

for students, simplified the financial aid process, and provided additional resources for needy students studying math, science, and critical foreign languages in college. All the while, we have made certain that student aid programs operate more efficiently, saving U.S. taxpayers billions as part of this Congress' goal to rein in runaway entitlement spending.

It is my hope that the House will soon renew remaining Higher Education Act programs by passing the College Access and Opportunity Act, H.R. 609. This bill would strengthen the Pell grant program, empower parents and students through sunshine and transparency in college costs and accreditation, and improve college access programs. The measure was passed by the Education and Workforce Committee last summer, and I look forward to working with my colleagues from both parties to see it pass here on the House floor as well.

As Mr. KILDEE mentioned, in 1998 we worked very closely together in reauthorizing the Higher Education Act. And I am certain that we will be able to work very well in passing H.R. 609, hopefully in the next few weeks.

In the meantime, Congress again must act to extend the Higher Education Act which we have done previously on several occasions with bipartisan support. And today I rise in support of the legislation to do so once again. H.R. 4911, the Higher Education Act, will ensure that vital Federal college access and student loan programs continue to serve those students who depend upon them. This legislation extends the Higher Education Act for a brief time, 3 months, to allow the student aid program reforms enacted last month to take full effect on July 1, 2006. At the same time, H.R. 4911 also gives Congress additional time to complete a renewal of the remaining higher education programs as well.

Each year, more and more American students participate in higher education programs at our Nation's colleges and universities. The new realities of an increasingly competitive global economy made clear that higher education is more important than ever before. That is why the Federal investment in the Higher Education Act is so vital. Millions of low- and middle-income students aspire for a college education, and we are depending on these young men and women to lead our Nation into the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation before us today is a necessary step to keep programs under the Higher Education Act from expiring. Too many students depend on this assistance, and we cannot allow it to lapse. However, we must remain focused on completing comprehensive reforms to build upon these programs.

With the enactment of the Deficit Reduction Act, we are halfway there. The extension we will vote on today is a bridge to the balance of our work, the College Access and Opportunity Act. I

encourage my colleagues to support the bill before us today and work with us in the coming weeks and months to complete a fundamental reform package so we can better serve American students pursuing the dream of a college education.

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. BISHOP).

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Mr. Speaker, let me start by congratulating our new chairman, the distinguished gentleman from California (Mr. McKEON). I am confident that he will be an excellent chairman and he will preside over our committee with fairness and bipartisanship and with the best interest of America's students and our workforce at the forefront.

And let me also congratulate Mr. KELLER on his appointment as the chair of the 21st Century Competitive Subcommittee. I look forward to working with him as well.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4911 with the hope that this third extension of the Higher Education Act may be the last short-term measure we need to pass before we produce an improved bipartisan and long overdue reauthorization bill that also reflects the best interests of America's college students.

As many of these students continue receiving their college acceptance letters, their families are now calculating how they can squeeze rising tuition and expenses into their budget. This is an uphill struggle made tougher by the President's budget for education which freezes Pell grants for the fifth year in a row, recalls the Federal portion of the Perkins Loan revolving fund, and freezes funding for the SEOG program and for work-study.

Students have done their part by working hard and getting accepted to college. Families have done their part by saving for college. Now it is our turn to help.

Mr. Speaker, let us pass this extension, defeat the budget cuts to student loan programs, and pass a reauthorization that will be improved over the bill reported out of our committee that helps make the dream of college a reality for America's students.

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KELLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4911.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

EDUCATIONAL FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM EXTENSION

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 2363) to extend the educational flexibility program under section 4 of the Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 2363

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. EDUCATIONAL FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM EXTENSION.

(a) EXTENSION AUTHORITY.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Education is authorized to carry out the educational flexibility program under section 4 of the Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999 (20 U.S.C. 5891b), until the date of enactment of an Act that reauthorizes programs under part A of title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6311 et seq.), for any State that was an Ed-Flex Partnership State on September 30, 2004.

(b) DESIGNATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Any designation of a State as an Ed-Flex Partnership State that was in effect on September 30, 2004, shall be extended until the date of enactment of an Act that reauthorizes programs under part A of title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, if the Secretary of Education makes the determination described in paragraph (2).

(2) DETERMINATION.—The determination referred to in paragraph (1) is a determination that the performance of the State educational agency, in carrying out the programs for which the State has received a waiver under the educational flexibility program, justifies the extension of the designation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE) and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KILDEE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Delaware.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on S. 2363.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of Senate 2363, a bill that would extend the Education Flexibility Partnership Act, also known as Ed-Flex. This important bill will allow States that have already been approved for the Ed-Flex program to continue to participate until the No Child Left Behind Act is reauthorized and the issue of appropriate administrative flexibility can be re-examined by Congress.

As some of you may know, Ed-Flex provides greater State and local flexibility when using Federal education

funds to support locally designed comprehensive school improvement efforts. This increased flexibility is provided in exchange for increased accountability for results.

Specifically, Ed-Flex allows the Secretary of Education to delegate the authority to States to waive certain Federal statutory or regulatory requirements affecting the State and local school districts and schools, if they have adopted challenging academic standards and strong provisions for holding schools accountable for student achievement.

I would also like to point out that there are some provisions of Federal law that cannot be waived under the Ed-Flex program. Those provisions include requirements relating to fiscal accountability standards, equitable participation by private school pupils and teachers, parental involvement, allocation of funds to States and local school districts, as well as health, safety and civil rights.

I am pleased that my home State of Delaware is one of the States that has been participating in the Ed-Flex program. They have used the additional flexibility provided by Ed-Flex to better serve students and schools with a high level of poverty.

I urge all of you to support the bill. In exchange for accountability, we can give States and local schools increased flexibility and more freedom from unnecessary and burdensome Federal regulations that can so often get in the way of attaining educational excellence. I ask my colleagues to support this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I join my colleague in supporting S. 2363, a bill to extend the current Ed-Flex authority.

The Ed-Flex program was first established in 1994 through the Goals 2000 Act. I was chief sponsor of the bill and Bill Goodling of Pennsylvania was the author of the Ed-Flex language. This was part of an early effort to provide States with greater flexibility as they begin to implement education reform initiatives.

Ed-Flex addressed criticism that certain Federal education requirements stymied local education reform and allowed local school districts to apply to waive select education requirements.

In exchange for greater flexibility, the local school district must demonstrate improved academic performance. Twelve States were granted Ed-Flex authority in 1999. Ten States continue to have the authority: Colorado, Delaware, Kansas, Massachusetts, Maryland, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Vermont.

S. 2363 would extend Ed-Flex for these 10 States until Congress reauthorizes No Child Left Behind.

By extending this authority for these 10 States, local school districts in these States will not have to interrupt the measures they currently have in place.

In Maryland, this includes allowing school districts that receive title I funds to allow all the students in the school to take advantage of title I services, such as extra attention in reading, in writing for elementary school students.

In Massachusetts, seven school districts are using Ed-Flex authority to provide title I service to schools that previously had access to these services; but due to shifts in school populations, these schools were no longer eligible for these funds, even though the need still existed.

I am pleased that States have been responsible in approving waivers requested by the school districts. States have adhered to the law which prohibits certain waivers such as those affecting civil rights and maintenance of effort. These provisions are important and exist to maintain necessary protection for students and funding.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me also mention that the Department of Education has provided assurances that it will not allow States to waive compliance with a highly qualified teacher provision in No Child Left Behind. All States must be in compliance with this provision by the end of this school year.

The highly qualified teacher provision is critical to improving student academic performance. All children should have the benefit of a teacher who is certified in the subject area they teach. The highly qualified teacher provision in No Child Left Behind ensures that that will happen, and I appreciate the Department's oversight on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is well thought out and deserves the support of this House.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 2363.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SENSE OF HOUSE THAT AMERICANS SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN MOMENT OF SILENCE REGARDING ARMED FORCES

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 698) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that

all Americans should participate in a moment of silence to reflect upon the service and sacrifice of members of the United States Armed Forces both at home and abroad.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 698

Whereas it was through the brave and noble efforts of the Nation's forefathers that the United States first gained freedom and became a sovereign nation;

Whereas there are more than 1,300,000 active component and more than 1,100,000 reserve component members of the Armed Forces serving the Nation in support and defense of the values and freedom that all Americans cherish;

Whereas the members of the Armed Forces deserve the utmost respect and admiration of their fellow Americans for putting their lives in danger for the sake of the freedoms enjoyed by all Americans;

Whereas members of the Armed Forces are defending freedom and democracy around the globe and are playing a vital role in protecting the safety and security of all Americans;

Whereas the nation officially celebrates and honors the accomplishments and sacrifices of veterans, patriots, and leaders who fought for freedom, but does not yet officially pay tribute to those who currently serve in the Armed Forces;

Whereas all Americans should participate in a moment of silence to support the troops; and

Whereas March 26th, 2006, is designated as "National Support the Troops Day": Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that all Americans should participate in a moment of silence to reflect upon the service and sacrifice of members of the United States Armed Forces both at home and abroad.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE) and the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Virginia.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 698 calls on all Americans to take a moment and reflect on the sacrifices that our young men and women in the United States military make every single day. I am honored to support this resolution.

Today we stand here, not as Republicans or Democrats, not as liberals or conservatives, but as Americans, able to put our differences aside and remember the commitment and sacrifices of those who are willing to go into harm's way to preserve the very freedoms we sometimes take for granted.

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I sometimes have