

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on an issue of national importance that has been ignored by this Congress. Schools across the Nation are bulging at the seams and the Department of Education predicts that overcrowding of America's schools will only worsen over the next decade. Yet school construction was not a part of our budget agreement and it has not been a part of the debate on this floor.

The Secretary of Education recently released a Baby Boom Echo report citing that kindergarten through 12th grade enrollments will be at an all-time high of 53 million this fall. By the year 2007, the number will reach over 54 million. How much longer can we ignore the problem of school overcrowding?

In my county, Orange County, we have one of the youngest populations in the Nation and Orange County schools are perfect examples of how overcrowding can create problems for schools and students across the Nation.

Schools in my congressional district have one of the highest growth rates in the Nation, between 2.4 percent and 5 percent per year.

Each time that I go home to my district, I visit one of those schools. During many of these visits, I have witnessed high schools and junior high classrooms where 50 or 60 or 65 students are crammed into one classroom. I have seen two classes being taught in one room. I have seen too many schools who use portable and temporary structures because they cannot afford to build new ones.

Our kids are not getting the attention they need and their learning is being inhibited. In addition, schools are quickly deteriorating because of extended and increased use.

Local school districts and States have obviously been unable to address school construction needs and, unfortunately, we have not given them an incentive to do so from the Federal level. That is why I have introduced the Expand and Rebuild America's Schools Act, which is a bill that will assist our local education agencies with the financing of school construction bonds.

The Expand and Rebuild America's Schools Act offers a 2-year pilot bond program that local school districts can take advantage of when financing school construction needs. The bonds are interest free. Because the Federal Government will provide a tax credit to lenders in the amount of the interest that would otherwise be paid.

But more importantly, this bill will reward schools that have high standards and that continue to succeed amidst bad conditions.

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This bond program will help those schools that have severe overcrowding problems, illustrated by year-round schedules and the use of these portable classrooms. Qualifying criteria for the program includes high growth rates and high student-teacher ratios.

Finally, this bill allows schools to apply for the program directly through the Department of Education, avoiding any State bureaucracy in funding decisions or program administration.

I hope this Congress will soon realize the importance of education, of our schools, and of our children. Let us make school construction and this bill a priority for our legislative agendas.

PUT EDUCATIONAL DOLLARS IN THE CLASSROOMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. KINGSTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, why are the liberal Washingtonian Democrats so afraid to change public education? Why are they trying to maintain the status quo in public education? What is it that they were afraid of? Are they so in the pockets of the Washington big unions that they are willing to sacrifice America's children to educational mediocrity?

I am a graduate of public schools. I am the son of a teacher and the brother of a teacher. I think it is very important for us to have a strong, dynamic public education system, and that is why I have worked with our conference to try to give public education the schools that they need to prepare our children for the future.

I am appalled by Members of Congress who choose to ignore the global realities of a changing world in order to keep the status quo. Just because Washington bureaucrats do not want to change or improve education does not mean that Congress has to be their lap dog.

Since I graduated from high school in 1973, SAT scores have fallen. On an international basis, American children, compared to Japanese, German and British children, score lower on many of the standardized tests. Public schools are losing students to private schools and religious schools, and home schools are increasing in popularity and numbers.

Public schools, because of this Washington command and control approach, have lost their local flexibility, their local control. They are mired in paperwork and red tape. That is why charter schools have become so popular.

What are charter schools? Charter schools are public schools. They are funded by public tax dollars. But unlike a regular, normal school, a charter school is free of the educational restrictions that the bureaucracy puts on them out of Washington and out of the State capital school boards.

They are so popular that in 1992 there was one charter school in the United States of America. Today there are 1,000, and within the next 3 years there should be another 2,000 to 3,000 charter schools. Again, why are they so popular? Because they have local control.

What is it that teachers and educators are so sick of? I will give my

colleagues an example. A teacher in Camden County in my district was telling me she just returned from a seminar on child sensitivity where they told her, at great expense to the taxpayers, not to hug children, not to be in a room alone with a child, and never to touch a child. And she works in an area where there are lots of broken homes and lots of kids who, Mr. Speaker, frankly, need a hug more than they need an A or an A+. They need a little loving, but we are paying teachers to learn how not to hug children.

Or the teacher in Darien, Georgia, who told me she has to spend 2 to 3 hours each and every week filling out paperwork for the bureaucrats in Atlanta who must send it to their bureaucrat bosses in Washington, D.C., 2 to 3 hours a week, which could be spent helping that marginal student catch up on the algebra or on the chemistry or on the social studies. But it is gone.

Or the mother in Savannah, Georgia, who tells me she no longer goes to PTA meetings because if she comes up with ideas, the teacher may agree or disagree with her, but it does not matter because they cannot change a thing because the teachers' hands have been tied by the bureaucrats, and the bureaucrats' hands at the school board have been tied by the Washington bureaucrats.

People want to return to local control in education. Our schools back home want to be free of Washington command and control bureaucracy, Mr. Speaker, and that is why it is so important that we, as a Congress, keep pushing for local control of education, we keep pushing for flexibility in the classroom, and we keep pushing to put educational dollars in the classroom with the teacher and the student and not the bureaucratic brokers in Washington and the State capitals.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time with a final word; that our public education system is well worth fighting for. Again, I am a graduate of public schools. I believe in them. But I believe we have to allow them the flexibility to be the great institutions which they once were.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. FATTAH] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. FATTAH addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Virginia [Mr. SCOTT] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. SCOTT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. FORD] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. FORD addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina [Mrs. CLAYTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mrs. CLAYTON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from the Virgin Islands [Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

STOP 245(I)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. BILBRAY] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BILBRAY. Mr. Speaker, I am here to address an item that has not been discussed very much at all here on the House floor this year, but something that was discussed extensively last year with the passage of the Immigration Reform Act. This item will be considered under the Commerce, Justice, and State conference report very soon.

This item is called 245(I), the notorious illegal alien amnesty program. It is a program that allows that somebody who has violated our immigration laws can pay \$1,000 as a payment to be exempted from the immigration laws of the United States. This 245(I) allows those who have broken our laws to gain special status that those who are waiting patiently to immigrate into our country do not have access to.

245(I) means that the people who have played by the rules are being punished and that those who have broken the rules are now going to be rewarded.

Mr. Speaker, I think there was one very clear message that we tried to articulate in the Immigration Reform Act of 1997, and that was that it was unfair to punish those who played by the rules and to reward those who broke the rules. And in fact that bill, the immigration reform bill, which was aimed at ending these types of policies, was passed by an overwhelming majority, by 320 votes in this House.

Democrat and Republican joined together to tell the American people that we were going to stop the absurd process of rewarding illegal immigration. And also those 230 Members of Congress voted together here in this House to send a message not just to America but to the world that the days of rewarding people to come into this country illegally was going to end; and to tell everybody in the world that if they want to come to this country, then

come here legally. If they play by the rules, then we will reward them. Break the rules, and they will not be rewarded.

Well, 245(I), Mr. Speaker, continues to reward those who have broken the law and continues to punish those who have played by the rules.

Now, there is an action in the other body that discusses the idea of extending this again another 4 years. And this was a program that was snuck in 3 years ago and was only supposed to be around for 3 years.

Let me remind my colleagues that there are 3,000,500 people waiting patiently to immigrate legally. They do not have the chance to pay \$1,000 and get on the fast track, because they have played by the rules. The fact is there is a million people in this country today that have been identified by the immigration department that are potentially eligible to buy into this amnesty program with \$1,000.

Now, originally, when this bill was passed and this amnesty program was put in, it was estimated that only 10,000 people would take advantage of this program, and they said that only 10,000 would be initiated. The fact is 400,000 have applied, Mr. Speaker, 400,000 people that have said we want to buy our way out of our illegal status and pay a bribe to the U.S. Government so that they will forgive us for being illegal.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, this number has gotten so big that over \$200 million is acquired by the United States from this bribe, what we call in my neighborhood "mordida," and it is a bribe to get the Government to look the other way.

Now, there are those who will say we have to keep this program now because we are making over \$200 million, and that somehow we are going to make benefits off of this. Let me remind my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, that a lot of these individuals who are paying the \$1,000 to acquire this legal status are doing so to qualify to receive public assistance benefits from the Federal Government for their children and so that they can then get a check. The fact is the \$1,000 will be recouped by many of these individuals if they have minor children who were born here in the United States while they were illegally in this country.

Now, I think it is quite unfair that there are those 3½ million people waiting patiently to immigrate who are not offered this kind of option. Their children are not given automatic citizenship, their children are not offered automatic welfare benefits, and they, by paying \$1,000, do not automatically qualify for public assistance and welfare in the United States.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is time that this Congress has the guts to stand up again, like it did last year, saying that the days of rewarding illegal immigration are over with, the days of punishing those who played by the rules are over with. Mr. Speaker, I

am asking for this body to publicly discuss the fact that if 320 Members said it was time to end this program a year ago, why is the Senate and why is this House even considering extending this program?

I think it is time the American people called every one of their Congressmen and said stop the alien amnesty program, stop 245(I), and let us start treating people fairly and rewarding them for playing by the rules.

STOP 245(I)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. ROHRABACHER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend my colleague, the gentleman from California [Mr. BILBRAY], for the remarks he just made and for the energy that he has put into this effort to bring our borders under control and to prevent hundreds of millions, even billions of dollars from being spent on people who have come to this country illegally.

I think it is incumbent on those of us who have been very active in this effort to prevent illegal immigration into the United States, to express our appreciation for the fact that legal immigration has done great things for the United States of America.

I know I am speaking for my colleague, the gentleman from California, [Mr. BRIAN BILBRAY], and I know I am speaking for myself and most of us, I think all of us who have been active on this issue in the House of Representatives. Legal immigration has served our country well. We are all immigrants, except perhaps for the American Indians who met us at our shores.

The people who have come here legally, however, are screened so that they are not carrying diseases, they are screened so that they can take care of themselves, so that they are not criminals, so that they are not people who would be involved in acts of terrorism. We have, in fact, the most generous legal immigration system in the world where we screen out people who will not be taking care of themselves or are not healthy or pose a threat to our society, and let other people come to our society who will be producing wealth and become productive members of our society.

We can be proud that the United States of America has a legal immigration system that permits more legal immigration into our society than all the other societies in the world combined. That is a wonderful thing, and we have benefitted from that. But what we have not benefitted from is a flood of illegal immigration in the last 10 years that is overwhelming many of the social systems that we put in place for our people.

In California we find our education system breaking down. Our young people's test scores are going down, down,