

Commission's management and the National Treasury Employees Union's leaders. As a result, this legislation will accelerate the hiring of mission-critical workers at the Commission, it will protect the rights of these employees, and it will advance investor protection. I support each of these worthwhile goals, and congratulate the Commission and the National Treasury Employees Union for their good work. Their joint efforts help to demonstrate the effectiveness of labor-management cooperation in the federal workplace.

I am also pleased that the legislation we are considering today, unlike the introduced bill, will require the Commission to conduct two studies about the implementation of this special hiring authority. The inclusion of this study provision, which I requested, will provide the Congress with information on the use of the authority, including its impact on the hiring of veterans, minorities, and other demographic groups, that will be needed to evaluate the effects of this change in the law. It is my expectation that the Commission will use the expansion of its professional ranks as an opportunity to aggressively seek qualified veterans and minorities to serve at the Commission.

Although I support this bill, I differ with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle on one remaining issue: the length of time that the Commission should have this special hiring power. As currently drafted, H.R. 658 would provide the SEC with the permanent authority to bypass civil service rules in order to accelerate the hiring process for accountants, economists, and compliance examiners. I believe that this special authority, requested by the Commission in a time of urgency, should sunset so that the Congress can evaluate the effectiveness of the program at an appropriate time. Because H.R. 658 will make extraordinary changes in the normal hiring process and because this power has the potential to be abused, the prudent course of action would have been for the Congress to sunset the law on a date certain and determine at that time whether to continue it. In short, the Congress should jealously guard the special powers that it grants government agencies.

Accordingly, during the consideration of H.R. 658 by the Financial Services Committee and the Government Reform Committee, I sought to make a good bill even better by offering an amendment to sunset the expedited hiring authority at the end of fiscal 2008. This amendment would have provided the Commission with sufficient time to meet its short-term staffing needs and preserved the ability of Congress to reevaluate this special power on a date certain. Although we did not include a sunset in this bill, H.R. 658 is still pragmatic and desirable legislation.

In closing, Madam Speaker, H.R. 658 will streamline the hiring process for hundreds of new professionals at the Commission, it will safeguard the civil service rights of these workers, and it will enhance investor protection. Notwithstanding my one reservation concerning a sunset, which I hope my colleagues in the Senate will fix during their consideration of this bill, I support H.R. 658 and urge its adoption by the full House.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Madam Speaker, if the gentlewoman has no further requests for time, I congratulate the gentlewoman on being given the right to control nothing, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. KELLY. Madam Speaker, we have no further requests for time, and we yield back the balance of our time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 658, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

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SENSE OF CONGRESS THAT CONGRESS SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN AND SUPPORT ACTIVITIES TO PROVIDE DECENT HOMES FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and concur in the Senate concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 43) expressing the sense of Congress that Congress should participate in and support activities to provide decent homes for the people of the United States.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. CON. RES. 43

Whereas the United States promotes and encourages the creation and revitalization of sustainable and strong neighborhoods in partnership with States, cities, and local communities;

Whereas the United States promotes and encourages the creation and revitalization of sustainable and strong neighborhoods in partnership with States, cities, and local communities and in conjunction with the independent and collective actions of private citizens and organizations;

Whereas establishing a housing infrastructure strengthens neighborhoods and local economies and nurtures the families who reside in them;

Whereas an integral element of a strong community is a sufficient supply of affordable housing;

Whereas affordable housing may be provided in traditional and nontraditional forms, including apartment buildings, transitional and temporary homes, condominiums, cooperatives, and single family homes;

Whereas for many families a home is not merely shelter, but also provides an opportunity for growth, prosperity, and security;

Whereas homeownership is a cornerstone of the national economy because it spurs the production and sale of goods and services, generates new jobs, encourages savings and investment, promotes economic and civic responsibility, and enhances the financial security of all people in the United States;

Whereas although the United States is the first nation in the world to make owning a home a reality for a vast majority of its families, 1/3 of the families in the United States are not homeowners;

Whereas a disproportionate percentage of families in the United States that are not homeowners are low-income families;

Whereas 74.2 percent of Caucasian Americans own their own homes, only 47.1 percent of African Americans, 47.2 percent of Hispanic Americans, and 55.8 percent of Asian Americans and other races are homeowners;

Whereas the community building activities of neighborhood-based nonprofit organizations empower individuals to improve their lives and make communities safer and healthier for families;

Whereas one of the best known nonprofit housing organizations is Habitat for Humanity, which builds simple but adequate housing for less fortunate families and symbolizes the self-help approach to homeownership;

Whereas Habitat for Humanity is organized in all 50 States with 1,655 local affiliates and its own section 501(c)(3) Federal tax-exempt status and locally elected completely voluntary board of directors;

Whereas Habitat for Humanity has built nearly 150,000 houses worldwide and endeavors to complete another 50,000 homes by the year 2005;

Whereas Habitat for Humanity provides opportunities for people from every segment of society to volunteer to help make the American dream a reality for families who otherwise would not own a home; and

Whereas the month of June has been designated as "National Homeownership Month": Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring).* That it is the sense of Congress that—

(1) everyone in the United States should have a decent home in which to live;

(2) Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives should demonstrate the importance of volunteerism;

(3) during the years of the 108th and 109th sessions of Congress, Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, Habitat for Humanity, and contributing organizations, should sponsor and construct 2 homes in the Washington, D.C., metro area each as part of the "Congress Building America" program;

(4) each Congress Building America house should be constructed primarily by Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, their families and staffs, and the staffs of sponsoring organizations working with local volunteers involving and symbolizing the partnership of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors of society;

(5) each Congress Building America house should be constructed with the participation of the family that will own the home;

(6) in the future, Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, their families, and their staff should participate in similar house building activities in their own States as part of National Homeownership Month; and

(7) these occasions should be used to emphasize and focus on the importance of providing decent homes for all of the people in the United States.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. GARY G. MILLER) and the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. GARY G. MILLER).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on this legislation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in strong support of this resolution expressing support for Congress Building America and for increased affordable home ownership opportunities.

This country is home to people of many different origins, but everyone seems to have the same dream, to own their own home. This dream means many things: Independence, financial security, geographic stability, the ability to accumulate personal wealth, a place to raise a family, or simply a place to go after a long day's work and find peace.

As a homebuilder for over 30 years, I enjoyed watching many people achieve this dream. One could always see the excitement and anticipation in the face of a home buyer. The Congress Building America program will offer every Member of Congress this opportunity to experience how the dream of homeownership builds hope in their communities and across the Nation.

I feel very strongly about this issue, because homeownership is the key to personal wealth in our country. When someone buys a home, they purchase an asset which will grow over time.

I started the Building a Better America Caucus, BABAC, when I arrived in Congress 4½ years ago, because I thought it was important to provide a forum for us to start addressing issues that impact homeownership. One of the objectives of BABAC is to help cultivate an environment where more Americans turn the dream of homeownership into reality.

When I first started my business, I had an old van that used more oil than gas and a cardboard box which held every tool I owned. I started small. Over 30 years, my business grew, but with each passing year, I saw the impact of government on the housing industry. With each year came government laws and regulations making it harder to build homes. The red tape kept increasing costs. In business, these costs are passed on to consumers. Homes kept getting more expensive.

It is very important that Congress start talking about how the government is impacting home prices. In some parts of the country, my district in southern California is one of them, the heavy burden of Federal, State and local mandates is creating a generation of people who cannot afford to live in the communities where they work and grew up. I call these people the new homeless.

Exactly who are these new homeless? In my district, it might be a couple. The husband is a firefighter and the wife is a teacher. They have a good job and they make a good living, but the combined income does not enable them to purchase a median priced home in southern California which costs over

\$300,000 today. This is a national problem, and Congress must work expeditiously to address it.

I encourage all my colleagues to become active members of BABAC so we can do something about the housing affordable crisis in this country.

BABAC provides Members a forum where we can discuss ways Congress can increase homeownership in America. The Congress Building America program provides Members the opportunity to personally help make homeownership a reality for a family in their district.

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The Congress Building America program will give every Member of Congress a chance to express their commitment to affordable homeownership by picking up a hammer and nails and building alongside Habitat for Humanity families to make the American Dream of homeownership a reality.

The goal of this resolution is to encourage Members of Congress to participate in Congress Building America events with Habitat homeowner families and local Habitat affiliates in their districts or States during the 108th and 109th Congress. This new initiative is a partnership program between Habitat for Humanity International, the United States Congress, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and national corporate sponsors.

I urge each Member to support this resolution and to personally join with the Habitat for Humanity affiliates in their districts to help low-income families realize the American Dream of homeownership.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, this resolution is really record-setting. I have not in all my years here seen so much wind up and so little pitch. This goes on quite eloquently and quite accurately about the importance of homeownership, and it talks about the need for affordable housing. It says, "Whereas an integral element of a strong community is a sufficient supply of affordable housing." It says, on the next page, "Whereas affordable housing may be provided in traditional and nontraditional forms." It talks a very good game about the importance of housing, and particularly affordable housing; and it delivers virtually nothing.

I have been lamenting for some time the opposition of my Republican colleagues to a housing production program in this country. In many parts of this country you will not get affordable housing, as we define that, that is housing for lower-income working people, middle-income people in some areas, unless there is some element of subsidy. We are not talking about the Federal Government simply building the housing. We are talking about a whole range of cooperative programs,

many of them private-public cooperations. But it is clearly the case that unless the Federal Government contributes something, you will not get affordable housing.

Now, my Republican colleagues have been strongly against most production programs, but I see now they have come up with one. It is in this resolution, which I am going to vote for, because I am all in favor of good wishes. I think we should all, at all times, be in favor of things that we should be in favor of. And this resolution is clearly in favor of a lot of things that we should be in favor of. It just does not do anything about them. Does not make them worse. And it does have a production program.

I call Members' attention to page 3, paragraph 3. It says, "During the years of the 108th and 109th sessions of Congress, Members of the Senate and the House should sponsor and construct two homes in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area."

Now, the legislative draftsmanship is perhaps not perfect. I will read that as being two homes each. I assume this does not mean that we should all of us build two homes. And I hope not, because there are people here that I would not want to be near them when they had a hammer or a saw or a drill. So I would not want to have to be in a joint effort to build some of these homes.

So we are talking about two homes each for 4 years. Now, there are 535 Members of Congress. Two homes apiece would be 1,070 homes a year for 4 years. So we now have the affordable housing program of the Republican Party for production: 4,280 homes over the next 4 years in the metropolitan Washington area, D.C. and Fairfax County, although they probably would not get that many, Alexandria, Arlington, parts of Montgomery and maybe more in Prince George's.

Now, 4,280 houses is better than nothing, although I have to say I am willing to do my part; and I have to say this, we are not often sufficiently modest around here, and each of us is supposed to build two houses, but, Madam Speaker, I would not want to live in a house I built. There are some things I think I am good at, some things I am not so good at. The notion of all of us building houses is an interesting one.

Actually, this is motivated both by a desire to do affordable housing, but it also carries out the Republican approach to unions. Because their entire production program would be built by overwhelmingly nonunion labor. There are a couple of Members here who are members of unions, although it is rarely the building trades. My colleague from Boston, the gentleman from Massachusetts, was an iron worker; but he can only do so much. And I do not know how many of the houses would be made out of iron or structural steel or whatever anyway.

So here they have a housing production program, 4,280 houses for the entirety of America, built almost exclusively by nonunion labor, without a penny of Federal Government contribution. Unless we built them during work hours. I suppose if we built them during working hours, when we were getting paid, it would be some Federal contribution. I assume the position is that we do not.

Now, I guess I am a little ambivalent about the notion of unleashing every Member of the House and the Senate to build two houses. I know you cannot comment on Senators, I understand that, Madam Speaker; but I think you can comment on past Senators, and I guess I can say that I am pleased Strom Thurmond will no longer be covered by this. It is a lucky thing we did not pass this last year, because Strom Thurmond would have been charged with building two houses somewhere, and I would want to live in those even less than the ones I would build.

But the problem is not so much with what it says, but with what it does not say. We have not for some time had a program in this country to have Federal resources go for housing production. And in the absence of a housing production program, families will have a hard time getting affordable housing. We have some programs that help. We have the programs that help build housing for the elderly and for the disabled. We have the low-income tax credit, which does a good job; but it is limited. We have the section 8 voucher program which works well in a lot of areas, but the section 8 program does not contribute to production, particularly when we have rulings now that say you can only use a voucher 1 year at a time. No one can build a house on a year-by-year commitment.

So I am all in favor of the goals of this resolution. I just wish it did something other than asking this workforce to go out and build a couple of houses a year to carry it out. We have a terrible crisis in this country with regard to affordable housing. And let me just say, Madam Speaker, that one of the arguments we have when some of us talk about the need for the Federal Government to participate in doing things that are important for the quality of our lives, we are told we should not worry about it, the private economy will take care of it.

The private economy does a great deal. The private economy supplies many of our needs, and a private sector is something we should all work for. But there are some things it will not do. And with the very prosperity of the 1990s, which was so important in helping people achieve so many goals, for many people it made the housing situation worse. Because prosperity is obviously not uniformly distributed. Under the policies now in power, it is even less uniformly distributed than ever, as a conscious choice. But even at its best, prosperity will be uneven.

And many people in this country, in the greater Boston area, in the area

around San Francisco, in Chicago, in many of our great metropolitan areas people whose incomes were somewhat fixed, many of them public employees, teachers, firefighters, police officers, and social workers, and public works people, people on relatively fixed incomes found themselves worse off in the housing market because prosperity drove up the value of many properties, and some people benefited enormously, and some were left behind.

We are told, well, a rising tide will lift all boats. But if you are too poor to afford a boat, the rising tide will go over your head and drown you. And that happened to many people. The very prosperity of the 1990s that were so welcome nationally exacerbated the housing crisis.

That does not mean the government building all the housing is the answer. It does mean that a sensible, well-funded production program, where the government contributes along with the private sector an element of subsidy so that new housing can be built in many parts of the country, is the only way this resolution will be more than just empty rhetoric.

So at this point we only have this resolution. But we will later in the year have a chance to address this, I hope. I hope the committee which brought this out, the Committee on Financial Services, which has jurisdiction over housing, will be allowed by the leadership of this House to formulate a sensible production program and bring it forward. And if we do, we may be able to rescue this resolution from the charge of being just empty rhetoric.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Madam Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. WALSH), the author of this resolution.

Mr. WALSH. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from California for yielding me this time, and I thank the House for considering Senate Concurrent Resolution 43.

Just to depart briefly from my prepared comments, I listened to the gentleman from Massachusetts rail against this legislation. It is just absolute proof that no good deed goes unpunished. This is a good idea. This is an idea that is very successful. It is an idea that gives individuals the opportunity to volunteer to help their neighbors to build a home. I suspect even if he may be a ham-handed carpenter that with a good foreman on the job he could learn how to pound nails.

But the point really is this is not about mass-production housing. It is about creating homeownership. Earlier this week, I had the privilege of joining a handful of my neighbors at the home of Nyoka Williams, a participant in the Syracuse Neighborhood Initiative. The Syracuse Neighborhood Initiative is a city-wide effort to expand homeownership opportunities and improve quality of life in Syracuse, my hometown.

We gathered to celebrate the success of the Mini-Grant program, which provides city families with grants and loans to improve their owner-occupied homes. At the ceremony, Ms. Williams reflected on her own hard-fought struggle to purchase a home. This program creates homeowners.

Now, not everybody in this country can afford to own a home, but we ought to be doing everything we can to make that possible, and this program goes a long way.

With Syracuse Neighborhood Initiative's assistance and her hard work, her previously vacant home is now a showcase on the block. And after years of renting substandard apartments, she is thrilled to be able to take care of her aging mother and entertain her multiple grandchildren in her very own home. Ms. Williams told me that homeownership has not only provided her with a quality place to live and to spend time with her family, but has given her a renewed sense of pride in herself and a new level of confidence that she can meet any challenge.

And I can tell you that Ms. Williams wears that sense of pride and accomplishment in a big beautiful smile whenever she talks about her good fortune and her very own home.

Madam Speaker, for many years now, Habitat for Humanity has been working to offer the same level of accomplishment and that sense of pride to thousands of families the world over. By making homeownership affordable and accessible, Habitat has coordinated the construction of thousands of new homes across the United States, relying upon a great deal of donated goods and utilizing a volunteer labor force.

Now, those volunteers can be labor union members or nonlabor union members. The good news is it does not matter. If they are willing to donate their time and hammer, or carry some lumber, or lay some concrete, God bless them. Nobody is going to tell them they cannot do it.

This program has made 50,000 Americans homeowners. I am proud to be a veteran of previous Habitat builds back home in Syracuse, in my home town and here in Washington, where I worked with Members of the House and Senate on two different houses in the Washington, D.C. area. Some of us were more handy than others, but the good news is we worked together. Even in Belfast, Northern Ireland, people of both communities came together, and the Habitat house build provided a vehicle to bring people together. And it does that here too.

It is our hope that every Member of Congress will build a house, all 535 of us, in their districts, through this program. Habitat for Humanity provides affordable quality homes for those currently struggling to achieve the dream of homeownership. There are millions of Americans who could become homeowners if we helped them through this program and the many other programs provided through the housing agency,

through HUD. They support renewed investment efforts in America's cities, and they allow for a better quality of life for all involved.

I urge my colleagues to support S. Con. Res. 43 and encourage their active involvement in the Congress Building America program in the 108th and 109th sessions of Congress. Proudful smiles like Ms. Williams demonstrate just how rewarding homeownership efforts like Habitat for Humanity really are.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Madam Speaker, I yield myself 30 seconds.

I notice on page 4 it says each Congress Building America house should be constructed primarily by Members of the Senate and House, their families and staff. Now, presumably, if we do this, it is voluntarily. But if we pass a bill like this and our staffs do it, it might not be voluntary. We might need an interpretation from you, Madam Speaker, under the bill you have been sponsoring. If our staffs show up to build housing and they have to work overtime, would we pay them overtime or would they get comp time?

So I think we will have to have further interpretation when our staffs report for home building, which some of them probably did not sign up for.

Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), a very active leader in the fight for affordable housing in our committee.

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Mr. SANDERS. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time and applaud the gentleman for all of the work he has done on affordable housing for this country.

Today we are considering legislation which encourages Members of Congress "to participate in and support activities to provide decent homes for the people of the United States."

I have no problem with this legislation. It would be very nice if Members of Congress worked together to build a few hundred units of affordable housing. The problem is that in the United States of America today, we have a housing crisis, and we do not need a few hundred units of new housing, we need hundreds of thousands of units of new housing. It is not acceptable for people to say it is so nice, we are volunteering our efforts.

Madam Speaker, we have children sleeping out in the street all over America. We have working families working 40 hours a week living in their cars, and Members of Congress building a few hundred housing units might make for good press releases and photos in newspapers, but it does nothing to address the housing crisis in this country.

While the affordable housing crisis in this country deepens, President Bush's proposed housing budget is 63 percent less than it was in 1976 during the last year of the Ford administration. While more than 3 million Americans will ex-

perience homelessness this year, including 1.3 million children, President Bush proposes to eliminate a \$574 million a year program to revitalize public housing and recently refused to fully fund public housing operating expenses. While 4.9 million American families pay more than 50 percent of their limited incomes on housing, President Bush has proposed to block grant the Federal section 8 rental assistance program which would raise rents and jeopardize rental assistance for tens of thousands of families.

While President Bush says he supports expanding homeownership, the reality is that his initiatives have not produced a single home buyer in 2.5 years, and since the President took office, housing foreclosures have increased by 39 percent and home loan delinquencies have increased by 26 percent.

Last year the Bush administration care so much about affordable housing that they worked to defeat legislation that I introduced to provide the tools necessary to construct, rehabilitate and preserve at least 1.5 million affordable housing rental units over the last decade through a national affordable housing trust fund.

Madam Speaker, we are not going to give up. Just a few months ago, I reduced the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund, a proposal that would not only provide real solutions to the affordable housing crisis, but would also lead to the creation of some 1.8 million new jobs and nearly \$50 billion in wages. This legislation currently has 200 tripartisan cosponsors, including 11 Republicans.

This bill currently has 200 tri-partisan cosponsors, including 11 Republicans, and has been endorsed by over 4,000 groups representing labor unions, business leaders, religious organizations, environmental groups, bankers and affordable housing advocates.

At a time when 4.9 million Americans families are paying more than 50 percent of their limited incomes on housing and at least 800,000 people, including 200,000 children, are homeless on any given night, the federal government has a responsibility to correct this crisis.

If the Republican leadership and the Bush Administration truly wanted to "participate in and support activities to provide decent homes for the people of the United States" they would join me in supporting a National Affordable Housing Trust Fund and get this bill signed into law as soon as possible.

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS).

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Madam Speaker, I want to associate myself with the comments that the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK) and the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) have made. While I stand in strong support of this resolution, and it is a great resolution, great ideas about

what need to be done, but in reality, we need to get serious about the business of doing it.

The Congressional Black Caucus has a program called WOW, With Ownership Wealth, and in my congressional district, we have been going around promoting the purchase of homes by African Americans. We find that many people, once they reach the point where homeownership is in their mind, there is not the availability of homes that they can purchase. When we start talking about incomes of \$25,000 and \$30,000, people cannot purchase a \$250,000 home. There must be affordable homes built.

Just recently a study was done that the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BIGGERT) is associated with the organization, pointed out there are 850,000 individuals at the Chicago metropolitan area who live at or near the level of poverty. If these individuals are going to be able to purchase a home, not only must there be mortgage money available, but there also has to be the affordability of a house that they can buy.

Madam Speaker, I support this resolution, strongly suggest that we find ways to implement the concepts of it and make real the idea that people can live in their house by the side of the road, and the only way we will do it is have affordable housing that they are able to purchase.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) who is the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity of the Committee on Financial Services, and a great leader in this field.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in respect for and in support of this resolution. Habitat for Humanity is a wonderful organization, with 1,655 affiliates in all 50 States. Habitat for Humanity has built nearly 150,000 houses worldwide, and it has an ambitious goal of building another 50,000 homes by 2005. So I certainly support their efforts, and I am pleased the House and Senate staff and Members will join Habitat for Humanity in building a couple of homes right here in Washington, D.C.

Yet, even as I congratulate Habitat for Humanity for all of its work, I believe that all of us need to take a broader look at the issues of affordable housing and housing policy generally. We are falling very short of where we need to be in order to make the goal of affordable housing a goal that is obtainable for all Americans. Much more work needs to be done.

The unfortunate reality is that the Bush administration's homeownership record is one of feel-good rhetoric and photo opportunities, not one of substance. When it comes to creating affordable housing and helping to revitalize sustainable community development, the Bush administration is simply missing in action. Only 47.1 percent of African American and Latino communities respectively are homeowners.

Where is the administration's plan to improve percentages to those of other populations?

We need to put a stop to predatory lending to vulnerable consumers. Where is the administration's plan to eliminate predatory lending to consumers who are new to the homeownership process? As Members know, predatory lending is the making of unethical and abusive mortgage loans that include excessive fees, inflated rates and such practices as making loans that the borrower cannot repay. The predatory lending industry has grown significantly over the past 10 years.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to protect homeowners who are subject to predatory practices. Predatory lending affects borrowers of all races and income levels, but such lenders often target elderly homeowners and people of color. For example, borrowers 65 and older are 3 times more likely to hold subprime mortgages than borrowers 35 years of age. Simply put, when it comes to housing, there is much more we need to be doing than just commending Habitat for Humanity for building some housing. For example, we need to adopt legislation that ensures that consumers will pay no penalties when prepaying all or part of a mortgage credit loan balance. We should be working to ensure that there is no financing of credit, life, disability or unemployment insurance on a single premium basis. We also need to protect anyone from knowingly engaging in the practice of flipping a mortgage loan or extension of credit.

We also need policies and practices that will nullify any mortgage or loan contract that does not contain all the written terms of the contract or has blank spaces for such terms to be filled in after the contract is signed.

Mr. Speaker, increasing the supply of affordable housing, protecting consumers from predatory lending and predatory mortgage servicing. This is the housing agenda we need to be pursuing. I urge the Bush administration to join us in this effort.

I commend Habitat for Humanity for its tremendous work and urge all my Colleagues to support this Resolution.

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. WATT).

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. WATT).

Mr. WATT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlemen for yielding me this time to give me an opportunity to express myself on this resolution.

We obviously are all supportive of the resolution dealing with Habitat for Humanity and encouraging our colleagues to participate in the effort here in the District of Columbia. We are supportive of anything that does decent and affordable housing for people in this country.

Mr. Speaker, it is for that reason that we are so perplexed by the President's decision not to go forward with

the Hope VI project by zeroing out Hope VI and saying that Hope VI has apparently served its purpose in this country.

I just came from a meeting with a group of students, one of whom was Ms. Audrey Evans who is a student at North Carolina A&T State University, and without knowing I was coming here, she said I want to commend you on the Hope VI program. She said she was raised in public housing, and our commitment to Hope VI helped to change her life because putting public housing in communities and allowing her to be exposed to people around her who are interested in succeeding educationally and economically and personally is something that has meant so much to her.

Throughout America, we have heard these stories about how successful Hope VI has been. On a bipartisan basis in our committee, just like both of these gentlemen have yielded me time, we are perplexed as to why such a successful program, which coincidentally was a Republican program instituted by Secretary Kemp when he was Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, how could we terminate such a program as this?

We are supportive of this resolution, but we also want this administration to be committed to housing in general in this country.

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2½ minutes to the gentleman from California (Ms. LEE).

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

As I read this resolution, I really did think I was reading the fundamental arguments for the establishment of a national affordable housing trust fund which has been sponsored by over 200 members of this body. So I would like to read just a couple of whereas clauses which explain why I think this resolution sounds like the provisions of the National Housing Trust Fund.

Whereas establishing a housing infrastructure strengthens neighborhoods and local economies and nurtures the families who reside in them; whereas homeownership is a cornerstone of the national economy because it spurs the production and sale of goods and services, generates new jobs, encourages savings and investment, promotes economic and civic responsibility and enhances the financial security of all people in the United States.

That is some of what this resolution says. I fully support and appreciate the efforts of Habitat for Humanity and really agree that they should be applauded and supported. However, this resolution is just another vehicle for Republicans to talk about their non-existent housing agenda. This Congress must allow us to debate and vote on significant housing legislation.

My frustration with my Republican colleagues for failing to bring signifi-

cant housing legislation to the floor and for ignoring the dismal housing and economic outlook in this country is really only compounded by the Republican attempts to clock weak homeowner initiatives by pretending to support the American dream of homeownership.

While the nationwide homeownership rate is approaching 70 percent, the African American and Latino homeownership rate pale in comparison, to about 46 percent; and in the administration's Homeownership Downpayment Assistance Program, they would not even support foreclosure assistance to help these homeowners keep their homes and protect taxpayer investment.

Of the 3.9 million low-income households to be considered working poor, over two-thirds pay 30 percent or more of their income for housing costs, with one-quarter paying over half their incomes. In 39 States, 40 percent or more of renters cannot afford fair market for a 2-bedroom unit, and that is why creating more affordable housing and homeownership should be our focus.

□ 1315

Consistently since the Bush administration has drafted budgets, they seem to negate the promise of homeownership, community investment, and fair, quality housing. This administration continues to cut the HUD budget and fight successful programs such as HOPE VI, section 8, the public housing drug elimination program and the creation of a national affordable housing production program.

I will vote for this resolution, I support it; but I encourage the other side to bring some real housing bills to the floor very soon.

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I enjoyed the one comment: "This resolution is here so Republicans can just talk about affordable housing." The gentleman from Massachusetts and I, we do agree on one major issue: there is a huge shortage of affordable housing in this country. I believe we both have a passion in common to try to resolve this problem. Earlier this year, I brought a bill up before our committee on brownfields. Brownfields are contaminated sites within inner cities where the infrastructure is in place and the need for affordable housing is there. The gentleman from Massachusetts has worked hand in hand with me to bring this to the floor; but because of a lack of agreement on his side of the aisle, none to his blame, we are unable to do that because one Member wants to define brownfields using an EPA definition. The gentleman from Massachusetts and I realize that if you do that you eliminate petroleum sites which are 50 percent of the half million sites in this country. So he and I have worked to resolve something and others are giving lip service to this issue.

There has been much talk about subsidies. We deal with section 8 housing and the need for section 8 housing. We come to an agreement that there is a need for that. But in Los Angeles County, we had the housing authority here, I asked them the question of what is your occupancy rate in California, in L.A. County? They said, we are 97 percent occupied. That means 3 percent of the units that are not occupied are under renovation. Basically, they are 100 percent full. They have no available section 8 housing for people to go to. We can increase section 8 vouchers causing more money to chase no product, and all it does is increase the cost of the product.

But there have been things that have been said here today. We need subsidies which we do provide some. The President has come up with a great idea. He said, let us allow people to take section 8 vouchers, up to 12, and apply them as a down payment to buy a home. That is a great idea. I hope the appropriators this year will fund that program. What we are saying is people who have been locked into section 8 housing can now take the money they would have received in 12 months and put it as a down payment to buy a home, so 10 years, 15 or 20 years from now their payment is the same as it is today, not rising as it does in rental housing. We need to create homeownership rather than just create renters in this country.

There has been a comment made about we need a housing production program. We have that in this program. It is called the Building Industry Association. But government does everything it can to stop builders from providing affordable homes in this country. We have so many mandates on builders. I remember 30 years ago when I entered the industry, you could go out within a matter of 2 months and make application on a tract map to build a tract of homes, whether it be five, 10 or 15; and in 60 days you had entitlements, yes or no. They had to do it because on day 59 you were approved by law. I talk to builders today that have been 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 years processing subdivisions trying to provide affordable housing for the people of this country and they cannot get through the process.

I spend more time helping builders with Fish and Wildlife and Army Corps of Engineers issues. One thing I wish the other side of the aisle would agree to do and that is reform the Endangered Species Act. In Colton, California, there is one project that has 3,000 homes on 3,000 acres. They are only wanting to develop about 300-and-something of those acres, but they happen to have a rat on that property. It is called the San Bernardino kangaroo rat. It is becoming extinct. People who love rats want to set aside habitat for these rats, but they always want to set the habitat aside on privately owned property. That means somebody who owns a piece of land, all of a sudden the

government determines that they own habitat that this rat should live on. The problem with the San Bernardino kangaroo rat is it only lives in washes, which means every time it rains during the winter, the little critters drown and the reason they are becoming extinct is the little critters are too stupid to get out of the wash that they are drowning in and go somewhere else. So no matter what we do, those little critters year after year after year are going to continue to be less in population than they are today because they are too stupid to move out of a wash.

There is another great one in California called the Delhi sand-loving fly. I remember years ago when our parents ran this country, we used to swat flies and poison rats. Now we set aside habitat for them on privately owned property. Something is wrong with this country. I think it is incumbent upon us to change it. It is nice to give lip service about affordable housing, and I believe many of my colleagues who spoke today are genuine about a passion; but this resolution allows Members of Congress to actually do something besides give lip service, lean over and pound some nails, finish some concrete, hang some dry wall, put some roofing material on, put some plumbing in, run finish on electrical, paint, hang doors, run casing and base.

We can actually do something besides talk about it. Yes, it is a small gesture; but if you look at the problems we have caused because of the stupid laws and regulations we have placed on the building industry today, anything we do, even if it is small, will help. If we are really talking about helping people get into affordable housing, let us do something genuine about it. More government is not going to solve anything. Yes, more government has created a problem and some believe that government money now should resolve that problem and that is wrong.

If we would just step back at the Federal, State and local level and say, how do we reduce the regulations placed upon the building industry so a person can go out and reasonably buy a piece of property and in a given span of time can build homes instead of 3, 4, 5, 10 years of process. When you take 3 years to get an entitlement, it is costing somebody a lot of money to buy the property and hold it and pay all these consultants to work on the property.

In California, we require builders to go through title 24. That is energy efficiency, which means a home must be airtight, no air infiltration. They even limit it in most fireplaces you can put in that are man-made because they do not want air infiltration in a home. When you have water and no air infiltration, what do you get? Mold. One of the problems we are facing in this country is that insurance companies do not want to write policies because of mold. If we did not have the policies we have today dealing with energy efficiency, perhaps we would not have

some of the mold problems we have in this country.

When we talk about affordable housing, let us talk about it in reality. If you are going to have section 8 housing that is available, you have got to have an affordable move-up marketplace, and it is not there today. People in section 8 housing receiving government assistance cannot afford to move out of that house because there is not an affordable unit for them to move into. So if we really want to help people be able to get out of section 8 housing, to actually attain the rights that we believe they should have of homeownership and the luxury that goes along with that, with building assets and everything else, if we really want to do that, then let us look at the structure we have created. Let us pass a law that says any regulation at the State level or the city level that has any negative impact on the cost of housing must have a cost-benefit analysis and you must be able to determine that it is really beneficial to do that, not just something that makes people hug each other and feel good and pat each other on the back. Let us change the way we do business in this country.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. I just want to make sure I understand. The gentleman is proposing that we pass a Federal statute that would say that no local zoning regulation could go into effect?

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. I take back my time. What I said is a cost-benefit analysis. If you can do something and determine that there is a benefit in the regulations you are placing on affordable housing, that is fine. But for us to sit here and say, oh, we need to have more government programs and more government funding and yet we do not get to the core problem of affordability, you have to get to the core problem of affordability. There is no difference from us saying, let us, the Federal Government, fund housing but you have got to have everybody in agreement we are even going to put it there.

The problem you have with section 8 housing, and the gentleman from Massachusetts knows this to be a fact himself, is you go to many communities and you say you are going to build low-income housing and the whole community is in an uproar because they do not want it in their community because they start saying, you are going to have gang violence, you are going to have problems, you are going to have transients. They do not want it in their communities.

I am not saying that it is bad; I am saying that is just a fact. It is this NIMBY, not in my backyard attitude. That is a problem we face in this country, unless you will change the laws to where a builder has a reasonable time

to process a subdivision. Yes, let us look at the environmental impact that might be placed on the community of a project; let us look at the environment, if there are any species that are going to be harmed there. But let us do it in a reasonable span of time, not 3, 5, 10 years. I told the gentleman from Massachusetts of a project I owned for 12 years that I finally ended up selling to the city because nobody wanted it built, yet there was not a bit of flora or fauna that was in any way impacted, nor was there a species out there that was on the endangered species list. Let us look at the problem and let us work together to see that we are not overturning local rights, but let us work with the local communities.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. If the gentleman will yield further, I think the gentleman, however, is being inconsistent. I have been critical of the use of local zoning in many cases to block housing proposals, but I do want to be clear. These are local and State laws. The Endangered Species Act is Federal. But most of what the gentleman talked about are local and State laws, and I am asking the gentleman, is he proposing that at the Federal level we pass statutes that regulate and restrict and limit what form local zoning can take, saying that it has to have a cost-benefit analysis, et cetera? I might be interested in joining that, if that is what the gentleman is advocating.

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Reclaiming my time, if we look prior to 1948, the tax revenues in this country generally went to cities. It started to change after 1948. The State started taking more and the Federal Government started taking more. About 1972, it got so bad that locals were being deprived of so much money they could no longer afford to put the streets and the sewers and the storm drains in necessary to build homes. Why? Because the Federal Government and the State government got greedy and started taking the money from the people who need it, the cities. What we have done is create a situation where now the tax dollars are not put in the infrastructure; the builder puts in the infrastructure. Plus he pays for all the local mitigation and impacts that the community might face in some fashion, even if it is a signal 5 miles down the road that might be impacted in some fashion because this tract of 80 people living in it might impact that intersection.

But we have got to look at what government has done. Government has changed to such a degree that we have taken the money, become greedy; and now we do not want to address the problems we can address.

Mr. NEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of S. Con. Res. 43, which expresses the sense of Congress that this legislature should participate in and support activities to provide decent homes for the people of the United States.

The goal of this resolution is to encourage members of Congress to participate in Con-

gress Building America build events with Habitat homeowner families and local Habitat affiliates in their districts or states during the 108th and 109th Congress, and I urge each member's support of this resolution and to personally join with the Habitat for Humanity affiliates in their districts to help low-income families realize the American dream of homeownership.

I urge my colleagues to endorse this resolution that will not only express the sense of Congress in support of increased affordable homeownership opportunities, but will result in the building of hundreds of new homes for low-income and minority families across the country.

The fact that June is National Homeownership Month makes the scheduling of this concurrent resolution especially appropriate. For the vast majority of families, homeownership serves as an engine of social mobility and the path to prosperity. We are blessed to live in a country where every citizen—regardless of race, creed, color, or place of birth—has the opportunity to own a home of their own. And, new homeowners can create wealth for their families for generations to come, while also helping transform neighborhoods and communities.

The home has long held a place of mythic stature in the hearts and minds of Americans, as many of this country's forebears considered homeownership a key component of a democratic society. Homeownership creates stakeholders within a community and inspires civic responsibility. It offers children a stable living environment that influences their personal development in many positive ways—including improving their performance in school. Studies by housing experts show a clear link between an increase in homeownership and a decrease in crime rates.

In the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity this year, I plan to continue working hard to explore new ways to put people on the path to homeownership, so they can realize its many benefits. The Financial Services Committee already marked-up three housing bills last month by voice vote: H.R. 23, The Tornado Shelters Act, H.R. 1614, the HOPE VI Program Reauthorization and Small Community Main Street Rejuvenation and Housing Action of 2003, and H.R. 1276, The American Dream Downpayment Act.

The American Dream Downpayment Act, introduced by KATHERINE HARRIS of Florida, is a vital initiative in the creation of new homeowners. This bill would provide \$200 million in grants to help homebuyers with the downpayment and closing costs. This has the potential of assisting 40,000 families annually achieve the dream of homeownership and would make available subsidy assistance, averaging \$5,000, to help low-income, first-time home buying families.

In addition to moving these important pieces of legislation, the Subcommittee is in the midst of holding a series of hearings examining the current operation and administration of the Section 8 Housing Choice voucher program, which provides rental assistance to more than 1.8 million families. While the concept of the program remains sound, the program has often been criticized for its inefficiency. More than a billion dollars are recaptured from the program every year, despite long waiting lists for vouchers in many communities. The rising cost of the Section 8 program and some of the administrative concerns have caused many in

Congress and the Administration to conclude that the program is in need of reform. In the coming months, I look forward to hearing the different perspectives from our many distinguished witnesses as we continue to discuss ways to improve America's communities and strengthen housing opportunities for all citizens.

Congress Building America will enable Members of Congress to express their commitment to affordable homeownership by picking up hammers and nails and building alongside Habitat for Humanity families to make the American dream of homeownership a reality. This initiative is a hands-on approach to making affordable homeownership a reality, one family at a time, one community at a time.

Mr. OXLEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of S. Con. Res. 43, which expresses the sense that Congress should participate in and support activities to provide decent homes for the people of the United States. I urge my colleagues to not only join me in supporting this resolution, but to also join the thousands of Americans who volunteer their time to provide for those less fortunate.

This resolution calls upon Congress to support activities to provide decent homes for Americans and recognizes an organization that has been working towards improving housing conditions for over 27 years now. Of course, I'm talking about Habitat for Humanity, an organization that has built nearly 150,000 affordable houses for families worldwide and is planning to complete another 50,000 homes by 2005. In fact, Habitat for Humanity just dedicated two homes in my district in Mansfield, Ohio on Father's Day and more houses are being dedicated all over Ohio on an ongoing basis. Several local businesses and charitable organizations also help support the building of these homes. This kind of effort provides a great example of what we can accomplish when communities come together to assist their residents.

The resolution outlines a plan for a new initiative called Congress Building America, which calls upon the Members of Congress to demonstrate the importance of volunteer work by working with Habitat for Humanity and other contributing organizations to construct homes across the nation. This simple, but adequate, housing for less fortunate families, symbolizes the self-help approach to homeownership. Under this model, homeowners contribute sweat equity toward their new home, building it alongside trained volunteers. The new homeowner then has the opportunity to buy the home with a no interest mortgage. The average cost of these homes is \$53,000 with a monthly payment of around \$266. In most cases, the payment is even lower than what they were paying for substandard rental units.

Beyond the obvious benefit to the new homeowner, Habitat's work to provide safe, decent and affordable shelter for thousands of needy families adds to the national economy because it spurs the production and sale of goods and services, generates new jobs, encourages savings and investment, promotes economic and civic responsibility, and enhances the financial security of all Americans.

One of the greatest attributes of organizations such as Habitat is that the benefits of service go both ways. Not only are families in need of housing receiving benefits, but volunteers often find their service extremely rewarding as well. It is great to see so many young

people serving their fellow citizens by volunteering to help those less fortunate. Over 10,000 students have signed up to help Habitat for Humanity build houses through their Collegiate Challenge program breaking down barriers to homeownership and breaking down the stereotype of a typical college kid on spring break at the same time.

Clearly, there is still much work to be done. We are focusing our efforts to increase the availability of affordable housing in communities across the country. Today we are here to reaffirm that commitment and recognize all the hard work that has already been done. I would therefore like to take this opportunity during National Homeownership Month to thank those organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, that work to help families achieve the dream of homeownership.

I would also like to commend the Housing Subcommittee, chaired by Representative BOB NEY, today for its hard work to break down the barriers to homeownership faced by too many Americans. By the end of this week the subcommittee will have held 11 hearings as part of its effort to pursue an aggressive legislative agenda. At the top of that list is the American Dream Downpayment Act which will provide \$200 million in grant funds assisting approximately 40,000 low-income families with down payment and closing costs on their first homes.

I encourage my colleagues to join me in participating in the Congress Building America program and look forward to the many continued efforts which will build communities across the nation and help thousands of American families buy homes.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote for the passage of Senate Concurrent Resolution 43, the resolution that expresses the Congress's support for the Habitat For Humanity and the good work this great organization does for American families throughout the Nation.

I am proud to say that this wonderful institution was born in Americus, GA, within the district that I am so privileged to represent. Since its inception, this model of compassion and commitment to humanity has spawned similar groups, and has changed the way many Americans view the problem of homelessness and derelict housing. At this very moment somewhere in America, a home is being built by the Habitat For Humanity. The number of volunteers now exceeds 200,000 and is growing. More than 100,000 homes have been built and renovated, and more are being completed across the country at a rate of 1,000 per month. But we can do even more.

This resolution encourages Members of Congress to participate in "Congress Building America" events with local Habitat For Humanity affiliates in their home districts that will continue and increase the homebuilding effort all across America.

Mr. Speaker, Habitat For Humanity works. What seemed like a dream to those who had the vision in Americus so many years ago, is now becoming a reality. Decent housing for every American—thanks to Habitat For Humanity, this is an idea whose time has come.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ISAKSON). The time of the gentleman from California (Mr. GARY G. MILLER) has expired.

The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr.

GARY G. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate concurrent resolution, S. Con. Res. 43.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

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WAIVING POINTS OF ORDER AGAINST CONFERENCE REPORT ON S. 342, KEEPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SAFE ACT OF 2003

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 276 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 276

*Resolved*, That upon adoption of this resolution it shall be in order to consider the conference report to accompany the bill (S. 342) to amend the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act to make improvements to and reauthorize programs under that Act, and for other purposes. All points of order against the conference report and against its consideration are waived.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. SESSIONS) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. HASTINGS), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution is a standard rule for consideration of conference reports and waives all points of order against consideration of the conference report.

□ 1330

Mr. Speaker, the process of reauthorizing the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and the Family Violence Prevention Treatment Act completes a promise made to the American people that was begun in the 107th Congress. Unfortunately, the last Congress adjourned before consensus was reached between the two bodies on this very important issue. By taking up the conference report on the reintroduced legislation today, Congress is demonstrating an ongoing commitment to ensuring that programs to prevent child abuse, neglect, and family violence can continue to work and to protect American families.

The underlying conference report that we are debating maintains important Federal resources for identifying

and addressing issues of domestic violence. It supports efforts to ensure that the current programs designed to address these issues are operating effectively and efficiently, and that they promote the prevention of child abuse before these heinous acts can occur.

The conference report retains language promoting partnerships between child protective services and private and community-based organizations, including education and mental health systems, to provide child abuse and neglect prevention and treatment services. It improves the training, recruitment, and retention of individuals who are capable of providing services to children and families. It also increases the availability of casework supervisors for oversight and consultation, while simultaneously improving public education on the role of the child protective services system and appropriate reporting of suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect, to reduce the number of false or malicious allegations.

This conference report requires States to have provisions and procedures for administering criminal background checks to prospective foster and adoptive parents, and other adult relatives and nonrelatives residing in the household, and helps to improve the training opportunities and requirements of child protective services personnel to ensure their active collaboration with families, and their knowledge of legal duties with these individuals to protect children's individual rights.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation also requires States to implement policies and procedures to address the needs of infants born and identification as being affected by illegal substance abuse or withdrawal symptoms resulting from prenatal drug exposure, including the requirement that healthcare providers involved in the delivery or care of such infants notify child protective services of the occurrence of such conditions in infants. It then requires the development and planning of safe care for such infants.

Lastly, the conference report retains language that expands priority services to infants and young children who are born with a life-threatening condition or with other very special medical needs, to ensure that these special needs are met and that these special children have a chance in life.

If there is one issue upon which every single Member of this institution can agree, regardless of his or her political belief, it should be the need to prevent child abuse and domestic abuse. These atrocities and often silent crimes do lasting damage to the lives of individuals and the moral fabric of our society. There exists a responsibility incumbent upon each of us to enact laws that protect the most vulnerable in our society, and this conference report will go a very long way to accomplish that exactly that noble and moral goal.