. Otherwise, the trip was a resounding success. I thank my colleagues for participating.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 775, THE VOTING IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2001

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

Mr. HORN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join today with our colleague, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), and others in introducing the Voting Improvement Act of 2001, H.R. 775, as we will call it.

The past election produced a great deal of confusion, turmoil, and uncertainty. Although there were a number of factors in producing that confusion, one major factor in Florida and other States was the continuing use of outdated and even antiquated punch card voting systems.

The bill we are introducing today tackles this problem immediately and directly by establishing a grant program for the States to replace all punch card systems before the next Federal election in 2002. In short, this bill provides a practical solution for solving some of the more troublesome voting equipment problems.

As the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) has noted in introducing the bill, punch card systems have the highest rate of error among all voting methods. One study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the California Institute of Technology recently estimated that the nationwide error rate for punch cards is 2½ percent, and in a national election that would mean that nearly 1 million votes are thrown out and never counted due to mistakes caused by punch card systems. Clearly, we need to make replacements of these antiquated systems a very high priority.

In addition to immediate equipment replacement, this bill establishes an ongoing grant program to assure that new voting systems are developed and deployed so that voters have up-to-date systems in the future.

The bill also assures that voter education and training of poll workers are

given increased attention and support, and H.R. 775 establishes a permanent bipartisan commission to act as a nationwide resource for information gathering and studying the best practices for ballot design and other basic election needs.

Mr. Speaker, the Voting Improvement Act is one of several proposals being introduced for overhauling our election laws and making certain that we never repeat the chaos of the past election. All of these demand careful review and the development of a bipartisan consensus for sound reform. This bill sets clear priorities and offers practical solutions that must be part of any final reform plan.

I urge our colleagues to join us in this effort in backing H.R. 775.

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REFORM EDUCATION IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, in the President's address last night he reaffirmed the fact that education is one of his top priorities. It appears from the speech that the President made that the only priority which ranks above education is the tax cut that is being proposed.

I salute the President for his selection and for his devotion and dedication to education as the number one priority. I think it is very important that he has taken note of the fact that this has been the priority of the American people for the last 4 years or 5 years.

Education has ranked as either the number one priority or somewhere in the top two or three priorities for the last 5 years. So the President is acknowledging the fact that in a democracy, the directions really come from the bottom.

He is not alone. The previous President chose to call himself the Education President, President Clinton. At one point he said he wanted to be the Education President. And he and the younger Mr. Bush are not the only ones.

Father Bush, I think, first coined the phrase Education President. The father of the present President said he wanted to be the Education President.

Before that, Ronald Reagan launched the movement to reform education in America with a report called *A Nation At Risk, A Nation At Risk*. We are now in our fourth President who has chosen to make education a number one priority. We should be making some tremendous progress in terms of the improvement of education in our Nation.

I regretfully report, however, that this is not the case. Despite the fact