In my own district of Lewiston, a town last year, we had 120 homes burn. The entire community of Lewiston, it was in the national news for several weeks, was threatened to be burned. That was also a prescribed burn. Again, I want to mention that prescribed burns might be fine if we have gone in and restored these forests as they should, but not certainly as we see them today.

Is there something we can do? Yes. We passed legislation just this last year, legislation which I authored. I did not write it, but I authored it here. It was called the Quincy Library Plan. The reason it was called Quincy Library is because environmentalists and wood products people and elected officials and community leaders from within the community of Quincy in northern California, a small town of about 1,200, got together and they thought, well, the only place they would not yell at each other was in the library. So it was called the Quincy Library Plan. They came up with a plan using the latest scientific data, along with all the current laws, put it all together in a plan specific for their forest.

They came up with this plan, it was voted out of this House virtually unanimously, passed out of the Senate virtually unanimously, and the President signed it. This administration refuses to implement it. We have already been 1 year into it, and this plan has not been implemented. It was a 5-year pilot program, and they are eating up the time. This plan, by the way, does not cost taxpayers money. It brings in $3 of revenue for every $1 that is spent. Maybe this would help some of the 43 mills that were closed in my district alone in my 10 rural counties, not because we are short of trees, but because of Federal legislation that would not allow us to go in and thin out.

Again, there is a tragedy happening in our national forests and to our environment. No spotted owls can live where a catastrophic fire has taken place. We need to do something different. I am very pleased with Governor George W. Bush and his intent to work with us on this.

I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for yielding to me.

Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania. We have been joined, Mr. Speaker, by the majority leader, such a delight, and I would like to yield to him now.

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman; and I see the he has more speakers, perhaps a wealth of speakers here, so I will not take but just a minute or two.

I want to thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for taking this special order on a very important subject, and I would like to make three points that have come to me while I have listened to all of these speakers. The basic question we are asking here is how do we as a Nation preserve, utilize, conserve, and develop our resources to achieve the wealth of a Nation in the lives of our children. It seems to me it takes a balanced and informed relationship between real people, who naturally will love their land more than anybody could when they make their living off it and they live on it, and a government.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, sometimes the government can do some downright silly things. Driving through Georgia just a week ago, looking at the beautiful landscape of Georgia, seeing the damage that was done by what I call the kudzu government. A lot of my colleagues may not be familiar with kudzu, but if they were to go to south, southeast America they will see kudzu. My colleagues who are uninformed might say, my goodness, that is pretty. But what is kudzu? Kudzu is something introduced in rural America, in the southeast, ostensibly to control soil erosion. And what it does is it grows over and smothers all the natural foliage of the region.

So if anyone has been fortunate enough to have been given kudzu, a gift from the government, and it has been in their neighborhood for very long, they know that it has killed everything, even what they wanted to keep. That is so like the government: comes and shows up and says, ''I am Mr. Kudzu, I am from the government, I am here to help you.'' And before we know it, they have smothered and destroyed everything that is dear to our native regions.

A look at mining reclamation. I wish everybody in America would go out to our great mining States and see what they are doing in mining in America today; to see how quickly they take the ore, the coal, out, extract it, clean up, replace and refill. It is not unusual to see the mine operating very productively, producing the minerals and the ores and the energy that we want, and within hundreds of feet we will see the natural wildlife of the region grazing on what had been, and is today again, the natural foliage of the region.

Once again, the government of the United States might have been helpful and encouraging in that. But today it says we are so extreme, as they did in the Grand Escalante, we will not allow the mining, we will not allow the reclamation. We will deny the Nation the resources.

One of the great philosophical questions of our lifetime is, If a tree falls in the forest and nobody is there, will anybody hear it? Well, if AL GORE becomes President, we might ask the greater question, and the one that has greater relevance to our life, If a tree falls in the forest, will anybody clear it? And we just heard a discourse on that.

There is a place in Idaho, in the district of the gentlewoman from Idaho (Mrs. CHENOWETH-HAGE), where you can stand and see that the environmental extremists allowed an experiment. They allowed somebody to do the natural, normal, sensible thing that we would all do as we cleaned up our own backyards and take the fallen trees, the underbrush, the fire hazard, and clear it. And there is a section right across the road where that was disallowed. The fire came, and it is not difficult to see where the fire's devastation ended. It ended where people did the sensible thing with their land and cleared the fallen trees and stopped the fire hazard.

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There are many things that we can see in rural America in our wonderful countryside, resources, wealth, that should be unlocked from rigid, inflexible, dogmatic Government controls that are naive in their understanding, innocent of their awareness, and arbitrary in their implementation.

Let America be what America has been and has built itself from, a free Nation of real people making a living and living on their own land.

I think we should return to this subject again soon.

EXPANDING TECHNOLOGY IN RURAL AMERICA

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

Mr. CANNON. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend and colleague the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PETERSON) for the opportunity to speak on his special order and for his effort in putting this together.

Tonight we have heard about many of the blessings that we get from rural America. We get timber and paper products. The gentleman from Pennsylvania spoke about that. We have oil and gas. The gentleman from Oklahoma spoke about that. We have minerals extraction. The gentleman from Nevada spoke about that. And the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHERWOOD) spoke about exporting kids.

Also, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) spoke about the number of children, the young people, from rural America who get involved in the military. So we have these great, great resources that we have been exporting.

But on the other hand, there now is a turnaround and we are getting more and more people back in or at least more and more people want to come back to rural America, and technology is allowing that to happen.

I would like to talk for just a couple minutes about technology and education in rural America and why that is so compelling and why that is going to change the nature of what we do in America so that people can go back to where they came from where they enjoy life, where they have clean air and they have beautiful scenery and they have good friends and where they can leave their cars unlocked when they go to church.

We have a number of things that are happening in technology that are happening at a breathtaking rate. And,

frankly, we do not see them. We have had so much change that these new developments are coming faster than we can really understand. But on the cutting edge of technology today, we have two or three different things that are going on.

In the first place, we have all seen the plummeting prices and the decrease in the size of computer equipment. That is going on at an increasing rate. And we are going to see a time within the next year or so when you can take a little small computer that has all the power of a major computer and it will operate off of radio frequency and it will do so at a very rapid rate, so that every kid in the world in the next 4 or 5 years is going to have the opportunity to be educated at a very high level.

I would like to think that in the next few years we will see a time when we will have advertisements instead of send $15 to feed a child for a month, we will see ads to send $15 to educate a child for a month and every child in the world will have the opportunity to get a post-doctoral education off the Internet. That is partly because of the devices that are coming onto the market.

In addition to those devices, we have this great new technology with radio frequency and the ability to communicate a signal sometimes through multiple repeaters, so that we should be able to take satellite signals and get those down to every child and every person on Earth; and that certainly includes everyone in rural America.

And finally, we are seeing terrific growth in the ability to compress data so that we can do much, much more with a smaller band width.

So, for instance, in my State of Utah, Emery County, a little rural county in the State of Utah, every person in that county, because of the foresight of the local telecommunications company, now has access to DSL broad band telecommunications. That DSL is going to be a big enough pipeline to do almost anything that anyone could imagine they would want to do. And that takes the jobs into rural Utah and raises the life-style there.

Now, I would just like to wrap up by talking about the difference in perspective here. We have a battle going on. It is a cultural war. We see that battle going on with the Boy Scouts of America and the attempt to revoke their charter. We see that battle in many other places. But the battle really comes down to a battle between urban America and rural America.

The Democrats have taken a very clear position. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee chairman, the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY), in referring to the 2000 elections, said on June 21, 1999, as reported in the Providence Journal, ''We have written off the rural areas.'' ''We have written off the rural areas.''

Now, the following day the minority leader said he did not mean to say that. He did not say he did not mean what he said. He said he did not mean to say that. Because that gave away the strategy of the Democratic party. And it was probably unthoughtful. But it has never been recanted, as far as I know, by any leader of the Democratic National party. No one has said, we are actually going to court the rural vote.

And in fact, everything they have done has been shown to be a movement away from rural. They tax rural people the same they do everywhere else, but they move the programs into the urban areas under the Democratic regime. That is not right.

There is a digital divide today and that digital divide can be healed and overcome between rural and urban America if we let the free market work. But if we tax everyone in America and move that money to the urban areas, then we lose the opportunity to bring back to the rural areas the basis for jobs and economic growth that make the rural part of America so great.

EDUCATION IS AT THE CENTER OF AMERICA'S FUTURE

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

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, before I proceed to the remarks that I had intended to make tonight, as a Member of this House who represents rural America, or at least a significantly rural district, I would simply note a few facts.

In 1979, the last year of the Carter administration, agriculture programs cost the taxpayer less than $4 billion in direct payments to farmers and prices paid to farmers at the marketplace were considerably higher than they are today.

This year, under Freedom to Farm, better known in rural America as freedom to fail at farming, which was rammed through this House by the Republican leadership a number of years ago, the cost to taxpayers has risen to well above $20 billion a year, almost 30 if we count all costs, and the prices paid to farmers have fallen through the floor.

I think most farmers, at least in my area, recognize that rural America cannot thrive unless family farmers get a decent price for their product and until the so-called Freedom to Farm Act is radically changed, rural America will continue to decay. Both parties need to face up to that fact. Major elements of my party have begun to. I wish I could say the same for major elements on the part of the other party.

But who knows, time may produce miracles. I hope that they will realize that they must undo what they did if farmers are to really have a decent shot at making a decent living through the marketplace.

Having said that, I would now like to turn to the subject that I wanted to talk about tonight, which is education. Because more than any other subject, education and what we do about it and what this entire country does about it lies at the center of the question of how well we will prepare for our country's future.

This is going to be a fairly dull speech. It will be filled with exactly what political consultants say we should not have in our speeches. It will be filled with numbers and facts. It will not be exciting. It is not meant to be. It is meant simply to state in a clear way who has tried to do what to education over the last 5 years.

We will undoubtedly hear in the Presidential debates tomorrow night; and we will have certainly seen across the Nation, Republican candidates giving speeches and running ads pretending to be friends of education. Those speeches fly in the face of the historical record of the past 6 years. That record demonstrates that education has been one of the central targets of House Republican efforts to cut Federal investments in programs essential for building America's future in order to provide large tax cuts that they have been promising their constituents for years.

Six years ago, in their drive to take control of the House of Representatives, the Republican leaders, then led by Newt Gingrich, produced the so-called Contract with America, which they claimed would balance the budget while at the same time making room for huge tax cuts.

They indicated that one of the ways that they would do so was by abolishing four departments. Eliminating the Department of Education was their new number one goal. They also wanted to eliminate the Departments of Energy, Commerce and HUD.

Immediately upon taking over the Congress in 1995, they proposed cuts below existing appropriations, not just below the President's request, but below previous appropriations in a rescission bill H.R. 1158. That bill passed the House on March 16, 1995, reducing Federal expenditures by nearly $12 billion.

Education programs accounted for only 1.6 percent of the Federal expenditures in fiscal year 1995. But they made up 14 percent of the spending reductions in the House Republican package. That package was adopted with all but six House Republicans voting in favor of cuts totaling $1.8 billion.

Next, H.R. 1883 was introduced, which called for ''eliminating the Department of Education and redefining Federal role in education.''

The legislation was cosponsored by more than half of all House Republicans, including as original cosponsors the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT), the current Speaker; the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARMEY), the majority leader; and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY), the majority whip.