

"Respectfully," and it is signed by 66 family members from central New Jersey.

Mr. Speaker, I include the letter for the RECORD:

August 26, 2000.

Hon. J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House,
U.S. Capitol, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: As concerned citizens of the State of New Jersey, we are writing to request your immediate assistance in having Congress consider gun safety legislation before it adjourns for the year.

As you know, in June of 1999, following the tragic murders at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, Congress considered a package of Juvenile Justice proposals. When this legislation was considered in the Senate, an amendment by Senator Frank Lautenberg was attached that would close the dangerous gun show loophole, ban the importation of high-capacity ammunition magazines and mandate the use of child safety locks on firearms.

These three proposals, which have also been introduced in the House of Representatives, are mainstream, common sense measures that polls show are supported by a large, bipartisan majority of the public. While we in New Jersey don't have gun shows, other states do. That undermines our gun safety laws because they allow criminals to buy dangerous firearms without background checks, waiting periods or identification at these shows. A law mandating child safety locks, if enacted, could save the lives of hundreds of young Americans.

Many of us visited Washington D.C. as part of the "Million Mom March" this Spring. In the many weeks since that watershed event, attended by thousands of Americans from all parts of the nation and all walks of life, no effort has been made to bring the Juvenile Justice legislation back before Congress. In fact, these measures have remained bottled up with delay tactics and parliamentary maneuvering. Now, as less than twenty days remain in the scheduled legislative session, the need for leadership and action on this issue is greater than ever.

Stemming the tide of gun violence is an issue of deep importance to us, and to our nation. Now is the time for our leaders in Washington to roll up their sleeves, not sit on their hands. We urge you in the strongest possible terms to use your influence as the highest-ranking member of the House of Representatives to immediately bring these legislative proposals back before Congress, so that they can be sent to the President for his signature.

Respectfully,

Signed by 66 New Jersey citizens.

Mr. Speaker, every school I visit, every PTA meeting that I attend, every classroom that I teach in, kids, moms and dads, in fact nearly everyone I talk with in New Jersey, tells me it is high time that Congress take action to keep guns out of the hands of kids and criminals.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come for Republicans, Democrats, and Independents to join together to pass these common sense gun safety measures.

RACIAL PROFILING AND POLICE BRUTALITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, there is an issue of great potency brewing in the African American community such that I feel compelled to bring it to the attention of this body.

Like other Americans, African Americans are animated by the same issues. Education is at the top of the list. And of course, there is a Patients' Bill of Rights and preserving Social Security and Medicare.

But what amazes me from the data and, anecdotally, when looking at black publications in my own district, is a surprising issue that has greater interest and intensity than others; and that issue is racial profiling and police brutality.

This is most interesting because the African American community has embraced police because there was such high crime, especially in the early 1990's. Crime is down 10 percent now from last year, 34 percent over the last few years; and yet there is this intense hostility based on what is happening particularly to black men but also to black women.

If one has raised a boy the way that I have so that he gets to go to college, graduates in 4 years, has a good job, it does not make a dime's worth of difference if he is driving down a road and there is a sense that who he ought to pull over are black people rather than others.

So that, if we look at Interstate 95, where 17 percent of the drivers are African-Americans, 56 percent of those searched are black; or let us look at California in a 1997 study that showed that only 2 percent of 3,400 drivers stopped yielded contraband; or a recent study of racial profiling on I-95 here in the East, about 17 percent of those who drive along I-95 are African Americans but they represented 60 percent of the drivers searched in 1999.

Something is wrong with those figures. And it has now penetrated deep in the African American community and it knows no class bounds. The richest and most middle-class African Americans know that there is no difference to a police officer who is looking for black people between a youngster that has done all he should do and somebody who may, in fact, be carrying drugs.

What amounts to a loss in the criminal justice system has occurred throughout the African American community where so many young African American men are caught up in the first place. We need to have that community where we had it when they began to embrace police in the 1980s, and we are losing them.

This body apparently had some recognition because under the present majority, H.R. 1443, which was a bill sponsored by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) was indeed passed in 1998, which allows the collection of certain kinds of information about traffic stops. This body passed it. It was sent to the Senate. The Senate Committee on the Judiciary never acted on it.

We need to pass this bill again. It is now called H.R. 118. We need to pass it.

Because about the worst thing that can happen in our society is that people believe that criminal justice does not have justice. And it is very hard for me to believe that there is justice in the system when the disparities are as huge as this.

□ 1700

Obviously, most African Americans play by the rules. So when you do not know whether playing by the rules will get you pulled over or not, particularly if you are a young black man, the stereotypic person to pull over, the rage of a loss of confidence that you are operating in a fair system becomes very great.

This is an issue for us all. This is an issue we can eliminate simply by first studying it and coming to understand what its causes are. H.R. 118 does not ask this body to take specific steps now. We need to know what is happening and why it is happening. If, in fact, black Americans see that we do not care enough even to find out why these disparities exist, I think we are sending a horrific message, especially now as people get ready to go to the polls. They want to see whether or not something can be done. I am not asking that something be done during this session. I do believe that during this session we have to start the ball rolling so that we can know what, if anything, we can do about these very telling statistics.

A TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IS THE BEST EDUCATION

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

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak briefly on two or three important topics or issues in education. First, we have done a more than adequate job in bringing down class sizes in most places around the country. What we really need to work on now is bringing down the size of schools.

At very large schools, some young people feel like they are little more than numbers. Most kids can handle this all right, but some feel that they have to resort to extreme, kooky, weird or, unfortunately at times, even dangerous behavior to get noticed.

At small schools, young people have a better chance to make a sports team or serve on the student council or become a cheerleader or stand out in some way. Young people today would be better off going to a school in an older building, but in a school where they did not feel so anonymous.

I read a couple of years ago that the largest high school in New York City had 3,500 students; and then they made the wise decision to break it up into five separate schools and their drug and discipline problems went way down.

The gentleman from Indiana (Mr. HILL) and I, on a bipartisan basis, introduced a bill to set up a special program within the Department of Education to give incentive grants to school systems that would establish programs to decrease the number of students at any one school. We got \$45 million for this in the last omnibus appropriations bill, but we need to pursue this much more aggressively. Small schools mean individual attention and individual opportunities. Gigantic schools, unfortunately, centralized schools unfortunately, breed weird behavior and even help lead to Columbine-type situations.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, this so-called teacher shortage is one of the most artificial, contrived, and easily solvable problems that we have in the country today. There would be no teacher shortage if we removed the straightjacket of education courses and let school boards use intelligence and common sense to hire teachers. A school board should be allowed to consider an education degree as a real plus but not be restricted or harmed or hindered by it. Right now, in most places, if a person with a Ph.D. in chemistry and 30 years' experience in the field wanted to teach, he could not do so because he had not taken a few education courses. This is ridiculous. Right now, a person with a master's degree in English and who had been a successful writer, say, for a magazine or for newspapers for years could not be an English teacher in a public school because of not taking a few education courses. This is crazy.

Someone who had been a political science professor at a small college for several years and then had several years' experience on Capitol Hill, for example, could not teach American government in a public high school without a required education course. This is stupid and it is why we have this artificial government-induced teacher shortage that we are seeing this publicity about.

We could wipe out this teacher shortage overnight if we would allow school systems to hire well-qualified people even if they had not taken any education courses. I repeat, an education degree should be considered a plus. It should be considered a good thing when considering someone for a teaching job. School superintendents and principals have enough common sense intelligence and experience to hire some well-qualified person to teach who has degrees and experience but simply lacks an education course or two.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, David Gelernter, a professor of computer science at Yale, said we are headed for an educational catastrophe or education disaster, he used both terms, by placing computers in classrooms for small or very young children. He said some seemed to believe if we give children what he described as a glitzy toy with bigger and bigger databases, we have done all we need in regard to education. He said we need to get back to

the basics, especially in elementary and middle school. He said we still need to teach reading and writing and arithmetic and history and science, and we need to teach these things before we give kids computers and then wonder why they cannot add or subtract or write a grammatically correct sentence or know even basic history about their own country. This was said by a man who is a professor of computer science.

Computers are not the end all of education. We need to get back to the basics before we end up in the educational catastrophe or disaster that Professor Gelernter predicted.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND MEDICARE

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

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, the public learned something about presidential candidate George Bush last week. Actually, the word "important" is an understatement. We learned something crucial. We learned his plans for Medicare.

Every senior citizen, every person with a family member covered by Medicare, every taxpayer in this country needs to understand this. George W. Bush believes Medicare as we know it should be replaced by private insurance plans. That is not conjecture. It is fact. It is what he tells us.

It is clear as day if one looks at his prescription drug plan. The first part of his proposal features a transitional program designed to give a special commission time to come up with a private sector alternative to the Medicare program. Mr. Bush goes so far as to avoid the obvious. That is adding prescription drugs to the list of health care services and supplies that Medicare covers. He actually advocates a transitional prescription drug program feature with mini-bureaucracies in each State to administer temporary prescription drug welfare programs. If one is opposed to big government, this part of his proposal is their worst nightmare: 50 State bureaucracies.

His welfare-type program approach, which would cover the lowest-income seniors only, is also sorely inadequate. Nearly half of all seniors who lack prescription drug coverage would be left out in the cold. The first part of his proposal may simply be ill conceived. The second part is simply irresponsible.

Under that section, the Federal Government would begin to subsidize part of the cost of private prescription drug coverage, but only after the Medicare program as a whole undergoes a transformation. That transformation, not surprisingly, features private insurance-type HMO health plans. Privatization of Medicare is not a transformation. It is an oxymoron. Private insurance plans cannot replace Medi-

care. Private insurance plan HMOs, their loyalty is to the bottom line. How many times do we have to intervene when a managed care or other insurer plan messes? Up how many times do we have to intervene on behalf of our constituents before the industry's loyalties become clear to us?

The loyalty results in decisions that are not in the best interest of enrollees. That loyalty is what creates the need for a Patients' Bill of Rights, which this House of Representatives and the other body should pass and send to the President. That loyalty, the bottom line, explains why health insurers market to the healthiest individuals and do everything in their power to avoid the sick. That loyalty explains how private, managed care plans, how private insurance company HMOs, contracting with Medicare, could enroll seniors one year, promising them all kinds of benefits, and unceremoniously drop them the next year; promise supplemental benefits they cannot deliver and then blame the government for problems that they created.

The traditional Medicare program is different. It is universal. It is reliable. It is accountable to the public. It has 1 to 2 percent administrative costs. Medicare's loyalty is to beneficiaries and to taxpayers. It is an undiluted commitment. Medicare offers choice in ways that actually make a difference in terms of health care quality and patient satisfaction. It does not tell beneficiaries which providers they can see and which providers they cannot see, like Medicare HMOs do, or provide financial incentives to discourage proper care, again as Medicare HMOs do, or interfere with the doctor/patient relationship, as Medicare HMOs do.

Medicare does not tell beneficiaries any of those things.

Having your choice of private health plans under the Bush plan, under private managed care, does not mean much if those plans all restrict access to providers and erect barriers to medically-necessary care. Medicare offers reliable coverage that does not come and go with the stock market, that does not discriminate against beneficiaries based on health status or any other criteria.

So George W. Bush has decided to join his Republican colleagues to promote the privatization of Medicare, to end Medicare as we know it, and to provide a new market for private insurance plans. And when it comes down to it and prescription drugs, whom do you trust? Do you trust Medicare, traditional Medicare, that served the public well for 35 years? Do you trust Medicare to provide these benefits to the public with prescription drugs, or do you trust private insurance HMOs who have pulled out of county after county, made promises they have not kept? It is a question of trusting traditional Medicare or, again, do you trust private insurance HMOs?