

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 straight-jacket 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 educational 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?

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

(Mr. BILBRAY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

THANKS TO THE MANY STAFFERS WHO HAVE ASSISTED IN THE FIFTH AND EIGHTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS OF FLORIDA

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

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I am here today because we are finishing this term of Congress, and while there may be other things for me, perhaps across in the other body, this is the last year that I will serve as a Member of the United States House of Representatives. I am very proud of the service that I have given, and I have enjoyed my service a great deal in this body.

I have enjoyed working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to accomplish many things over these years that I have served from 1981 to the present, but none of that would have been possible without a very strong group of men and women who served on my staff.

Now, we often talk about our committee staffs; but I am talking specifically about my personal staff; my staff both in my Orlando district office, and my staff here in my Washington office. There have been many, many people who have worked for me over those years; and in a moment I am going to enter into the RECORD some 99 of those staffers that I have at least documented, that I want to recognize because their hard work is what allowed me to provide this service first to the Fifth Congressional District of Florida and then to the Eighth Congressional District of Florida.

I want to single out some in particular, though, because even though I would like to be able to talk about all 99, I cannot do that. I do not have time to, and no one would want me to; but some have been with me a long time and some have done admirable service.

In my district office, Nancy Abernethy is a case worker who has been with me since the very beginning when I first began my service, the beginning of 1981; and throughout those years she has provided service to many constituents, particularly in immigration matters and about tax matters, that is above and beyond the call of duty in many cases.

There are literally hundreds of people in central Florida today who have had service provided by Ms. Abernethy in resolving matters regarding immigration rulings and immigration concerns that they would not have had resolved in the way they did if she had not been there to act on their behalf. She still does that today.

I have another lady who has been with me for many years, all but I think a couple of the years I have served, in that same district office, a case worker named Elaine Whipple. Elaine tirelessly served me for a long time working with senior citizens, particularly veterans, on issues concerning veterans affairs, but also on Social Security, giving service, finding answers to solutions to those Medicare problems for people with the various agencies of the government. These two women provided a perfect illustration of what can be done in the best of public service when you have people that are dedicated, who every day go to work regardless of whether I am sitting in the office or not, answering the phones, talking to people and providing them a conduit between the Federal Government and an agency that is far removed from them, and some real, everyday problems in their personal lives that need recognition and resolution.

I have also had several other people that have really served extraordinarily well that I want to mention. The chiefs of staff who have served me over the years, Vaughn Forrest for many years, my very first chief of staff, did admirable work. We provided together a program for relief for Salvadorans, the people who were displaced off the farms there during their civil war where we lifted medicines and medical supplies down there that were donated privately, not a legislative agenda but something privately done, that the office did, that I am prouder of than any other thing that I have worked on since I have been in Congress; and much of that work was a tribute to Vaughn Forrest's effort as he did in many other cases.

□ 1715

Mr. Speaker, more recently Doyle Bartlett has been my chief of staff who was an early aide who came to work for me in my district office and who worked on to be a legislative staffer up here, and then later my chief of staff. And most recently John Ariale, who currently is my chief of staff, but was my district aide for many years, working to serve the public in the central Florida region tirelessly for a good number of years on my staff.

Personal secretaries, personal assistants over the years both in Washington and in Orlando in the central Florida area have meant the difference in my life and in the ability for me to be able to serve. Fran Damron who came to Washington to start this process from Florida with me, but for unforeseen family circumstances might very well be in my employ today.

Mary Lee Reed who still works part time for me, for many years worked in this Washington office as my right arm. Today Sue Lancaster in my district office who has been with me for many years, I could not do without really in many ways. She has tirelessly put time in program after program serving our constituents and working

to allow me to serve better. Lisa Smith, who recently left my office in Washington, served many years here doing that job. And more recently Jin Sikora.

I have had other staff assistants from Jane Hicks who served me a long time on the front desk here to Selma McKinzie, I should say the district desk in Florida to Selma McKinzie who served here and the list could go on and on. I cannot begin to name them all.

Leslie Woolley was my first legislative director, the legislative is a critical staff as well to provide services in a personal staff office that we do not get from the committee staff on legislative matters. Many, many issues that Members of Congress have to face every day and votes they have to take on the floor, they have to be prepared for that. They would not otherwise be able to do because that does not come within the purview of the committees they serve on, but they are expected, we all are expected to respond and respond intelligently to make votes for these issues.

I want to again thank these personal staff Members for all the work that they have done over the years. I do not think we pay enough tribute to our personal staffs.

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

STAFF TRIBUTE (1981-2000)

PERSONAL OFFICE STAFF

Nancy Abernethy, Melissa Finn Aldrich, John Ariale, Marie Attaway, Michael Ballard, Doyle Bartlett, Paul Bernstein, Lynne Bigler, Julie Bordelon, Scott Brenner, Melissa Burns, Rachel Cacioppo, Sandra Carroll, Christina Cullinan, Fran Damron, James Derfler, Andi Dillin, Susan Dryden, Sarah Dumont, David Eisner, Debbie Feldman, Terri Finger, Vaughn Forrest, Kristen Foskett, and Teresa Fulton.

James Geoffrey, Elizabeth Gianini, Shannon Gravitte, James Griffin, Michael Hearn, Mark Heidelberg, Jane Hicks, Mary Carlson Higgins, Judi Holcomb, Barbie Howe, Dawn Igler, Joe Jacquot, Kirt Johnson, Dana Hargon Jones, Vincent Jones, Josh Kane, Dirk Karaman, Karl Kaufmann, Susan Kessel, Anne Kienlen, Janie Kong, Sue Lancaster, Carolyn Lindsey, Patti Lockrow, and Linda Lovell.

Gerry Lynam, Ellen Maracotta, Kevin McCourt, Selma McKinzie, Ferrall McMahon, Bob Meagher, Judy Merk, Dave Merkel, Helen Mitternacht, Lisa Morin, Don Morrissey, Rufus Montgomery, Maureen Mulherin, Sophia Nash, Karen Nasrallah, Paula Nelson, Jaclyn Norris, Jennifer Paine, Clif Parker, Mari Parsons, Marissa Barnes Raflo, Mary Lee Reed, Therese Ridenour, Debby Roeder, and Tom Rosenkoetter.

Clif Rumbley, Christy Russell, Ann Scarborough, Eythan Schiller, Karen Schwartz, Jenn Hargon Sikora, Ginny Smith, Lisa Weigle Smith, Teresa Smith, Yvette Sommers, Phil Squair, Janet Sterns, Marise Stewart, Pam Tabor, Jay Therrell, Laurie Thompson, Carl Thorsen, Chuong Tran, Steve Van Slyke, Linda Vogt, Tyler Wesson, Tina Westby, Elaine Whipple, Susan Williams, and Leslie Woolley.

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