

recreational anglers who fish in Maine's lakes will be unable to feed their catch to their children.

Mercury has made fish unsafe for children and pregnant women. We have known for years that many fish caught in fresh water posed a risk to our health. Now, just recently, we have confirmed that the canned tuna fish that we buy in grocery stores should not be eaten in large amounts either. Due to their position downwind of many of the most offensive mercury polluters, the people in Maine by themselves cannot control the amount of mercury in their communities.

As someone who enjoys fishing, I can say that the fishing in Maine remains some of the best in the country, but there was a time when it was not only about recreation; fresh water fishing also helped feed families.

In my district, the Maine Environmental Health Unit has a responsibility to inform the public of this mercury problem. For children and pregnant women, they have set a consumption advisory of zero for nearly every species of fresh water fish in Maine. They have also issued the following warning to the public: "It is hard to believe that a fish that looks, smells, and tastes fine may not be safe to eat, but the truth is that fish in Maine's lakes, ponds, and rivers have mercury in them. Mercury in the air settles into the waters. It then builds up in fish. Small amounts of mercury can harm a brain starting to form or grow. That is why unborn and nursing babies and young children are most at risk. Too much mercury can affect behavior and learning. It may cause numbness in hands and feet or change in vision."

Mr. Speaker, these words are not mine. These words are not political. These words are statements of scientific fact from an agency tasked with protecting our health. Mercury in our environment is dangerous to our health, and it is particularly dangerous to the health of our children. It is the responsibility of EPA and this administration to protect the public from mercury pollution.

Why does the administration not propose real mercury regulations? Contrary to some claims, it is not because of fear of losing jobs. Enforcing the Clean Air Act and limiting mercury pollution will not end the business of generating power in the Midwest. In fact, when the administration eliminated air pollution controls in August, people with high-paying jobs, with good benefits were actually laid off because of pollution control equipment that they installed was no longer needed.

The administration cannot outsource this problem. The responsibility to control mercury pollution is a challenge our country must face together. Recently we have heard reports from the Environmental Protection Agency that in creating its mercury proposal, usual EPA methods were not used. Sound science was not adhered to. Poli-

tics became more important than defending our health and our environment.

When EPA policy is taken word for word from the industry letters, there is a credibility problem there. The result of this mismanagement of mercury by the administration is a mercury plan that may violate the Clean Air Act and does little to make real, swift reduction in mercury released in the environment.

Because we have not stopped mercury pollution, the people of Maine continue to see their lakes and rivers polluted by a poison that cannot be controlled. The administration must understand that the American people expect the EPA to introduce a mercury rule that complies with the Clean Air Act and protects the health of our families. The administration must work with Congress to create an environment in which people can have good jobs, a clean environment, and a country where they can feed the fish that they catch to their children.

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his leadership on this particular issue.

Before we close here, it is worth going back to that study I mentioned at the beginning. In February of this year, just last month, a new study came out which showed that of the 4 million babies born in this country every year, some 630,000 have been exposed while they were fetuses to levels of mercury in their mothers' body that are considered unsafe. Instead of dealing with that threat, this administration has written a proposed rule limiting mercury written by the industry lobbyists.

What is happening is, now the EPA is going to go back and say try to do it over again, try to fix it up, but we do not know when they will do it or what they will do. This problem is growing. It is manageable.

I said earlier that the technology is available today so that we could establish a rule to phase in mercury pollution control equipment; we could have that rule take effect in 2007. The industry would have time to make the changes. Ninety percent reductions in mercury emissions today are feasible, they are possible, they can be done. The only resistance is coal-fired power plants do not want to spend the money. So on the one hand, we have the interest of an industry that have been major, major contributors to the majority party here and, on the other hand, the health of our children. It is, or ought to be, a simple choice. And we are here tonight to make sure that people understand that choice and encourage policymakers here to make the right one.

PARENTAL CHOICE IN EDUCATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PORTER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FRANKS)

is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, today we would like to address the House related to education. I think as all people have contemplated history and the betterment of human kind, most of the greatest leaders have recognized that some of the core hope of humanity lies in the education of its children. That is reflected by some of the words of great leaders of the past. Aristotle said, the longer I study the art of governing mankind, the more I realize that the fate of empires depends upon the education of youth. Teddy Roosevelt said, to educate a child not in line with moral capacity is to educate a menace to society. Thomas Jefferson said, the purpose of education is to create young citizens with knowing heads and loving hearts. And sometimes, Mr. Speaker, that loving hearts part complicates all of our lives, because it seems today in education we focus strictly on the academics of education. We forget that the real heart of education is indeed the education of the heart.

□ 1630

And I have to think sometimes, Mr. Speaker, that as we look across the spectrums of society and we recognize that some of the great tragedies in this world are not so much that our academics are out of kilter, but that sometimes our hearts simply have not been taught to truly respect and care about one another.

And I have had the beautiful privilege of teaching a group of 1 year olds in Sunday school for the past almost 21 years. And I have seen coming generations rise up around our knees. And as I look at how they grow up in the different areas they go into in life, it becomes very obvious to me that in nearly every case if a child is given the proper opportunity, they can grasp a lot of the academics of this world; but what they need to understand is that they are indeed a miracle, that they are part of a miracle of life, and that somehow that they were put here on this earth for a purpose. And I truly believe that that is where the education of the heart comes in.

But unfortunately, oftentimes in the public square in our country today, we run from the idea that parents or guardians should have any input in the foundational moral training of their children. It is left to the schools, and the schools make the decision and that is the way it is.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we make a great error in doing that. Because if a child understands that they are indeed a miracle, that they are put here on this earth for a purpose, then somehow they are part of a significant enterprise that really begs human description. Once they understand that they have that purpose, then they begin to grasp the academics. They have the motivation to learn science and math and history. They have the

convictions to go out and face the challenges of life without faltering when every wind of something that would distract them in life comes along.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we really, truly need to begin to consider this entire dynamic in our educational system. As it happens, we have decried socialism across the world. In fact, we have pointed out to almost everyone that the highway of history is littered with the wreckages of Socialist governments, of governments that somehow thought that collectivism and socialism transcended that of liberty and the worth of the individual and that of a rule of law and of a republic.

And if anything has demonstrated that over the last 10 to 20 years, it is the fall of the Soviet Union. It seems that socialism has been discredited across the planet in nearly every way, unfortunately except in our own school systems in America. And we have embraced the notion that government should be the one to make all of those decisions, that government should be the ones to decide the academics, that government policy should be the ones to allow the educational requirements of children and to dictate what those are. And in so doing we leave out the most important single factors in a child's life, and that is simply those people who love them more than anyone else can possibly understand, and that is their parents.

And I know that there is going to be an ongoing debate in this Chamber for many, many years related to parental empowerment in education. But Mr. Speaker, unless we as a people understand that children are not wards of state, that they are the gifts of God to their parents and to the world, unless we understand that parents have more concern and more understanding about their particular children than anyone else in the world, then we will fail the coming generations.

Mr. Speaker, I am reminded of a circumstance recently in Arizona, where I come from, where there was testimony on this very issue before the State legislature. And some of the parents groups were there, advocating that they should have a greater role in their children's education. And as it happened, the debate continued in a more heated manner. One of the bureaucratic members of government got up and said, "Well, we love your children just as much as you do." He said that to one of the parents. And one of the parents very succinctly said to the bureaucrat, he says, "All right. Tell me what are their names." And, of course, the bureaucrat was without an answer of any kind.

And I think that that really illustrates what the bottom line here is, and that is that no public or private group can really ever understand a child's most important needs like mom and dad do. I suppose that is reflected to a large degree by the magnificent success of home schooling in America. These are some of the smartest kids in the entire Nation.

And I am reminded that the Ark was built by amateurs and the Titanic was built by experts. It seems that parents, even many times without teaching degrees, are turning out the smartest children that we could imagine. And we as a society and as a Nation and as policymakers need to understand why that is true. And I, again, believe with all in my heart that it goes to the motivation of the child many times. It goes to the causing that critical curiosity that comes into the life of every child if given that opportunity.

I believe parents are in a better position to know what is best for their children. And that is why one of the things that I advocated in this body for the time that I have been here has been to empower parents in education. I believe that there is probably no greater thing that we could do for our children in terms of the philosophical underpinnings of the Nation and of their ability to face the future with a sense of hope.

The reality is that everywhere we have tried to empower parents, we have seen good results. We have seen it in places where there are vouchers programs. We have seen it in places where there are scholarship tax credit programs. We have seen it in places where there are school choice between the public school systems, where a child's parents can choose to put their child in this public school or the public school down the street. We have seen it anytime we empower parents to make choices, something good happens. We have seen it, as I said, in the home schools.

When we empower parents, we do good things for children. It is that beautifully simple.

Mr. Speaker, as it happens among those groups, among those approaches to educational choice, among those approaches to parental empowerment, the one that I believe has the very most hope in terms of a public policy outside the area of home schooling is this thing called scholarship tax credits.

I was privileged to write Arizona's scholarship tax credit many years ago. And now today we scholarship 21,000 children in Arizona. And the schools they go to are entirely left up to the parents. The mechanism is very simple. The mechanism is such that if an individual on a voluntary basis chooses to contribute to a scholarship fund for children to go to a school of their parents' choice, then the contributor gets a dollar-for-dollar reduction in their income taxes.

And essentially what that does, Mr. Speaker, is it calls upon the individual taxpayer to make a simple choice. Would I rather my money go to the bureaucrats or would I rather it go to children? And I have to say that is not a complicated task for many parents or many scholarship donors. They have a pretty clear perspective of which way that should happen.

One of the challenges, of course, in Arizona is that we really do not have

the money to put all the children that we would like to scholarship. But there are a lot of ancillary effects of this program, Mr. Speaker, one of which is that we have seen a definitive response by the government schools, by the public schools, to parental choice. We have seen that all of a sudden the schools there begin to have a much greater interest in what mom and dad have to say about education. Because they know now that mom and dad if they need to, if they choose, that they can move in a different direction, they can take their child to a different school.

When you empower parents like that, you create a dynamic between public schools and parents that is vitally important to the success of both.

As it happens, Mr. Chairman, about 90 percent of the parents in Arizona choose a faith-based school for their children, again being entirely up to them; but as many people would be detractors of such a choice, the reality goes back to the heart issues that we spoke of earlier.

And, Mr. Speaker, we talk about the problems with integration in our schools. And if one looks at some of the private faith-based schools, they are the most integrated schools in the entire Nation. And I have to say to my colleagues that when you give parents the ability to place their children in schools of their choosing, there are such a host of wonderful things that begin to occur. First of all, competition happens for the child. All of a sudden the child that might have been just a little bottom in the chair for the system becomes royalty to everyone in the system.

All of a sudden we begin to focus on the child rather than the system itself. All of a sudden parents matter, their opinions matter. Because if the schools could not respond effectively to the parents, then the parents simply have another option. All of a sudden the schools begin to say, all right, what are the dangers on this campus for children? What are the situations as far as bullying in our schools? All the things that we talk about in terms of public policy problems in the schools begin to be affected almost automatically.

All of a sudden those questions begin to be taken up seriously by the administrators because they recognize that they are competing for the child in a sense.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many other things I would like to add, but I see that a good friend of mine, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. HOEKSTRA) has come into the room. I would like to yield to Mr. Congressman HOEKSTRA for a moment and perhaps we can come back and discuss the issues a little bit more.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for yielding.

To have the opportunity to have this dialogue about empowering parents, empowering parents to give them a bigger role in the education of their children, there are a number of methods

now that States are employing to create a dramatic impact in improving their children's education.

I think my colleague and I agree that the most important thing in a child's education is having a caring and involved adult in their life. And whether it is a parent, whether it is a guardian, whether it is a mentor, whatever, but if a child has a caring adult in their life, who takes an interest in their education, that is a powerful motivator to ensure that that child has the ability to learn and has the ability to move forward.

And States are doing a tremendous amount of innovation and experimenting with how they provide parents with this option of selecting where their children go to school. Fifteen States today have various proposals for public school choice, inner- and intra-district choice programs, allowing students to transfer between public schools.

And then there are other States that provide slightly different versions of public school choice. One of the things, again, another version of public school choice, is charter schools. Today over 40 States and the District of Columbia have charter school laws. Again, giving parents the initiative of saying this is the school that best fits my child's needs. And it does not necessarily mean that the other schools are not good schools, but recognizing that certain schools will have certain strengths, not every school is exactly the same, and provides a better opportunity to tailor the match for the child to the school that they attend.

Six States have enacted voucher laws. My colleague has been very instrumental in another form, a modified form of school choice that opens up enhancing education for all of our kids, not only for those that might go to a private or parochial school, but also a public school, by putting more money into our school systems, public schools, and the private and parochial school systems with a tax credit program that my colleague not only introduced in the State of Arizona, but my colleague was the key move in, I think, a trend that is gaining a lot of interest. Because what it does is it not only empowers parents to select schools, but it also empowers parents to reward the schools or the community groups that they believe are doing a good job.

In the State of Michigan we passed a new education financing system that I think in many ways was positive. But after 10 years we have learned that there have been some unintended consequences. Our school administrators in some respects are now more beggars to the State Capitol than being focused where they should be, which is on the parents and the kids in their community. And there is really no way for a school district that is doing a phenomenal job to go back to the people of that community and say we want to do some special things for our kids and to get that money.

□ 1645

My hometown public schools have a declining enrollment. They cannot take costs down quick enough to reflect a declining enrollment, and so even though our public school system in Holland has always been a competitive advantage for the community, where companies would locate in Holland because they saw that we had a quality school system, it helped to attract, that school district can no longer go to the community and say if you want us to be a differentiator, that when a company is located saying are we going to locate in West Michigan, are we going to locate in Kentucky or somewhere else, one of the reasons that company is going to locate in west Michigan is they are saying they have got a great school district; they have put additional resources into that school, and I know that if I come to this community I will be able to attract the employees that I need because my employees are going to want to have a good school district for their kids.

Maybe you would want to share a little bit about what the impact of tax credits have been in Arizona, not only in improving public schools but enhancing choice for all of the kids in Arizona.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, I will have to say that my first response would be that among those 21,000 children who have received scholarships, it is almost impossible to relate the wonderful anecdotal stories that you get. Parents come to me and say, my child was failing in the public situation. They just were not doing well. It was not that the schools were not a good school. It just was not the right fit for them. Sometimes we overlook that. Oftentimes there is this notion that if you are for parental empowerment that somehow you are condemning all public schools, and that is not the case at all.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. If the gentleman would yield, I think that is critical because I think this is what I really want to reinforce because I think it is also a model that I would hope that we would consider here in Washington; and more importantly, I am hoping that it is a model that we will consider in the State of Michigan for putting more money into our public schools.

The tax credit that you designed in Arizona not only empowers scholarship organizations to give scholarships to low-income students to go to private and parochial schools, but it also provides a mechanism of funneling more money into our local public schools in Arizona. Is that correct?

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. That is correct, and it has the ancillary effect of causing parents to be more involved with that local public school. All of the sudden they have a stake in it personally. They have made a tax credit contribution to the school, and the schools then, of course, there is a dynamic. There is a communication that occurs

there; and as you said in your remarks earlier, one of the prime indicators of successful education is an involved adult, in other words, the parental involvement in the education.

In fact, if there was any single greatest factor in a successful child's education, and we talk about all the systemic approaches, but the greatest single involvement is parental involvement, and I think that is recognized in the home schools and private schools and public schools. It really oftentimes does not matter so much which one of those systems the child goes to as much as is the parent fully engaged and involved, and that is why I believe things like the tax credit for the public school and the tax credit for the private school option are so good because they, as a matter of course, as part of the logistics, they involve parents; and parents, when they are involved and have to make a choice, then not only are they more aware of the situation but they have an investment of their time and emotions, and they made a choice and now they have to make it work.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, maybe you can relate a little bit about the experience in Arizona. You talked a little bit about that there have been, what, 21,000 students in the State of Arizona who have been able to take advantage of a scholarship to attend a school of their choice; but there have also been significant amounts of money that have flowed back into the public schools where parents who are very satisfied with what is going on in their public school, the public school has identified a specific need.

We did a hearing on this I think 4 or 5 years ago as this concept was starting to come out. I think that is what really intrigued me is it did not pit one sector of our education system against another, the privates against the parochials. This actually ended up being a win-win situation for education in general because it became a new way to voluntarily fund the public and private and parochial system, a voluntary way to move more money into educating our kids.

I will yield back to have you explain some of the results that you have seen in Arizona.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Well, the gentleman is exactly correct. As it happens, somewhere around \$100 million has been raised for children to go to the private school of their parents' choice.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. This is \$100 million voluntarily, correct? This is not \$100 million where the legislature in Arizona passed a new tax and said we are upping our sales tax by half a percent or changing the income tax? This is \$100 million that people voluntarily in Arizona said we are going to pump this money back into our education system to help educate our kids and provide a higher level and a higher quality of education?

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. The gentleman is exactly correct. Approximately \$100 million has gone to the private scholarship groups and approximately 120 million additional dollars have gone into the public school setting.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. So over \$220 million, voluntarily going into education?

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. That is correct, and of course, that is the voluntary aspect of it, which, as you mentioned, is vitally important; but it also has engaged the parents. One of the things that we are seeing is a decided increase in Arizona among those parents who are highly satisfied with their public school experience, and we are convinced that there is a clear connection between the two because anytime that there is a motivation and incentive for parents and schools to talk, it usually creates a better environment altogether.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman may want to just explain for folks exactly how the tax credits work. How is this tax credit different perhaps than a voucher system that is maybe being used in some other States? Then we can talk a little bit about the advantages of the tax credits versus vouchers and that kind of thing.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. I will be happy to do that. I thank the gentleman.

The single most important difference between vouchers and tax credits is the fact that with the tax credit, all of the contributions that go into the system are entirely voluntary and they never go through government coffers. Now, you say, well, that is a simple difference; but it creates all kinds of ripple effects, all kinds of ancillary differences.

For instance, those people who are concerned that if they send their child to, say, a faith-based school down the block and that if they send them with a voucher that somehow the scary, insidious hand of government will come in and tell them to take down their cross or Star of David or whatever the case might be. Under the scholarship tax credit approach they would have very little to worry about because there is simply no connection to government in that regard. The moneys go into a private charity, which 90 percent of those moneys then go to the scholarship for the child.

When you consider the expenditures there, there is a significant difference. I mean, about 56, 55 percent of our dollars that come appropriated from this body go into the classroom; but overwhelmingly, when people contribute on the private scholarship tax credit, about 90 percent of those go directly for tuition of the child.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield. I mean, that is one of the frustrating things that we have here, and I think that is an important statistics.

We passed a bill here a couple of years ago that entitled dollars to the

classroom because we did a survey of the Education Department. We found that the Education Department and the other Federal agencies had over 760 different specific education programs, not all of them obviously in the Department of Education, not all of them obviously targeted to K through 12 education; but we do not have that many different kinds of education systems that you said, well, it makes sense to have 760 different education programs.

Then what we started doing is we started taking a look at how those dollars flow. We appropriate money into one of these programs, so we send it to a K through 12 school with a list of rules and regulations, or we send it to the State. The State then has to administer it and send it down to a local school district, and again, it gets to a local classroom, perhaps with some rules and restrictions on it. They then have to report back to the State, and the State has to report back to Washington and say we spent the money exactly the way that you told us to and within the restrictions of the program.

Of course, we know that the folks at the local level cheat, so we then send in our auditors. We send in our auditor from Department of Ed down to the State, down to the local school district to audit, and the school district has to justify and keep the records that they spent the money exactly the way that they did. Then we end up with the scary numbers that you said, somewhere between 50 and 60 percent of every dollar actually going into educating a child. Somewhere between 30, 35, 40 percent of every education dollar we spend in Washington goes into bureaucracy by deciding where the money is actually going to go. Somebody's got to divide it up at the Federal level and the State level, and we have got to track and monitor and audit.

What we tried to do a couple of years ago was kind of like what happens with the tax credit program. As we were saying, 90 cents gets into a classroom. What we tried to say here in Washington, would it not be great if every education dollar we spend at a K through 12 level, if we could get 95 cents of every dollar into the classroom educating a child and get rid of the rules and regulations, get rid of the bureaucracy.

It is exactly one of the points that the President had in his No Child Left Behind bill of giving States and local school districts more flexibility, but that part of the bill was left on the cutting room floor. It got cut out of the bill, but I could not help but think of that when you were talking about the effective nature of voluntary tax dollars going into a scholarship fund, and then that scholarship offering it to a student and 90 cents of every dollar gets to that local school versus what we do here in Washington. It is a very efficient way of getting money into a school.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Absolutely. I find it fairly telling that from the

Federal Government perspective that we supply about 7 percent of the funding for education that goes to the States. In other words, the total funding that it takes to educate a child in the public school system, about 7 percent of that money comes from the Federal Government; but when you consider that over 55 percent of the paperwork that the school has to do is mandated by the Federal Government and there is something horribly wrong about all that, because it just underscores everything that you said, and if you consider across the country, on the average, private schools cost approximately half, if you just measure them all out and average them all out, about half what the public school systems cost, and yet on the average they will educate a child academically about one to two grade levels higher in the same respective area.

There is something to be learned there. Oftentimes people say that is because the private schools skim. Now, I think there are some other differences. First of all, classroom size; second of all, certainly in Arizona, for every two teachers, we have more than one administrator, but when you look at the private settings, you have about one administrator for every 19 teachers. So there is an entirely different overhead dynamic, and I just think sometimes we need to look at just some of the financial dynamics there.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, we did a program called Education at a Crossroads, where we went around to schools; and I do not know, 13, 14 different States, and we asked those kinds of questions, what kind of paper do you have at the administration level, and all those kinds of things. The local administrators would be the first ones to say we share the same vision that you have. We want parental empowerment; we want the parents to want to send their kids to our schools; we want to get the dollars into the classroom; we want that to be the focus.

I still remember a press conference we did where we brought out the reams and reams of paperwork that these school districts are required to send to Washington, and obviously if they have got to send all this stuff to Washington there has got to be somebody that fills it all out. The thing that we never did find was when you send all of that paperwork into Washington and we would have a huge stack from just a local school district, who in Washington is the person that reads all of that stuff? I think that we never found that person or that Department, and that is why the flexibility is so important.

So even though in some of our schools the ratio of teacher to administrator is very different than what you may find in another setting, if it is a private or parochial setting, that is not necessarily where the administrators want to be. They would prefer to put as

much money into the classroom because they have got the same focus that we have.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, that is pointed out very clearly in the year 2000 where only 52 percent of staff employees in public schools were teachers, about half; and many of them I am convinced that were not teachers would certainly have wanted the money to go towards instruction. If you look at the same year, only 52.4 percent of the nearly \$382 billion spent nationwide on education, only about half was spent on instruction.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. What is the number?

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. 382 billion in the year 1999 through 2000 school year. Only 52 percent was spent on instruction.

□ 1700

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, what this tells us is a very important thing. This is not an issue of money. We are spending a tremendous amount on education, but we are spending a tremendous amount of it in the wrong place, and it is partly because parts of the No Child Left Behind, that never made it into law, was to give local school districts and States relief from the paperwork burden that sucks up valuable education dollars away from the kids and puts it into a bureaucracy either at the State capital or here in Washington.

Like I said, and I think the gentleman agrees with me, the teachers, the principals, the administrators at the local level want to do what we are saying; they want to focus those dollars in the classroom. But they recognize that when they get as many mandates as they get from Washington, D.C., they have to have the piece of paper and the forms filled out; they have to dot the I's and cross the T's or they get in trouble.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is exactly right. We have an estimated number of Federal programs, so when we talk about how we create these programs for the States, there are over 700 of them. And I would suggest to my colleagues that these mandates and regulations and ineffective programs make it very difficult for the local schools at the State level to comply with this.

What they do in the meantime, and this is shocking, but \$84 million in State education funds were recently returned to the U.S. Treasury because States had not used it for more than 3 years. I am convinced they are just ready to pull their hair out because they could not deal with these complex mandates we put on them from the Federal Government.

I think there is a bigger issue here, and that is sometimes the Federal Government just needs to get out of the way and let the States and parents make the decisions on education. Because it seems like the more we get in-

involved from the Federal level, the more we have a tendency to mess things up.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. The gentleman used the word that we talk about quite often. School districts and principals and teachers at the local level are forced to comply. Compliance means you adhere to the rules, but it also means your focus has changed from where it needs to be, which is educating the child to complying with the rules. And the teachers and principals at the local levels want to focus on our kids.

All these programs and all these rules and regulations move us away from where the gentleman and I started today when we started talking about parental choice. We talked about parental empowerment and recognizing that the tie between the parent and the child and the local school district is absolutely critical, and that when we put in funding schemes like we have in Michigan that say the money is no longer going to come from the local level and the people in the community, but it is going to come from these folks over here in Lansing, we weaken that.

When we send in a bunch of programs and a bunch of mandates from Washington, it weakens the ability of the folks at the local level to take a look at the needs of Johnny and say, What do I need to do for Johnny? They have to say, Wait a minute, I have this form 1081 with this program and I have to fill this out, and that means I have to do this. I have to fill this report out after class today, or I have to fill it out at the end of the semester. Again, it weakens that link between the parent, the teacher, and the child and that local community and it forces these people to look to Washington, which is the last place they should be looking to as to who needs to be educated in their community.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that this body is essentially the school district for the Washington, D.C. schools. Perhaps the nomenclature is a little different, but the reality is we are in charge of trying to make sure that the Washington school districts here in the District of Columbia operate effectively. Now, in Arizona, just to give a comparative, about \$6,800 per year in the public school system is what it takes us to educate a child, when you add maintenance and operations along with the cost of facilities. But here in Washington, D.C. it is over \$12,000. It is the highest in the Nation.

If we know what we are doing here in terms of educational policy, why is the one school area that we are most in charge of costing the most and have some of the poorest schools in the Nation?

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will once again yield, that is one of the ironies here. The gentleman is right. Many in Washington would say that the Congress functions as their school board, and yet we do spend somewhere upwards of \$12,000 per student in the city of Washington, D.C.

I know that for most of the school districts in west Michigan, the area that I represent, the number that they get per child is somewhere in the neighborhood of \$6,700 to maybe somewhere around \$8,000, maybe a little over \$8,000, but in that range, and they would be saying, wow, if I got \$12,000, and even for the most or the best funded school district in west Michigan that is another \$4,000 per student, that would be a 50 percent increase, what would I do with all that money? And then, of course, they look at the results here, and those are not very good results.

I remember when we did the "Education at the Crossroads" hearings, we did a district in Alabama, and it was very interesting. They had one of the lowest per-student funding ratios in the State and they had the highest test scores. So we asked them what they attributed this kind of performance to, because they did not get a lot of money, yet their scores were phenomenally well. The answer was, well, we only get enough money to focus on the basics. We do not do a lot of the peripheral stuff. We cannot do it. We cannot afford it. So all we do is, day in and day out, we focus on the basics.

That is not saying these other things are not worthwhile, but it means that they have to get the foundation and the basics done first. And I do not want to put a number out there, but if you gave that school district \$12,000 per student, they would not know what to do with the money because they are doing it with a whole lot less and getting outstanding results.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, I think that perhaps one of the greatest dynamics of this debate is the whole cost structure. On the average, and I will speak for Arizona because that is the State I am from, about \$6,800 per student when we educate that child in a public school, whether it is an inner city school or rural school. If you average it all together, it is about \$6,800. In Arizona, the average private school is approximately half of that, and yet, again, they outperform the public schools on the average. In Arizona, the average home schooler is approximately half of that, and yet they are the most outstanding academic children. They perform academically better than just about any other children in the State.

Consequently, I think that the obvious inference there is it is not just the money. In fact, it seems like we have to pay more for worse results on a regular basis. I am just convinced that rather than trying to argue about which system is better, we need to start looking at home schooling and the private schools and see what are they doing that the public schools are not doing. What are they doing that government can learn from, rather than to compete so much all of the time? Let us find out what they are doing that is making things work for children. I am convinced that that would have a big impact here.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Well, I have spent a lot of time trying to find a common ground between the various forms of education in Michigan, whether it is home school, private schools, a charter school, or a public school, recognizing that each one of these plays a vital role in our total education system; and, also, very frankly, recognizing that when you are in the State of Michigan and you are talking about education reform, you are going to have to design it as a win-win that says there is something in here that is going to enhance the ability of public schools to compete, to educate our children, as well as enhance the educational opportunities for private and parochial schools.

One system is not inherently better than the other and one system should not be inherently favored over the other. Again, this is why I am very much intrigued by the concept that the gentleman has successfully promoted, which is a tax credit, which is a win-win for all of those. I do not think, as it is written, Arizona allows or provides a benefit for home schoolers, does it?

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. It does not, unless the home school would have some type of satellite classroom setting, and I would hope and look for the day that it would. Because, again, there is no one that has a higher opinion and a greater respect for the home schoolers of this country than I do. They simply have done such a magnificent job that all of us could learn greatly from them. I hope we do.

Interesting to the gentleman's point, one of the great educational philanthropists in this country, John Walton, recently said in a roundtable that, "In any system, if you want to increase the attention a group receives, you must increase their power. The best way to empower school children and parents is to let them direct the money."

Mr. HOEKSTRA. That is exactly the point. What happens when we pass legislation out of Washington that empowers Washington, that gives them more authority, it means that people at the local level have to spend more time focusing on Washington bureaucrats. In Michigan, when we moved the funding from the local level to Lansing, it meant that the local administrators now would have to spend more time focused on Lansing rather than the interest in their community.

That does not mean that what we have done in Michigan is bad, but it is a recognition that that should be counterbalanced. Because where do we want the power and the influence for our local schools? Do we want it in bureaucrats in Washington, in Lansing, or do we want it in my hometown of Holland, with parents? Do I want it around a kitchen table or around a PTA table?

I want it in my local school districts, because in some cases now in my local community, the parents kind of walk away and say, Pete, what can we do? We cannot raise the money.

We had an inner-city school that a lot of people in the community wanted to keep open, but there was nothing that our superintendent could do to go to the community and say, this is not the most efficient way to run our school system by keeping this school open, but I really think it is important to the sense of community and the city of Holland that we leave that school open. He could not go to the community and say, if you agree with me, great, then give me the money to do it. They never had the opportunity to say there is something more important here than just the bottom line on dollars and cents.

There is a sense of community for that part of our town and the belief that using what somebody might describe as being an inefficient way of educating our kids by having that community school right there, that local neighborhood school right there, even if it is a little bit more inefficient, because it gets a better result.

We have to focus and give our people at the local level and the parents and administrators at the local level the opportunity to design a system that works, not necessarily the one that is the most efficient. Because it does not do us any good if it is the most efficient, but we do not get the kind of results that we want.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, I think that if we look at the American economy, how it differs from, let us say Socialist countries in the world, and we see that we have placed nearly all of the direction of this economy, this monstrous productive American economy, in the hands of the consumer, in the hands of the everyday purchaser. Now, the reality is that there are always groups that join together and have economies of scale and magnify their purchasing power. But the reality is we have understood in this country that free enterprise and giving this over to private individuals has been a magnificent engine of productivity in this country.

Across the world I have seen that we are the most productive economy in the history of humanity, and it is not because we are so much smarter than anybody else. It is simply because we have a better system. I would suggest that sometimes those that would denigrate trying to pull free enterprise and parental empowerment and choice into education forget the lessons of history.

There were times when someone came along and said about Federal Express, when it came along, that it would destroy the post office. Well, not only did it not destroy the post office, it actually made them far more efficient. We send a letter across the country now in 2 days rather than 5 or 6. We have some of the more efficient efforts in the postal system than we have ever had. The postal system, many times, gives money back to the Treasury now, instead of us having to appropriate billions of dollars more.

The same thing happened with the telephone system when we deregulated

it and turned that back into the hands of consumers. When we let people make their choices about what was best for them, we revolutionized communications. All of a sudden people had cell phones everywhere. It has become the bane of our society, I think, to see and hear cell phones ringing everywhere, but people can send pictures using their cell phones, they can call Australia for 10 cents a minute, they can look up their Web site on their cell phone, and almost everyone has one these days. And it is because we knew if we could deregulate those things, that an engine of innovation would occur.

□ 1715

Mr. Speaker, it astonishes me in this country that we have had the insight to increase the efficiency of the mail and the telephony of this country, and yet we do not afford our children the same opportunity to have competitive excellence in education.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, I believe the gentleman is absolutely right. I do not believe we have even begun to tap the full potential to reform K-12 education with the technology that is out there today. How can we really revolutionize K-12 education? Rather than accepting the status quo, what can we do? We have some tremendous needs.

We have a much more diverse society than what we had before, so we need to assimilate children. We need to get them to learn English. I sit on the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. The other thing we need to have happen, as we have more kids who need to learn English, we have a tremendous need for children here to learn another language because we are in a global marketplace. How do we explore what they are doing in Europe where many kids speak two, three, four different languages? That is not done here.

I think there is a tremendous opportunity to investigate different means of learning. I think one of the ways that will happen is by allowing educational opportunities and choices to flourish and then empowering parents so they can align their child with the school that they best believe fits their child's needs.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. I cannot agree more. Several things occur when we empower parents as essentially the customers of education. We say education should not be a customer-driven thing. I suppose we can say that about anything; but one thing is sure, when we do have a market-driven situation, we get better quality, greater innovation, and a drastic reduction in costs.

I am convinced that those same things would happen for the educational system in this country if we injected parental empowerment and competitive excellence into the system.

But a fourth thing occurs, which is when we empower parents to choose their children's education, those parents with a philosophy of one kind are

able to direct their children in that direction. Those with a philosophy of a different kind can do something else. I am afraid if we do not start looking into some of these hard issues, deeper issues in our educational system, we may grow a generation with great academic skills, but very little concern for their fellow human beings.

It is especially difficult when some, forgive me, some intellectual pigmy masquerading as a Federal judge says that children in the public school system cannot say the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. That essentially vitiates much of the efficiency of the system entirely. I am concerned if we do not begin to realize it is not just academics, that academics are important, but it is not just academics, that we are going to see a new generation that does not know who Abraham Lincoln is, that does not who George Washington is and what they stood for and the things that made this country the greatest Nation in the history of the world.

That is why I am so deeply committed to seeing that education is given a greater sense of parental empowerment and competitive excellence. It will be the salvation of the public school systems, and in my judgment it will be to the betterment of the coming generations.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, it is kind of interesting, the gentleman brings up the judicial pronouncements, and they have been going on since the early 1960s with school prayer, and there has been a very serious unintended consequence. I was at a school in Michigan for a graduation. I looked at the program. It said opening prayer. I kind of looked at the superintendent and nudged him and said, You cannot do that. He kind of looked at me and laughed and said, We can here. Then I looked over at the diploma table and there were a stack of books over there. I said, What book are you handing out? He said, Well, we are handing out the Bible to all of our graduates. I had a smile on my face and said, You cannot do that here. And he kind of laughed and said, We do.

What some of the court pronouncements have done, they have broken the bond between the school and the community because public schools represented local community values, not to an extreme; but when you get a pronouncement from some judge in California about what some school in Arizona or some rural school in Michigan or Illinois or Indiana can do, and that now becomes the law of the land, and the people in Indiana or Michigan or Arizona never had any problem, they look and see what book is being handed out, and for 100 years this school has been handing out a Bible at graduation, and we are not telling people what to believe or whatever. It breaks the bond. Again, it is one of those barriers that comes up between a local public school and their community, and these are the barriers that I think

are making it so difficult for our local public schools that have been so successful, but we are creating all sorts of barriers.

We are creating judicial rulings from California and other places that break that bond. We are moving funding away from the local level. We are moving rules and regulations in from Washington that tell them how to do their business, and all of that gets in between a local school, a parent and their child. That is a huge problem.

We ought to talk about what you are planning on doing here in Washington. We have talked about all of the money spent here in Washington on K-12 education, all of the money for the rapid acceleration on Federal spending on K-12 education, and it is all going through programs and mandates. When you start a new program, you send it to a school. That program comes with strings attached.

But the gentleman has another view, a version of a tax credit bill that he would like to see enacted here in Washington that would, rather than empowering bureaucrats, would empower parents. So it says Washington is going to become more balanced, we are going to fund money directly for programs that we think are of high priority, but at the same time we are going to do something to strengthen that bond between a parent and the educational system in their community by going to the same win-win proposal as they have in Arizona, which was tax credits.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. We have introduced the Children's Hope Act, and the gentleman is a cosponsor. All of us are very appreciative of that. The Children's Hope Act is essentially a bill in Congress designed to create an incentive for other States to create their own scholarship tax credit such as the ones in Arizona, Florida and Pennsylvania. The idea, of course, is to empower the States, the local governments, and the parents exactly in the opposite order: the parents, the local governments, then the States, and then lastly have the Federal involvement.

Instead of trying to create a monolithic program here that we control, and as has been demonstrated, we do not control things very well from this body, if we can empower the parents in the greatest way possible, we can do the States the greatest favor possible in my judgment. The Children's Hope Act will create a Federal tax credit. It would simply allow people to pay less Federal income taxes if they contributed to educational efforts in their own State. This is especially focused on the scholarship tax credit programs for tuition organizations that give tuition to children to go to the schools of their parents' choice.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. And it is intended to help public schools as well?

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. It lets the States make that decision. We tried to create the broadest possible latitude for the States and the local governments there to do that. Certainly if we

look at, and there is a lot of criticism that Washington no longer cares about education, and they measure our concern for education in funding, but the reality is our funding for education in Washington has gone up precipitously, and in my judgment that is in the wrong direction.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. The funding from Washington may not necessarily be all that bad if there was balance. But what we have done is we have funded bureaucracy, bureaucracy which has written more rules and more regulations for local school districts. We have talked about the impact that has had. It is smothering our local public schools with overhead and administrative costs and taking dollars out of the classroom. A tax credit would begin to bring a little bit of balance that says rather than putting more money into empowering bureaucrats, we are going to put some money into empowering parents and rebridging that gap between parents and local schools and their children.

That is the important thing, to give at least some of this money the opportunity to be driven by the parents in their local community, rather than by a bureaucrat here in Washington.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. There are two ways the Federal Government can return money to the States. They can appropriate money with all of these bureaucratic mandates; or they can simply say to the States, here is an idea, if you do it yourself, you will have to send less money to the Federal Government in the first place. That is what the Children's Hope Act is predicated upon. It creates an incentive for States to take care of their own efforts by empowering parents and sending less money to the Federal Government.

I am convinced that this solves a lot of the problems across the board.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced we can accomplish so much if the Children's Hope Act is passed. It puts the scholarship tax credit on the radar of the States in general. It looks at what is happening in Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Florida. If we can empower parents and create a new movement toward competitive education, towards competition, towards competitive excellence in education, I think we can do more for this coming generation than anything else.

And I would suggest to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. HOEKSTRA) that the implications are pretty significant. Abraham Lincoln said the philosophy of today's classroom is the philosophy of tomorrow's government, and how our children grow up and the days that exist now will certainly dictate the kinds of philosophies that fill these seats across this room. I would appropriate the words of one of our predecessors of a long time ago, Daniel Webster. Daniel Webster said it this way. He said if we work on marble, it will perish. And there is a lot of marble around here. If we work on brass, time will efface it. There is a lot of brass in

this place. If we rear up temples, they will crumble in the dust. But if we work upon immortal minds and imbue them with principles with the just fear of God and the love for our fellow men, we engrave on those tablets something that will brighten to all eternity.

That is what it is really all about here. This is more than just a bureaucratic struggle over who has control over what happens. It is about trying to make sure that the foundations and the underpinnings of America and the great principles that have made us the greatest Nation in the history of the world remain in the hearts of the coming generations. That is certainly my belief, and I yield to the gentleman to express his perspective.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, there is not much I can add to Daniel Webster or the gentleman's rendition of Daniel Webster.

On occasion I have an opportunity to give a tour of the Capitol at night. One of the places I go to is the other body. I go to the desk that was Daniel Webster's desk and tell the stories about him. He was a great orator, a very wise man, as the gentleman has quoted him. I think his quotes would be a very appropriate place to end this Special Order.

□ 1730

A LOOK BACK ON THE ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PORTER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks on the subject of my special order.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight along with fellow members of the Congressional Black Caucus to discuss the ongoing war in Iraq. As you well know, tomorrow will mark the 1-year anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I am sure you would agree, Mr. Speaker, that this is one anniversary that will not be commemorated with a joyous celebration. Instead, this anniversary will be met with somber reflection upon those lives, both military and civilian, that were lost or forever changed as a result of this tragic war.

Just last year, Mr. Speaker, President Bush told the American people, and I quote, "I want Americans and all the world to know that coalition forces will make every effort to spare innocent civilians from harm." Yet just 1 year later, the New York Times is reporting that somewhere between 3,000

and 5,000 innocent Iraqis have been killed as a result of this war. In fact, as of yesterday, there have been 566 Americans, 59 Britains, 5 Bulgarians, 1 Dane, 1 Estonian, 17 Italians, 2 Poles, 10 Spaniards, 2 Thai and 3 Ukrainians that have died in Iraq. And according to the Pentagon, there have been over 3,000 U.S. troops wounded. Those troops are some of the same people that I see in Walter Reed when I visit.

I was just at Walter Reed 2 weeks ago. When I see the young men and women who have gone off into war, many of them coming back missing a leg, an arm, two legs, many of them feeling a bit disoriented, many of them feeling confused, many of them just simply trying to get, as one soldier said, from one day to another, again, this commemoration will not be a joyous one.

Mr. Speaker, we in the Congressional Black Caucus wholeheartedly believe in the principles of peace. We also believe in the principles of freedom as well as a necessity for America to provide security for all of her citizens. But we also wholeheartedly believe in protecting the sanctity of human life.

Mr. Speaker, just last year, President Bush convinced the Nation that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and thereby posed an imminent threat to our national security. And while there have been questions as to whether our data from the CIA and other organizations was accurate, the fact still remains to this day that no weapons of mass destruction have been found. I think, Mr. Speaker, that that is one of the things that makes it so painful for so many of the families. We see them on network television and we see them on the cable shows, those families who say that they believe in this country, that they raised their boys and girls as little children to put their hands up to their hearts and to say the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. They taught them to be patriotic. They taught them to stand up for what they believe in. They taught them to stand up for the Office of the President, but, more significantly, to stand up for one of the greatest countries in the world. And so from little children they stood up and they said, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

Those parents who now see their sons and daughters in many instances sadly coming back in sealed caskets, coming back with limbs missing, some of them have begun to ask the question, Why is it that we went to war? For when we went to war, Mr. Speaker, they did not hear the term "regime change." That is not what they thought. They thought that there was imminent danger. They thought our country was in deep trouble. I am sure that as they stood at the air bases and as they stood at the train stations and as they waved good-bye to their sons, to their husbands, their wives, to their sisters,

their brothers, their friends, they said they are going off because of these weapons of mass destruction that the President had told them about.

Mr. Speaker, I am not here to beat up on the President because that is not appropriate. But I am here to remind us of why we went to war. I think that so often what happens is that we get so caught up in the political fray that is going on that we forget that when those parents stood at those various departing stations that they thought they were going for one reason, and then once the war got started and moved forward and as weapons of mass destruction were not found, we then began to hear new reasons.

And so it is when the President said that we were going to destroy these weapons, and although I must say that the Congressional Black Caucus begged on this floor the President to think very carefully before going to war, this Congressional Black Caucus begged, because we said that the number one thing that we must always protect is the lives of human beings, be they American soldiers, be they American civilians, or be they the Iraqi innocent people, we must always look at life as the number one priority. But then we went to war.

But before we went to war, we asked the President, Are American lives in imminent danger? We asked the question over and over and over again. Sadly, back then, we could not get an answer. But the implication was that we had major, major problems and that these weapons of mass destruction could be released at any time and could do so much harm.

We asked other questions, too. One of those questions was as we proceed with this war, how is it going to be paid for? Who is going to pay for it? The President was very generous in an answer when he talked about the war.

I shall never forget sitting in one of these seats as I listened to him. One of the things that he said was that this war had come to us, we did not go to it. He went on to say that we had to act now and we had to act so that our children and our grandchildren and their offspring would not have to deal with this issue and would not have to pay for this. And so again our soldiers went off to war, believing that as they marched onto the soil of Iraq that they were making sure that the weapons of mass destruction, when found, would be done away with so that no harm would not only come to the Iraqi people but to the world.

But, Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but ask, if the ultimate goal of this preemptive war was to disarm Saddam Hussein, was our mission really accomplished? Could we have reached the same end by utilizing a different means? Day after day as I listen to my colleagues come upon this floor and talk about how it is that we now have Saddam Hussein in custody and how we have gotten rid of this tyrant and we have locked up this person who was