

It has been most informative to listen to each of my colleagues as they have shared the very words of our Founding Fathers. And as we have listened to these words, it becomes crystal clear that, to the extent that the First Amendment addresses the interaction between public life and religious belief, it is this: that the only thing that the First Amendment prohibited was the Federal establishment of a national denomination. The freedom of religion, therefore, is to be protected from encroachment by the State, not the other way around.

Mr. Speaker, with the words of our Founding Fathers, and they are many, from George Washington to John Adams to John Jay, Benjamin Rush, John Quincy Adams, Fisher Ames, Daniel Webster, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson and others cited tonight, each one of these men was fully committed to the primary role that religion played in public life and in private life, yet without the establishment of one particular denomination.

So, Mr. Speaker, as we continue to consider the many policies that lie before us, from charitable choice to opportunity scholarships to attend religious schools, to governmental contracting with faith-based institutions, even to the posting of the Ten Commandments on public property, let us do so with a true intention of the framers in mind, and that intention was to allow and encourage religion, both to flourish and to inform public life, yet still without naming a particular state religion or denomination at the Federal level.

That is fully possible.

Instead of shutting it out and denying even the purely practical solution that it offers, let us not be afraid of the good that religion can and does bring to public life. Indeed, it is one of the reasons that we have such a great country called America.

THE REPUBLICAN MAJORITY IS NOT LISTENING TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, we are, I hope, nearing the end of the first session of the 106th Congress, and there are some people who say that probably the end of October we might end the session; but from what I hear today, it may be close to Thanksgiving before we get out of here. Either way, it is a most regrettable session; it is a tragic comedy that ought to end as soon as possible.

One of the most regretful parts of this session is that the Republican majority that is in charge of the Congress is not listening to the American people. We as politicians always are accused of holding our fingers in the air

to see which way the wind is blowing and shaping our actions and our policies in accordance with public opinion. It is very interesting that this is a year when, in very important areas, we are not listening to the people when we should be.

I am not saying that we should always follow public opinion; I think a representative government means that they expect some judgment to be exercised by those who are elected and sometimes their conscience and their knowledge and their vision may conflict with the opinion of the masses; but in general, we should always be listening. And when there is a conflict, we should certainly try to work towards some kind of compromise, some kind of merging of our own opinions with those of the majority. We pay a lot of money for polls and both parties and individuals rely heavily on focus groups and all kinds of devices to find out what people are thinking.

But we have a situation now where it is quite clear on several major issues exactly where people are, where the majority is, and this Republican majority refuses to listen. Of course I am told that if the Republican majority wants to shipwreck that first session of the 106th Congress, or maybe the next session too, and we come to a situation where their conflict with the majority of Americans is so great until the democratic process will go into action, and it will throw them out of office. We should not worry as Democrats; we should be happy that there is such confusion and such day-to-day trivializing of the processes of the Congress.

Everyday we have stupid bills that really do not mean very much and are a waste of time. In our committees, instead of meeting issues head on, we are dancing around them and camouflaging the real intent of the majority on these bills. Currently we have a situation of that kind in the Committee on Education and the Workforce as we seek to reauthorize the Title I portion of the Elementary and Secondary Education Assistance Act. I am sure many other committees are finding the same tactics where we do not address reality, we trivialize the process by playing around the edges and we are proud of not doing anything. This is a no-commitment Congress.

Some people have often used the joke that when Congress is out of session, the Republicans say it is good for us not to be around because we only do harm when we are here. Well, I think that worse than doing harm is to not address the issues at hand and to do nothing, sins of omission are the sins of the 106th Congress. It is a shipwreck Congress as we come closer to the close of this first year. It seems that matters are growing worse each day, not better.

We might say that maybe we had a high point last week where we did vote on the HMO Patients' Bill of Rights, the Patients' Bill of Rights that would allow people to have some kind of leveraging as they deal with the health

maintenance organizations. Well, we finally came to a point where we got a vote on the floor. We got a long debate, and there were attempts to poison the bill with substitutes and even now, there are attachments to the bill which place the HMO Patients' Bill of Rights bill in some jeopardy, but at least it has been accomplished, finally.

But what took so long when so many Americans have made it quite clear that they wanted something done about reining in the HMOs. They wanted this Patients' Bill of Rights very badly. Do we always have to reach the point where 80 percent of the people are for something before we can get some action by the Republican majority here in the House? Why must it take 80 percent before they realize that there are political dangers in not doing anything, so finally they yielded and we were able to get a Patients' Bill of Rights, flawed as it may be, passed out of the House and it is now going into the conference process with the other body, and the other body has a bill which is quite different and weaker, and we must watch closely to see that the Patients' Bill of Rights, the heart of the matter, is not sabotaged and rendered impotent.

It is very important that with all of the kinds of experiences that we now have, all of the anecdotes that can be told on either side, both Republicans and Democrats, if one is a Congressperson, one is constantly being assailed with stories of the HMOs and our failure to do anything to combat the abuses that HMOs are guilty of.

So it is something that had to be done. The focus groups told us, the polls told us; but it took us a long time to get there. I am happy to see that in certain places there is movement ahead of the Congress and we will have to run to catch up, but I think that there is such a strong impetus to have justice in the area of health care that we are going to get it by and by. It just takes too long. The democratic process should not take so long.

I understand that California, in California today or yesterday, the governor signed a bill where California now has a standard, a fixed standard for nurse and patient ratios. In nursing homes and hospitals, we have to have a certain number of nurses in ratio to the patients that is reasonable so that the patients will get a reasonable amount of care. Governor Gray Davis, Democratic governor of California signed that bill. I want to congratulate the people of California, congratulate the legislators out there for moving forward on correcting a major abuse that HMOs have caused as a pressure to bring down the cost of health care, the amount of money that they pay the hospitals for health care. They have forced hospitals into situations where they have cut back on personnel, often personnel that is vital to the health and safety of the patients.

□ 2130

We should not tolerate that. There are elements in the Norwood-Dingell bill which deal with standards, deal with protection, access to services, emergency care; a number of very direct approaches which rein in abuses that are known to have been practiced by the health maintenance organizations.

Most important in the Norwood-Dingell bill is the provision for the suing of HMOs. We can take an HMO to court and sue, which nobody is recommending a large number of court suits. But if the power to sue is there, then it establishes a whole different environment that patients operate in, and it is very important to keep that provision in there.

So we can applaud that finally, after begging, after pleading, after pushing, after the public opinion polls kept rising, we were able to get some action on the floor. We have a bill that is going through a process now which has to be watched closely, but I hope it is progressing.

The fact that the House and Senate now have to go into conference and come out with a bill that both Houses can live with and the President will sign is a good sign. We are much further along than we were, I assure the Members, before we passed that bill last Thursday.

Prescription drug benefits are not dealt with in this bill. This is to deal with reining in HMOs. There are some items in there related to prescriptions and how HMOs must handle prescriptions. There are some efforts to cut abuses by health maintenance organizations in the case of prescriptions, but we have not addressed the issue of providing prescription drug benefits for people who are on Medicare.

There is a need to be able to let every American share the benefits of modern science. There is a need to be able to make certain that no person goes sick or is in pain unnecessarily. If we have the drugs, if we have the medication which can ease pain, can improve health, then the fact that a person has no money should not be a barrier to the use of those modern miracle drugs.

I think that there are some situations where various ailments or diseases are quite rare and unusual, and the production of the drugs and medications necessary to treat them is very costly. They deserve special treatment. But there are a large number of drugs which are designed to deal with commonplace ailments.

Diabetes is an ailment which afflicts millions of Americans. There are medications for diabetes which everybody should be able to have access to. Some of them are a bit expensive, and expensive is a relative term. If a widow is on a small pension and social security and has to pay her rent and food, et cetera, what is expensive to that widow might seem rather inexpensive to some others of us who are healthy and still working and have good salaries.

But why should the person who needs it most and the people who are most frail, who are the eldest people, the people who have declining incomes, in many cases, or no incomes, do without? In too many instances, I have had people tell me, I could not keep taking my medication. I could not maintain the drugs that I needed because I just did not have the money. It was a matter of either I eat or I take my medications, and I had to stay alive.

Some of those same people, we do not find them around after a few months because the drugs they take are vital to their health, or they become much sicker as a result of not being able to take drugs that are beneficial to the prevention or the retardation of certain kinds of advancing ailments, so they get very sick, they go the hospitals and they are charity cases. They must be taken care of in a much more expensive setting than would be the case if they were allowed to have prescription drugs.

I am on several prescription drug bills. I am happy to say that we have colleagues who have proposed remedies, and the President has certainly proposed an initiative that will begin to deal with the problem of the denial of prescription drugs to persons who are in need of these drugs.

I am on a bill that the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK) has to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to submit to Congress a plan to include as a benefit under the Medicare program coverage of outpatient prescription drugs, and to provide funding for that benefit.

I am on another bill that the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) has, which is a bill to amend title 18 of the Social Security Act to provide for the coverage of outpatient prescription drugs under Part B of the Medicare program.

The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN) has a bill. I am certainly on a bill with our colleague, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT). In his bill, of course, he covers all prescription drugs, because that is a single-payer bill, H.R. 1200.

I just want to take this opportunity to say that H.R. 1200, the single-payer bill sponsored by the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT), is still very much alive as a piece of legislation. We continue to reintroduce it. I am on that bill.

I am on a bill with the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY), with the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), a bill to require persons who undertake federally-funded research in developmental drugs to enter into reasonable pricing agreements with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and for other purposes.

Some might have seen some of these exposes that have appeared on television in the last few months of what the drug situation is with respect to the United States as a principal creator and manufacturer of modern

drugs. We have a situation where we are charging our citizens far more for those drugs that are created in this country than citizens of other countries are being charged.

We do not have to go all the way to Europe, just go next door to Canada or next door to Mexico, and we will see tremendous price differences between the drugs, important prescription drugs, that are being sold in Canada and in Mexico versus the price we pay here.

Many of these same drugs have been developed as a result of basic biology and chemistry, research that has been done in American universities financed by the taxpayers of the country, and have been done in our institutes of health. There are studies and all kinds of things we do to enhance the production of important, modern drugs. But we are, as citizens, forced to pay enormous prices, far more than people in other countries.

This is unacceptable. This is a reason to get angry. We cannot dawdle here in the Congress and let this continue to go on. We need to come to grips with the fact that our people, our citizens who in many cases have financed, partially financed, the development of important, modern drugs, are being charged enormously excessive rates for the use of those drugs. That is more unfinished business.

The public says they want something done about this. The polls say we need to do something about it. The people have spoken, but nobody is listening. The Republican majority is not listening to the American people.

Some folks in New York State, for example, have made a joke out of the fact that the First Lady, Hillary Clinton, is considering running, exploring a possible run for the Senate. She has announced for several months now that she is on a listening tour. She is not running, she is on a listening tour. They made fun of that and thought it was very funny, that it is a new twist, and people like to play with it. But I think it is a very good idea, to have every American elected official start out by listening.

It is a very important part of our activity. We pay a lot to get to the point where people are talking to us through our polling, through our focus groups. It is a vital part of the operation. No political campaign goes forward without polls and without attempting to measure the opinion of the public.

So we know that they want prescription drug benefits. We know they want a bill of rights for health maintenance organization patients. We know this very well, so why is the Republican majority refusing to listen to the American people?

We have some areas where the public has no opinion or no particular concern where there is a great deal of activity here in Washington to spend their money, to spend the taxpayers' money. The other side likes to talk about taxpayers' money being wasted on food

stamps and WIC programs and Medicare and programs that benefit people, but they are very much involved in the effort to revive the F-22.

The F-22 is an airplane that may be a miracle airplane. It may be able to do all the things, one day, when they get through with the research and testing. The F-22 may be a miracle airplane able to do wonders, but it costs billions of dollars to manufacture F-22s. They are trying to work out a situation where they can get it through the testing stage and we will build \$50 to \$60 billion worth of F-22s.

Why do we need \$50 to \$60 billion worth of F-22 fighter planes when we have very good planes that are far superior to any planes manufactured anywhere in the world? Why do we need another super super fighter plane? But there is a great deal of discussion underway about what can be done to save the F-22, how can we develop a rationale to spend billions of dollars to develop this plane that is manufactured mostly in Marietta, Georgia, the home district of our former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr. Gingrich? What can we do to revive the F-22?

The public is not asking for the F-22. In no poll, no focus groups will we hear people crying for more F-22s. I marvel at the way the majority, the Republican majority, gets stuck and stays in one rut.

I was looking through my records and found that on March 14 of 1995, that is 4 years ago, more than 4 years ago, I commented on the F-22 and the folly of pursuing money for the F-22 at a time when the Republican majority was proposing to save money by cutting back on school lunches. I think about a month later in April I talked about, the Nation needs your lunch, where the Republican majority was saying to schoolkids, we have a budget crunch. We need your lunch. We have to cut back on school lunches in order to make certain that we balance the budget.

That same Republican majority was at that time very much pushing the F-22. I am going to go back and read from March 14, 1995, what I said:

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make one more plea for justice. I want to again beg the leadership of this Congress to abandon its reckless demolition of the programs that have helped to make America great in the eyes of the whole civilized world. The way we as a Nation have treated the least among us is the vital ingredient of our greatness.

This is a plea for honest decision-making. Yes, there is waste in government and it must be removed, but school lunches and summer youth employment programs are not wasteful. These are the government programs that work. These are the programs that are still very much needed. The CIA is not needed at the level of \$28 billion a year, which they admitted was at least that much in 1995. The farm price supports for rich farmers are no longer needed at the level of \$16 billion a year. We do not need another Sea Wolf submarine, and we certainly do not need to spend billions of dollars for F-22 fighter planes.

The F-22 enterprise in Marietta, Georgia, represents a long-term, overwhelming pork barrel. For this same amount of money, we could double the number of jobs in the civilian sector, creating infrastructure and services that are needed. The F-22 is Republican pork. In the Federal budget, this is a huge hog that deserves to be slaughtered.

My point is that the F-22 in 1995 was on no list of public opinion at a high level demanding that we build F-22s. In 1999, it is even less desirable than it was in 1995. Yet we are going ahead, not listening. We are not listening to the public when they say they want a Patients' Bill of Rights, we are not listening to the public when they say, we want prescription drug benefits. We are not listening to the public when they say, we want school construction, an increase in the minimum wage. They are not listening, but they are trying hard to put together a program to maintain the F-22 in 1999.

In 1995, I did a little poem for them that went as follows:

The F-22 for pork, not for me and you.
The F-22, toys for skies blue,
Empty of any enemy crew.
The F-22, jobs for just a few.
The F-22, rich Georgia stew,
Pork, pork, pork, not for me and you.
Off the orphans, starve the kids,
Save the contracts, roll out the bids.
Bully the poor, be a high-tech dog,
Eat the best meat high on the hog,
For the peach, who gives a hoot?
The F-22 pork is now the Georgia State fruit.
Pork, pork, pork where they grow, the F-22,
that is the speaker's hometown, too.
The F-22, pork, pork, pork not for me and
you.

□ 2145

The F-22, mostly manufactured in Marietta, Georgia, the home of former Speaker Newt Gingrich, and there are still people who are working day and night to put together a plan to keep that F-22 flowing at the cost of billions of dollars.

Nowhere is the public asking for more F-22s. We are spending a great deal and amount of time to do the things that nobody wants done, except a small special interest few, but we are ignoring some other big issues. While we dawdle here in this 106th Congress and do not pay attention to anything of great importance, the era of prosperity and relative peace in the world, which has given us time to focus on important vital matters, is being whittled away.

We should be dealing with the fact that in this era of peace, we should invest more funds in ways to keep peace going, not in F-22s and other war machines that are really outdated.

Where is the next contact likely to come from? Probably between India and Pakistan. Every day some new development takes place way over there between two very highly populated countries that have been at each other for quite awhile, mainly over the issue of Kashmir. The Pakistani government was overthrown today. There was a coup. The elected government, elected by a majority of the people, was over-

thrown by the Army. Pakistan has had a long history of military rule; and whenever the military rules, they only go backward. They have a lot of economic problems at this point, and they are likely to get worse. Why is the Pakistani Army in charge now? Because the elected prime minister, a person chosen by the people, decided to dismiss the chief of staff of the Army, the chief of the Armed Forces. The chief of the Armed Forces is the person rumored to have caused a major upheaval a few months ago when he marched without the knowledge of his government, without the knowledge of the prime minister, of the approval of the elected officials that went into Kashmir beyond the line of demarcation and caused a crisis with India. That blunder is the kind of blunder that could lead to a situation where we would inevitably be drawn in, not that we could do much to solve the problem. In that place, it is not so easy to have a bombing campaign which would bring whoever is right and wrong, and it is not clear who is right and who is wrong, to the table.

In that situation, there may be two recent nuclear powers, I will not say amateur nuclear powers but they certainly are recent. There is a recent acquisition, recent testing of nuclear bombs. If they start throwing bombs at each other then the atmosphere is polluted, the winds are blowing, who anywhere in the world is going to be safe from the kind of radiation fallout? Who anywhere in the world will be safe from the kinds of things that would permanently be done to the environment as a result of some kind of even a small-scale nuclear war between Pakistan and India?

So we ought to be studying ways to deal with making peace in the world. And Pakistan, India, and Kashmir ought to be one of those places that we are focusing attention on.

We have focused very little of our energy and attention on that region. If the same kind of energy and attention that we focus on the Middle East was focused on that area, we might have gotten close to a solution by now. Not that we have done too much in the Middle East. We just need to do as much to deal with the world's second most populous nation, India, and a very densely populated nation of Pakistan.

There is a territory called Kashmir, and it lies between India and Pakistan. And years ago when I was still in school, India promised that it would allow self-determination for the people of Kashmir. That has been on the agenda for all of these years and still no plebiscite, no vote has been allowed under the supervision of the United Nations or some kind of outside objective observers, which would allow the people of Kashmir to make a determination as to what they want to do, whether they want to become part of India or part of Pakistan, or become independent.

India says, no. The focus of the world is on the gun-happy army of Pakistan. Yes, that is a problem. Pakistan must find a way to control its own military. On the other hand, the situation is exacerbated by the fact that India over these years has refused to allow a plebiscite where the people can vote their own destiny.

We applauded, we were very happy when finally East Timor was allowed to vote and overwhelmingly the people of East Timor voted to be independent. As a result of that, of course, they paid a heavy price because in a very few days the Armed Forces, disguised as guerrillas and local militia, exacted a heavy toll in terms of lives and property; but it went forward. Troops from Australia are there now, and people who like to put down military interventions and say they are never good, I think the people of East Timor, a very small nation of less than 500,000 people, welcomed the entry of the Australian and other troops under the United Nations command to help bring some justice there.

Well, we hope we never have to send troops to Kashmir, and I doubt if it will be so easy to do that. Why are we not working on some peaceful solutions to that problem right now? Why are we not working on peaceful solutions to the problems in a large number of places in the world?

Why do we not spend some money on our peace academy? We have a peace academy. Most people have never heard of it. There is an organization with a very tiny budget that does things in the name of promoting peace. Our peace academy really ought to be as large as our military academies, if we are serious. We have West Point. We have the Naval Academy. We have the Air Force Academy. We have the Coast Guard Academy. We have the War College. We have numerous places where we are still training some of our best minds for war, for old fashioned war, violent war, but we have no places where the Federal Government is investing significant amounts of money to train people for peace.

So I mention this because the folks who are here pressuring to find billions of dollars for the F-22 are off course. They are certainly not listening to the American people. I think if it went to the American people, common sense would set a different agenda. They would say, what is being done to promote peace? How are we investing to promote peace? And that would go forward.

We are not listening, though. We are not listening to those who want to see justice in the world with the least costly means, and that is through a process of peaceful negotiations. In Kosovo, there are some people who have said that it would not have gotten as bad as it was if we had given the peace process, the nonviolent approach, more resources; and they are probably right, but that is a matter of hindsight now. There are a lot of situations in the

world where as a matter of foresight we ought to be investing more heavily in peace, but we are not listening.

The Republican majority is not listening to the American people. They are not listening. On the HMO bill of rights, they were not listening. They are not listening on prescription drug benefits. They are not listening on the minimum wage bill.

We have a minimum wage bill now which Members of the House of Representatives have signed a discharge petition for because under normal circumstances we could not get the bill to the floor. Now that large numbers of members have signed and we also know that a considerable number of members of the majority, of the Republican Party, are willing to vote for a minimum wage bill, finally we hear rumors that there is going to be some movement on a bill which would merely raise, merely raise wages from \$5.15 an hour to \$6.15 an hour in a two-year period, fifty cents a year over a 2-year period.

Considering the fact that we have unprecedented prosperity in this Nation, our CEOs, corporate heads, are making salaries higher than ever before, some of their salaries dwarf the budgets of small countries, we are in a situation where the majority, the Republican majority, will not listen to the American people who say it is only fair, only fair that we increase the minimum wage so that the people on the very bottom are able to begin to make their work count for more.

People who are making minimum wage, a family of four who lives in poverty, they are still below the poverty line at this point if they are making a minimum wage. Let us raise it over a two-year period by one dollar. Republicans have a counterproposal. The leadership of the majority of the Republican Party has not committed themselves, but there are proposals to raise it 25 cents per year over 4 years.

The unprecedented prosperity that we enjoy now is not enough to make them sympathetic toward a 50 cent increase per year, but it appears that finally they are going to listen to the point of yielding to a minimum wage bill being placed on the floor, if they can exact a high price for business. There may be some compromise coming. I think it is important. It is important to people in my district. New York is one of the States with large numbers of people who are still making only the minimum wage, and we need to help those people who are working get better rewards for their work.

The welfare reform bill is coming to a point now where the limits are going to be kicking in, and more people are going to be thrown off welfare, certainly some mothers of young children, and they need to have jobs out there that at least pay \$6.15 an hour instead of \$5.15 an hour. The Republicans are not listening, but I think we have reached the 80 percent point, at least 80 percent of the American people are

saying we think that it is only fair that there be an increase in the minimum wage.

What the Republicans are proposing in the area of programs that help the people on the bottom the most are across the board cuts at this point. We have the appropriations process, which is creeping forward.

I said this, this first year of the 106th Congress, is a tragic comedy. It is tragic that certain vital things are not getting done. It is a comedy to see the kinds of proposals that keep popping up that they expect us to take seriously. Even the Republican candidate for President has stated that he does not want to be identified with certain proposals that have been made recently. One proposal to cut off the lump sum payment of the wage extension that people get as a result of having worked and not making enough money, they now want to cut that into 12 parts and pay it out on a monthly basis instead of the earned income tax credit being paid in a lump sum at one time. I think the reaction of the Republican candidate for President was he does not want to be any part of an action which attempts to balance the budget on the backs of the poor. I applaud his candor, and I applaud his truthfulness, but that only led to another absurd and very harmful proposal by the Republican majority.

Now they are proposing across the board cuts. Let us cut everything drastically. The Health and Human Services bill, which contains most of the programs that benefit the poorest people in America, that was being targeted as the last bill to come out of appropriations, where the highest amounts of cuts will be made. Now they are getting a little more generous and saying we are not going to just make them bear the brunt of the burden. We will have it across the board and all the appropriations bill will be cut and let everybody suffer. At a point in history where we have the greatest prosperity this Nation has ever known, we want to go to the American people and say, we are going to cut title I; we are going to cut Head Start. We are going to cut food stamps; we are going to cut aid to college students. The Pell grants and student work programs, we are going to cut. We are going to cut and say with a straight face that we are being responsible. This is responsible because we need the money in order to put it into a pot for a tax cut, a tax cut for people who are working and earning sizable amounts of money.

Most of the tax cuts, the greatest benefit of the tax cuts, would go to the richest people in America. That is responsible. That is listening to the American people.

The fact that the polls show that most people have used their common sense and said, look, this tax cut does not make sense, the people who need it most are not getting it, the people who need it least are getting the most, why do we need this kind of tax cut? I am in

favor of a tax cut. I am in favor of a tax cut, but we ought to start at the bottom and cut the payroll taxes on the poorest people in America.

The biggest increases in taxes over the last decade has been in the payroll taxes, Social Security, and the taxes of Medicare, the taxes that have been imposed on everybody, and poor people have paid the biggest increases. So let us start there and cut the payroll tax first, and then come up and cut the people at the lowest income levels first and keep going so we can give the middle class, which probably suffer the most, because they have enough money to really place them in jeopardy in terms of unfair taxation but not enough to be able to benefit from all the loopholes and the corporate giveaways so they suffer the most. The middle class needs some relief, but that is not the way the Republican majority proposes to handle the tax cut.

After they have across the board cuts, their tax cut will not give the money to the majority of the people in America in any kind of significant way. So they are not listening. They are not listening.

Eighty percent of the people say this tax cut proposal is no good, but they are not listening. When it comes to education and school construction, that is a high priority. The American people keep demanding it. I have been on the floor time and time again saying that the people want more Federal assistance for education. They want more government involvement at every level. Whether we are talking about the State government or the city government or the Federal Government, they want more government.

My people in my district need help. They are tired of situations where the children have to eat lunch at 10:00 in the morning because the school is so overcrowded, and most of the schools in my district there are twice as many students as the school was built for so it is overcrowded from the time they come in in the morning to the time they leave, and the lunchroom cycle has to be arranged so that the lunchroom is not overloaded at any one time. That means that some schools have to have three and four lunch periods. If they have to have three and four lunch periods in order to get the kids in there safely and out, then they have to start having lunch in some cases at 10:00 in the morning. That is child abuse. To make a child eat lunch at 10:00 in the morning is child abuse, but it is going on in large numbers of schools because they see no way out.

In the same schools, there are some students being taught in the hallways, some being taught in closets. There are situations where the President's proposed bill to give money for more teachers at the lower grades cannot help us because of the fact that if they get more teachers, they do not have a way to reduce the classroom size because there are no classes. In a first grade class, one teacher cannot be put

in one corner of the room and another teacher in the other corner of the room and expect to have any productive teaching taking place. It will not happen. So as we get more teachers in order to reduce the size of the classes, they need more classrooms.

It goes on and on and the public says, look, we are tired of it. We want more done about education, and we want specifically to have something done about school construction, school infrastructure, school repair, school wiring, things related to the physical infrastructure.

I have been saying this for some time so I guess my credibility in this House would not be that great because one might say I am prejudiced, I am locked into a position. Let us look at the polls that all of us politicians respect.

□ 2200

The ABC News, Washington Post poll released on September 5, 1999 says the following: Support for education over tax cuts. We find that improving education and the schools will be very important to 79 percent of Americans when choosing the President next year more than any other issue, more than any other issue. Only 44 percent say cutting taxes is very important, making it 14th out of 15 issues.

Do my colleagues want to know what the 15 issues are? The top five issues, according to the ABC News, Washington Post poll released on September 5, 1999 is, one, improving education, 79 percent rank education as the number one issue; handling the economy, 74 percent; managing the budget, 74 percent; handling crime, 71 percent; protecting Social Security, 68 percent.

Now, the fact that any one of these made the top five is such that I would not quibble about which is most important, first place or third place or fifth place. Those are top five. Education is always in the top five for the last 5 years. Sometimes it trades places with Social Security and sometimes with crime. Education has always been there. In this poll, 79 percent say improving education is the top issue.

What are the lower five of these 15, they are still important issues: Helping the middle class, 61 percent. Handling gun control, 56 percent. Still over the majority feel that handling gun control is important. Handling foreign affairs, 54 percent. Still over a majority, over the 50 percent. Cutting taxes, below the 50 percent. Only 44 percent are interested in cutting taxes.

Campaign finance reform, 30 percent. I am sorry to see that campaign finance reform is down there so low, but to make the top 15 is important considering this Nation has more than 250 million people, and all the opinions of different problems and issues to make the top 15 is important. Campaign finance reform is one of the those issues where I think we elected officials, Members of Congress, and others have to move public opinion. We have to explain to the people. We have to use our

own set of principles and our own values to help guide public opinion into realization of how dangerous it is not to have campaign finance reform and to have money play such a great role in our democracy.

Let me just go a little further on this education issue. When we take the education issue and break it down into parts, the polls show that 80 percent of Americans support at least three education priorities. What are those three priorities? Fixing rundown schools. Ninety-two percent favor fixing rundown schools, 92 percent. Only 7 percent opposed, and 1 percent says they do not know. Let me just say that again. Fixing rundown schools, 92 percent favor, and only 7 percent oppose.

Are we listening? Is the Republican majority listening? Is the Democrat minority listening? Are our Democratic leaders listening? Is the White House listening?

We do not have in this Congress adequate proposals to address the fact that 92 percent of our people say fixing rundown schools is a top priority. Eighty-six percent say that reducing class sizes is a top priority; 86 percent favor, 13 percent oppose, 1 percent says they do not know. But reducing class sizes, 86 percent favor and 13 percent oppose.

Placing more computers in the classroom 81 percent favor, 16 percent oppose, 2 percent do not know. A lot of people will say, well, that is a luxury, computers in the classroom, hookup with the Internet, all this stuff. We need pencils and papers. We need chalk. We have got to stay with the basics.

Well, I think the common sense of the American people have run off and left Members of Congress who think that computers, educational technology, hookups with the Internet, all that is not vital to the education of children in 1999 who are going to be in a cyber-civilization tomorrow. They are going to have to take jobs in a world where, if one cannot use computers and use them effectively, there is very little hope for one ever having the opportunity to make a decent living.

So placing more computers in the classroom is of vital importance. The common sense of the American people has sensed this. Instincts have told them that this is important.

We are privy to all kinds of studies. We know, as Members of Congress, that we are considering another bill to bring in people from outside the country who would fill the jobs and information technology because we have so many vacancies. There is so much pressure from industry here in this country to get more people from the outside to take these jobs. We know that. Most people out there do not know that.

But their instincts tell them, their observations at a very low level, without all the benefits of the staff and the studies that we have, say that computers in the classroom are important.

In other words, 80 percent of Americans support at least three education priorities: fixing rundown schools, reducing class sizes, placing more computers in the classroom.

I think I have just begun to tell my colleagues that the three are inseparable. If we do not fix rundown schools, if we do not create more space, if we do not allow funding for schools to be able to wire for the Internet, and, in many cases, the wiring in the walls will not take, and they have to be rewired, in many cases they have asbestos problems, and that has to be taken care of as a construction issue. So fixing rundown schools is vital in order to be able to put more computers in the classroom.

Fixing rundown schools, of course, is obviously vital if we are going to reduce class sizes. In the places where the children have the greatest amount of problems with reading, and where we want to reduce class size in order to be able to give the early teachers the elementary grades, a chance to be able to help kids more, to learn to read, to establish the basic fundamentals that allow them to be successful in school, in those places, they have the worst physical plants, the worst infrastructures. They do not have any classes. They need more classes before they can have reductions in class sizes.

We are not talking in New York City this fall about the tremendous shortage of classrooms and the overcrowding. We talked about it last year and the year before. Now the silence is such that one thinks the problem has been solved and resolved. It has not.

There is more overcrowding now because there is a great increase in the number of students that have gone into the schools. There is more overcrowding now because children are being held back on the policy of no social promotion.

Some children, of course, last year had to go to summer school and had to attend summer school in buildings that were so hot that it was torture for young kids to be in those buildings during the summer because they have no air conditioning, and they have very poor ventilation. Then they found out some of those same kids should not have had to be there because they had passed the necessary tests, and they did not need to go to summer school in order to qualify for advancement to the next grade. There had been an error, an error in the calculation of the test, to show us how blunders place children at risk and make them suffer.

The private sector I think was involved in that testing blunder as well as the board of education. But let us put that aside for a moment and consider the fact that there is silence in New York City, a city that had \$2 billion in surplus last year and did not spend a penny to help renovate, repair, help building those schools. Not a penny of that surplus went into the schools.

There was silence at the State level. The State had a \$2 billion surplus, and

the Governor vetoed a bill which called for \$500 million to help repair schools.

The burden should not only be on the shoulder of the Federal Government. We need movement on the Federal Government because, in the process of having the Federal Government move, we hope to stimulate and drag along other levels of government in this process of getting schools built.

Why do I think it is so important? Because, as I said many times before, in any religion, the state of the temple, the church, or the synagogue, the way the physical building looks is the beginning of the assessment of the way people feel about that religion. If it is a dilapidated, rundown, neglected building, then nobody is going to take the parishioners seriously about their religion and the way they feel about it, because that symbolism, that highly visible statement of how one feels is there.

When one does not take care of school buildings, one sends a message to parents in my community and certainly in inner city communities across the country that we have abandoned the schools. That is almost true. The major leaders of America, the people who are in the power structure, have abandoned public schools in their heads already. Many have overtly done it. Others do not realize yet, but the way they behave, their hesitation, their neglect, their sins of omission means that they have abandoned public schools already. Because if one does not move to build and rebuild the physical infrastructure, then all hope is lost.

□ 2215

Parents have no hope when they hear the rhetoric of the Department of Education, of the White House, or the Congress or any Member of the Congress. They hear the rhetoric, but they see the schools collapsing. They see the schools have leaky roofs, crumbling walls. They see the schools have coal burning furnaces. There are still more than 200 schools in New York City that are burning coal and jeopardizing the healthy kids immediately and causing respiratory illnesses among teachers.

When though see these things happening, they are correct in not believing that elected officials are serious about maintaining the public school system. Is it any wonder, then, that so many inner city parents, white and black, and certainly a large number of black parents, are opting to support vouchers, more than 50 percent in certain surveys.

In a survey that was taken last year, 57 percent of black parents in inner city communities said that they would certainly support vouchers in order to get their kids a decent education. They did not have any faith left in the public school system. That is most unfortunate, but that is a truth I have to stand here and admit.

They have given up hope because they realize that their child only has

one life and they only go through the process of being educated one time and they cannot afford to wait any longer. They are desperate. But in their desperation, they are turning to a system which will also disappoint them, because all we have done is create a hope in a false institution that does not exist. The private sector cannot handle the millions of youngsters in public schools who need help.

There is a large scholarship program that was developed by some millionaires in New York and they put up large amounts of money and a thousand youngsters could be provided with a scholarship which allowed them to go to a private school of their choice. The money that they got as a scholarship would pay half of it.

Thousands and thousands are on the waiting list because there are no schools to accommodate all of those young people. There are no private schools that can accommodate it. It would take 20 or 30 years to build a private school system that could accommodate the 53 million children who now go to public schools in America.

It is not an answer to the problem. And the parents who have given up hope are only going to have their hopes dashed greatly as a result of this illusion that is being created by people who wanted to destroy public schools to make a point and to prove that the private sector can do it better.

If they lose a generation, they are so cold hearted that they do not particularly care what happens to that generation. But that is about what we are facing. A generation will be lost while we try to get in place a private school system to replace a public school system which now takes care of 53 million students.

It is most unfortunate. I can only close with the same message that I have brought here before many times. Both parties are negligent in focusing on the principal problem with the education improvement effort. Kids must be provided with an opportunity to learn. As we try to raise standards, as we standardize curriculums, we need to focus on the students themselves and provide them with the maximum opportunity to learn.

At the heart of the opportunity to learn is a physical facility. We need a physical facility which can support the opportunity to learn. They need a decent library. They need decent laboratories. They need a clean, safe environment conducive to learning. We cannot go forward unless we address the issue of school construction, school repair, school modernization.

The bills that we are supporting in the Democratic Caucus is a bill that I have my name on as a cosponsor is totally inadequate. It is a bill to sell bonds and the Federal Government will pay the interest. It is a commitment of the Federal Government over a 5-year period to \$3.7 billion for the school construction situation under a situation where each locality or State will have

to vote to borrow money and we will pay the interest on the principal. That is totally inadequate.

As would he go into a cyber-civilization, I strongly advise, urge, and plead that all elected officials understand that what would he need is an omnibus cyber-civilization education program to guarantee that the brain power and the leadership needed for our present and our expanding future digitalized economy and high-tech world will be there.

At the heart of such a comprehensive initiative, we must set the all-important revitalization of the physical infrastructure of America's schools. These necessary brick and mortar creations will long endure as symbols of this particular set of leadership's commitment to education. It will also serve as practical vehicles for the delivery of a kind of high-tech education required in the 21st century.

All of the most brilliant and visionary education achievements of the Clinton administration may be merged and focused through these vital and physical edifices. We have had a net day movement for the volunteer wiring of schools. We had the technology literacy legislation, the community technology centers, the distance learning projects, and the widely celebrated and appreciated E-rate for telecommunications.

The lifting of standards, the improvement of school curriculums, and the support for smaller class sizes are also initiatives that require the additional classrooms and expanded libraries and laboratories that school modernization will bring.

We are not listening to the majority of Americans. The Republican majority is not listening, and too many other people in other places also are not listening. We need to listen on all of these vital issues, whether it is the HMO bill of rights, prescription drug benefits, minimum wage, the need to fund HHS right across the board with increases instead of decreases, or school construction.

All of these are areas where leadership is needed, where the demands right now in a time of great prosperity and peace are that we lay the foundation for a cyber-civilization, and we do that with an education program that is across the board seeking to improve education but starting with the all-important area of construction of new schools.

IMPACT OF ILLEGAL NARCOTICS IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TANCREDO). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to come to the floor again tonight to talk about the issue of illegal narcotics and its impact upon the United States of America.

As I begin my remarks tonight, I want to take a moment and pay special tribute to a gentleman who I have had the honor and privilege of knowing from my district in Central Florida. That individual is E. William Crotty, and he is affectionately known to all of us who are friends of Bill Crotty as Bill Crotty.

He had the distinction of being appointed the ambassador to seven Caribbean nations by President Clinton last November and has been in that position until his death just a few days ago.

To his family, we want to extend our deepest condolences, extend our sympathy to his wife Valerie and his children and his relatives.

I have known Bill Crotty for many years. I happen to be a Republican. I am actually in a family dominated by some pretty prominent Democrats. Bill Crotty was a Democrat's Democrat. But although he and I sometimes differed on political parties, we agreed more often on the need to serve our community, to serve our State, and to serve our Nation.

The untimely death of Bill Crotty this week has left our community with a great void. It has left the Democrat party with a tremendous loss. He was one of the largest sources of support, financial assistance, and dedication for the Democrat party of any individual I know in the United States.

He took on every challenge with a great energy particularly in support of his party and his candidates and also, as I said, in the best interest of his community, State, and Nation.

He was appointed United States ambassador to the Caribbean nations of Barbados, Antigua, Barbuda, Dominica, St. Lucia, Grenada, Saint Kitts, Nevis, and St. Vincent, and the Grenadines.

Since he assumed that post, I had the honor and privilege of talking with Bill Crotty and working with him. We both had a common interest in that region; and that was to bring stability, to bring economic development and trade to that area of the Caribbean.

One of our mutual concerns was the problem of illegal narcotics. Just some weeks ago, Bill had written me and sent me these letters and clips and he said, "Dear John, enclosed please find an article that appeared in the July 23rd edition of the Grenada Today. The article discusses deportees, but the thrust is drug trafficking."

He goes on to discuss the possibility of our visiting with a delegation and meeting with leaders in the Caribbean to help them in their efforts to combat illegal narcotics. He closed by saying, "It will be a real honor for my wife and I to host you and your delegation. I will send you additional materials I think may interest you concerning drug trafficking and Caribbean matters."

Again, just recently discussing with Bill Crotty, our ambassador, this particular situation we face in the Caribbean on illegal narcotics, I have an ar-

ticle that was published just before his death that spoke of Bill Crotty's determination to make a difference in the post in which he was appointed to serve. The article from the Daytona Beach News Journal in Central Florida said, for example, "He delivered a state-of-the-art Fairchild C-26 aircraft from the United States Government to Barbados. Prime Minister Owen Arthur was the recipient and received this as part of an \$11 million support package to the regional security system in the Caribbean to help fight drug trafficking."

We have lost with the death of Bill Crotty, again, an individual who was dedicated to his community, to his party, and also an ally with me in the war against illegal narcotics. His untimely death again leaves us all at a loss. But we do want to extend our very deepest sympathy to his family who now have grief as Bill has left us. Again, Mr. Speaker, we pay tribute tonight to E. William Crotty, United States Ambassador.

When I speak on the floor of the House every Tuesday night and get an opportunity, I like to talk about some of the items in the news and I led tonight with the obituary of a good friend and dedicated American. But it appears to me that almost every time anyone picks up a newspaper or turns on the television or hears some media report, that individual in the United States or in any of our communities hears more and more about the effects of illegal narcotics.

Leading the news this week was the death in Laramie, Wyoming, of a young, gay man who was beaten to death by several individuals. Some have referred to it as a hate crime.

No matter how it is referred to, it was a horrible incident. And I know the State of Wyoming and many people in the community of Laramie, Wyoming, are saddened by that occurrence in their community and that tragic death.

□ 2230

What captured my imagination and attention, again dealing with the question of illegal narcotics as chairman of the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and Drug Policy, is the headline that said "Shepard-Death Defendant to Claim Impairment." This is the headline in Tuesday, October 12 Washington Times. The first paragraph says, "Laramie, Wyoming. The attorney for a man charged with beating college student Matthew Shepard to death said yesterday his client's judgment was clouded by drugs and alcohol."

Again even as we face the most tragic events of our time that are publicized in the media, we look at some of the root problems beyond hate, beyond theft and robbery, beyond other charges that have been alleged, and we see drugs and alcohol and substance abuse as possibly the root cause of these crimes. Again, this entire area of illegal narcotics and substance abuse has taken its toll across our Nation.