Character Act would promote this needed planning.

We commend your efforts in introducing the Community Character Act and we look forward to working with you toward its adoption.

Sincerely,
LEE L. VERSTANDIG, Senior Vice President, Government Affairs.


HON. EARL BLUMENTAER, Longworth Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN BLUMENTAER: On behalf of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) and its 14,000 members, I’m writing to convey my strong endorsement of “The Community Character Act” (CCA) you have sponsored. ASLA applauds your leadership in promoting legislation that will support state and tribal efforts to develop and update land use plans.

ASLA supports the Community Character Act as an effective tool to promote more livable communities and stewardship of the natural environment, both of which are important aspects of the landscape architecture profession.

Americans are increasingly aware and concerned about the byproducts of unmanaged growth—loss of open space, congestion, strip malls, and loss of ecological biodiversity—as clearly indicated by surveys and the passage of numerous local ballot initiatives to address growth. CCA responds to these concerns by authorizing funding assistance to states and tribal governments that request help in implementing their respective visions of sustainability.

In addition to minimizing some of the harmful impacts that unplanned development can have on local and regional ecosystems, good planning and design makes smart business sense. Planning and design help to create communities with character—places where people want to be. As more people are attracted to such places—both residents and tourists—local economies flourish.

CCA has garnered bipartisan support, as well as the endorsement of a broad array of organizations, including planners, conservationists, preservationists, and the National Association of Realtors.

Thank you again for your sponsorship of “The Community Character Act” and your continued commitment to enhancing more livable communities across America. I look forward to working with you to enact this legislation.

Sincerely,
NANCY C. SOMERVILLE, Executive Director.


HON. MARGE ROUKEMA, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENTAER AND REPRESENTATIVE GILCHREST: Smart Growth America would like to commend you on the introduction of the Community Character Act of 2001. We support both the bill and your efforts to assist states, multi-state regions and tribal governments in their efforts to revise their land use planning legislation and develop comprehensive plans.

Planning for future growth and directing development so that it strengthens existing communities while building upon their physical, cultural historical assets is integral to smart growth. We applaud your foresight and willingness to help states, tribal government and regions in their ongoing efforts to achieve smart growth by coordinating transportation, housing and education infrastructure investments while conserving historic, scenic and natural resources.

The Community Character Act makes the federal government a partner in the ongoing efforts of states, regions and tribal governments that want to plan for future growth. We applaud your efforts and look forward to working with you to pass this timely legislation.

Sincerely,
DON CHEN, Director, Smart Growth America.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE ACCESS ACT TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS ACT OF 2001

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, today, I am pleased to introduce the District of Columbia College Access Act Technical Corrections Act of 2001. I am particularly pleased and appreciative to be joined by my colleagues, D.C. Subcommittee Chair CONNIE MORELLA and former Chair TOM DAVIS, who are original cosponsors of this bill and were original cosponsors of the landmark College Access Act that has proved so successful.

This bill is necessary to correct three problems that have arisen in the administration of the District’s Tobacco Assistance Grant Program, authorized in 1999 with the passage of the District of Columbia College Access Act.

The Act allows D.C. residents in-state tuition at public colleges and universities nationwide or a $2500 stipend at private colleges and universities in the region.

First, the bill amends the College Access Act to remove a provision limiting the benefits of the Act to residents who graduated from high school before January 1, 1998. The bill would allow current college seniors and a smaller group of juniors who are presently excluded from the program, but are otherwise eligible for College Access Act benefits to receive those benefits. The arbitrary cutoff date, which was not included in the bill passed by the House, was put in the bill in the Senate out of concern that there might not be enough money to cover all eligible students.

Fortunately, the evidence does not support this assumption, allowing the students eligible in the original House bill to be funded. The District has received over 3500 applications and placed over 1600 students at colleges and universities across the country. The program’s $17 million appropriation was originally derived with the assumption that current college juniors and seniors would indeed qualify, and the program currently has the funds to allow these students to participate. It is inherently unfair for D.C. residents who are college freshmen and sophomores to get the benefit, while students who are juniors and seniors do not.

Second, the bill removes the arbitrary three year deadline for college admission in order to be eligible for the benefits in the College Access Act. The bill as passed never intended to deny in-state tuition to students who had to work after high school or who have decided to get a college degree later in life. The three year deadline language was also placed in the Act by the Senate to control the cost of the program. However, the District has done a study of the data and it is clear that it has the funds to include these students in the program. It is unfair to penalize otherwise eligible students because their life circumstances necessitated that they work before entering college. The Congress should applaud and encourage these students. The Department of Education, for example, does not place a similar constraint on its programs.

Third, the bill closes the loophole that currently allows foreign nationals who live in the District to receive the benefits of the Act. The congressional intent of the bill was to provide state university system-type higher education options to D.C. residents, not foreign nationals who happen to live in the District. Most of these students already have the option to take advantage of their own country’s higher educational systems. The bill merely mirrors the Department of Education’s own statutory requirements on this matter.

The positive impact of the College Access Act on the District of Columbia has been extraordinary. For the first time, D.C. students have the same higher educational choices available to them as residents of the fifty states. This bill seeks only to include those who were arbitrarily left out of the Act from receiving these benefits.

The end of the current school year is rapidly approaching and current college seniors will begin to graduate in May. Because of the necessity for swift passage and the non-controversial nature of this bill, I am asking Chairwoman MORELLA to seek to have the bill placed on the suspension calendar as soon as we return from recess.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this important, noncontroversial measure.

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY COUNSELING IMPROVEMENT ACT

HON. MARGE ROUKEMA OF NEW JERSEY IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mrs. ROUKEMA. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing the Elementary and Secondary Counseling Improvement Act, legislation to provide for elementary and secondary school counseling programs. The epidemic of school shootings across the nation exemplifies the urgent need for school-based mental health services for our youth. Many youth who may be headed toward school violence or other tragedies can be helped if we identify their early symptoms.

The lack of mental health interventions can produce devastating results for children, including disrupted social and educational development, academic failure, substance abuse
early identification, assessment, and direct academic supports. Physical and mental health resources, behavior. The Surgeon General describes children and adolescents' ''This is exactly the nation's attention on unmet mental health needs. Providing mental health services in schools is a wise long-term, cost-effective approach to reducing youth violence, developing a positive school environment, increasing student achievement and improving the overall well-being of our nation's youth. Schools provide a tremendous opportunity to identify potential mental health problems in children. Children spend a high percentage of their time in school, especially during their critical years of learning and development. Teachers and other school professionals have the chance to identify potential problems and get children the help they need. Schools can provide youth with on-site access to mental or behavioral problems access to the mental health services they need. School-based mental health programs have decreased the number of suspensions and referrals to the principal's office, decreased the use of force, weapons, and threatening of others, and decreased, school suspensions were reduced, and students were given the opportunity to receive services. With the increase of violence in our schools, we must reauthorize and expand the Elementary School Counseling Program. Our schools must be better equipped to identify and help youth possibly headed toward school violence or other tragedies. I strongly urge my colleagues to support this important legislation which ensures that the mental health needs of our nation's children are appropriately addressed. Mr. Speaker, I submit the text of an article by Abigail Trafford, which appeared in the Washington Post on March 7, 2001 concerning the need for school-based mental health services to address the problem of violence in our schools, to be included in the RECORD.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS (April 5, 2001)

How many school shootings will it take to focus the nation's attention on unmet mental health needs of children and adolescents? No one knows what drove 15-year-old Andy Williams on Monday to allegedly fire 30 rounds from a .22 caliber longbarrel revolver, killing two students and injuring 13 others in Santee, CA. Or why an eighth-grade girl in Williamsport, PA., pulled out a gun and wounded her classmate today. But in many instances of juvenile violence, the primary cause is untreated mental illness. To be sure, there are other factors in this level of violence, such as easy access to guns. And most kids with mental health needs do not get help. But after the headlines fade and the tragedy at Santana High School in Santee becomes another statistic next to Columbine—after the calls from parents and neighbors are met to put in more metal detectors in schools and establish hot lines to report threats and weird behavior—where is the call to improve the mental health and emotional development of children? "You can make a case that youth mental health is the most neglected area in health care," says clinical psychologist Mark Weist, who directs the Center for School Mental Health Assistance at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. "There's a huge gap between our mental health needs and the resources and services that are available to them."

For starters many people still deny that mental illness can occur in children, which increases the stigma. There also aren't enough mental health professionals for the population. Between 12 and 15 million children and adolescents in the United States are in need of mental health services, according to the Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health. There are only about 1,400 child and adolescent psychiatrists in the country. One estimate of the need called for at least $30,000 psychiatrists for this population. There is also a shortage of psychologists, social workers and other mental health workers who are trained to address the emotional and developmental needs of the young.

Services in many parts of the country are fragmented and under-funded. Since the Columbine shootings, the demand for mental health care for children increased. With heightened concerns about violence, many schools have adopted a zero-tolerance policy toward disruptive students. In some cities, a typical scenario is: A student makes a threat and is sent by ambulance to a hospital emergency room. There he—usually it's a boy—is diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. The lack of space available in the appropriate level of care whether it's a hospital bed or placement in a special school or residential facility. Either the student ''boards'' at the hospital until a bed in a mental health unit is found, or he is sent home to wait for outpatient services.

With the move toward zero-tolerance policies, many needy kids are also sent from school for long periods of time. This often exacerbates their problems and jeopardizes their academic development.

Yet, the most effective arena for providing mental health services for children is the school. A decade of research into school-based health centers suggests that children are more likely to have a doctor reported at a school center than in a doctor's office or outpatient clinic. Advocates of comprehensive mental health services in schools point out that such programs help to decrease emotional growth as well as detect psychiatric problems early and monitor treatment with medications or therapy.

"There's enough data to suggest that this makes a difference. At the federal level we should look at school-based mental health as routinely as curriculum requirements," says pediatric psychiatrist Richard D'Alli, who directs child and adolescent community programs for the Johns Hopkins Children's Center.

In fact, mental health counseling is the leading reason for visits by students to school-based health centers, according to surveys of users of these centers. The trouble is that most schools do not have a health center. There are only about 1,400 school-based health centers in a country with more than 110,000 schools. About 40 percent of these centers have no mental health services.

These statistics underscore the general lack of psychiatric help for children. Overall, only one of three children with mental illness get any treatment—and only 10 percent get adequate treatment, according to the Surgeon General's report.

It's time to address these needs and not wait for the next shooting. A national commitment to bolster mental health care for
children cannot guarantee that there will never be like Semyon Domash and Columbine. As D’Alli says: “What set these kids apart? Why are they murderers? We may not have the answer any time soon.”

But detecting and treating mental illness in children is one way to reduce the risks of school violence. Researchers know that psychiatric disorders in children arise from a complex of factors—genetic vulnerability, social environment, history of traumatic experiences, level of psychological and cognitive strength. They also know that intervention as early as in an elementary school can protect at-risk children.

“These are troubled kids,” continues D’Alli. “The whole concept is to treat [the problem] early. If you don’t, you’re not sure where it will lead.” So why isn’t there a louder outcry from parents and teachers for mental health services in schools? Part of the answer is money. Good mental health services are labor-intensive and costly. The other part is leadership.

President Bush was quick to express his sorrow. “When a bad parent teaches their children right from wrong . . . our country will be better off,” he said. But this problem is not just a moral problem. It’s a medical one. And he can do something about it.

ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST MISSING IN BELARUS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, this fall, the Belarusian Government is planning to hold their second presidential elections since independence. Judging by the continuing actions of the repressive regime of Aleksandr Lukashenka, free, fair, and transparent elections—consistent with Belarus’ freely undertaken OSCE commitments—will be very difficult to achieve. The election threatens an all-encompassing atmosphere of trust and a respect for basic human rights. Unfortunately, recent actions in Belarus do nothing to encourage such trust.

Most recently, on March 25, Belarusian authorities cracked down on participants of the Independence Day march, arresting and beating several protesters, subsequently fining and jailing some, including Belarusian Popular Front Chairman Vintsuk Vyachorka, who received a 15-day sentence on March 29, Ales Bialiatski, head of the human rights center "Viasna", who received a 10-day sentence, and Yuri Belenky, acting chairman of the Conservative Christian Party, who also received a 10-day sentence. Also detained and beaten was 17-year-old Dmitri Yegorov, a photojournalist for a Grodno-based, non-state newspaper, The Refractor.

On the day of the march, Belarusian state television accused the opposition of “seeking to draw Belarus into some bloody turmoil,” reflecting its increasingly shrill tone of late. Earlier this year, for instance, Belarusian television claimed the CIA was intensifying “subversive activity” as the presidential election draws nearer. On March 24, Belarus’ KGB chief pledged on Belarusian television to intensify surveillance of foreigners in order to prevent them from interfering in the country’s domestic matters.

On March 12, Lukashenka signed Decree #8, which essentially imposes restrictions from abroad offered to NGOs for democracy building and human rights, including election monitoring. Moreover, the Belarusian Government has claimed that the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group’s (AMG) domestic election observers project does not conform with the Belarusian Constitution and Electoral Code, although nowhere does the law address the conduct of election observation, and the government has resisted AMG efforts to convene a working group regarding the administrative dimension of the elections. Lukashenka himself has asserted that he would ban the training of election observers by non-Belarusian bodies, telling reporters: “There will be no guerrillas in Belarus.”

Earlier this year, Lukashenka also accused the AMG for “exacting their mandate,” planning to train some “14,000–18,000 fighters” under the guise of election observers.

Mr. Speaker, I am also concerned about recent assaults on religious communities. Last month, the Council of Ministers restricted visits by foreign clergy for “non-religious purposes—including contact with religious and other organizations, participation in conferences and other events, or charitable activities. Government officials are also refusing to register some Reform Jewish communities because they do not have “legal” addresses. In February, state-controller Belarusian television aired a documentary alleging Catholicism as a threat to the very existence of the Belarusian nation. And in January, leaders of Belarus’ Protestant community alleged that state newspapers carried biased articles that present Pentecostals as “wild fanatics.”

Religious freedom is not the only liberty in peril. Freedom of the press and of self expression are also in jeopardy. Editors of a variety of newspapers are being fined for violating the Law on Press and Other Mass Media. Various periodicals are being confiscated and destroyed, and distributors of Independent newspapers have been arrested. Youth organizations have been accused of engaging in activities that weaken the Belarusian state and undermine its economic stability. Teenagers have been arrested for picketing and protesting, and others have been detained for distributing newspapers or pasting stickers advocating reform and calling on the authorities to solve the cases of political disappearances. Belarusian Television and Radio (BTR) has also canceled scheduled addresses to be made by potential presidential candidates or opposition leaders. The Deputy Minister of Education has ordered heads of schools and Radio (BTR) has also canceled scheduled addresses to be made by potential presidential candidates or opposition leaders. The Deputy Minister of Education has ordered heads of schools and a director of the clubhouse of the Brest Association of Hearing-Impaired People canceled on orders from the Mogilev authorities. And he can do something about it.

FHA SHUTDOWN PREVENTION ACT

HON. JOHN J. LaFALCE
OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. LAFALCE. Mr. Speaker, today, along with Representative FRANK, I will be introducing a bill I filed last Congress, the “FHA Shutdown Prevention Act.”

This legislation provides standby budget authority for HUD to keep a number of FHA loan programs operating even when they run out of credit subsidy, by drawing on the profits from the other FHA specialty loan programs that make a profit for the taxpayer.

As Congress debates the issue of what we might do with the multi-billion dollar annual FHA surplus, I think most would agree that the first thing we should not do is shut down important existing FHA loan programs merely because of budget technicalities and Congressional and Executive inaction. Yet, that is precisely what looms on the near horizon, for the second time in less than a year.

Last July, HUD was forced to suspend insurance for a number of multi-family and single family loans in the General Insurance/Special Risk Insurance (GI/SRI) Funds. These included a number of multi-family loan programs, the FHA reverse mortgage program, the 203(k) purchase-rehab program, and other important loan programs for low- and moderate-income families. These programs were not suspended because FHA as a whole is unprofitable since all of the FHA loan programs combined make a net profit to the taxpayer of over $2 billion a year, according to CBO and OMB. These programs were not even suspended because the GI/SRI Funds as a whole are unprofitable, because the profitable specialized FHA loan programs in the GI/SRI Funds make a profit sufficient to pay for the few specialized loan programs that run a small loss.