

See, instead of giving local school districts the flexibility to develop their own curriculum, they are instead hampered by the NCLB's testing requirements and must tailor their classes now around these tests. Instead of schools setting their standards high in an aggressive drive towards excellence, we have seen just the opposite. In order to maintain their Federal funding, the States are now setting their standards low. In essence, it's a race to the bottom, if you will, as far as standards in this country. And instead of allowing our educators to focus on education, NCLB has instituted some absurd regulatory burdens on the States.

According to the GAO, 41 percent of the financial support and staffing of State education agencies was a product of Federal dollars and regulations. In other words, this means that the Federal Government was the cause of 41 percent of the administrative burden at the State level, despite the fact that the Federal Government only sends 7 percent of overall education funding in this country.

Also, according to the GAO, the testing requirements of NCLB alone will cost States around \$1.9 billion between 2002 and 2008 and spend up towards 6.6 million hours to administer all the paperwork that comes with it as well.

Now, I recently held a town hall meeting on NCLB. Every person that came to that meeting, showed up, had something negative to say about the administrative burdens in NCLB. At one point during the meeting I asked how many people had contact and met with either their local principal or their local school board about some of these problems. Just about every hand in the room went up.

So then I said, Well, how many people here in the room went and talked to somebody down at the New Jersey capital, the New Jersey Department of Education? About half the people raised their hand.

I said finally, Well, how many people went to Washington and took the time out to go and visit somebody with the U.S. Department of Education? Only one person raised their hand.

You see, my point in this is, by instituting these requirements for NCLB in Washington, we are moving accountability for education farther and farther away from where it belongs: parents, students, educators at the local level.

In addition to this, the regulations NCLB places on schools often attempts to fix problems that really don't exist.

One of the schools in my district consistently was cited in publications as one of the top performing schools in the State, but it was placed, because of NCLB, on its watch list 2 years after NCLB was instituted. Now, notice, this was not an underperforming school. Every year nearly 100 percent of the kids graduated. Most went on to college. The average combined scores of SATs was 1100; 14 AP programs were offered at the school. This was a great

school. But instead, NCLB found it underperforming. And because of this, now the teachers and administrators at this school have to turn their attention away from what they were doing, which was running an excellent school and now focus on the paperwork and the burdensome accountability requirements of NCLB. So less good education is coming about because of this.

Now, let me be clear. I share, along with all my colleagues from both sides of aisle in Congress here, the ultimate goal of providing a high quality education for every child in America. This year I introduced legislation that would allow a State then to opt out of the majority of the requirements of NCLB, but, at the same time, would allow that State to keep their education funding through a refundable tax credit.

My bill is H.R. 3177. I call it the LEARN Act. That stands for Local Education Authority Return Now. It gives the States the ability to opt out of NCLB and provides residents of those States a State tax credit equal to the amount of money that otherwise would have gone to Washington and then come back to their State for Federal funding. What it does is give control back to the States, allow them, the States, the parents, the school boards, the option to pursue local and State educational initiatives based on what they know is best for their kids. It allows the States and local school districts to set their own standards, enforce their own penalties for failure, and establish their own goals for their teachers and their students. With my bill, education accountability is transferred from D.C. bureaucrats back to the people who know the schools and the students personally.

See, under my proposal, States that feel that the regulation of NCLB is both necessary and beneficial to continue on, well, they can stay in the system. If they need Washington bureaucrats in their State to tell them what to do, well, they can stay in NCLB.

However, if the State's residents feel that the responsibility for educating their children is best left in the hands of the State, then this legislation will empower them to do so and keep the funding in place that the States rely on.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ANNIVERSARY OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mrs. MCCARTHY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York. Mr. Speaker, next week we'll be cele-

brating the 6th anniversary of the terrible attacks that happened on September 11 in New York, here in the Washington area, the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania.

While we remember those that we lost, I hope that we also reflect on how our Nation, and especially this Congress, came together during the weeks and months that followed that terrible, terrible day.

Following 9/11, we, as Americans, demonstrated the best of all of us. Thousands volunteered to help with the rescue and recovery efforts on Ground Zero. Scores more donated money, gave blood, took time to help people that they didn't even know. Millions prayed for the families of those that lost loved ones. It was a remarkable time. People from all walks of life stood together with a renewed sense of purpose and compassion.

While we remember those we lost on this anniversary of September 11, let's also remember how we came together to help get America through perhaps the most difficult time in our history. Let's remember the firefighters, the police officers, the union workers who risked their lives to save others. Let's remember the families who lost loved ones on 9/11, who became advocates for commonsense laws down here in Washington that would prevent another tragedy from happening. These courageous men and women worked tirelessly so that other families wouldn't experience what they went through.

As each year passes, the needs of those affected by 9/11 change. We work with a number of families back on Long Island in my district, especially the children, that still need mental health care. We need to improve the health care for the recovery workers who put their lives on the line and are now suffering from illnesses. And local residents, it is still paramount in our minds to make sure that they stay healthy.

The long-term mental health of families and children who lost loved ones maintains its high importance. Most people will remember it as being post-traumatic syndrome. One never knows when those flashes of that day come back. Sometimes it takes years and years for the treatment to take hold.

The Fourth Congressional District, I want to salute such groups as the South Nassau Communities Hospital and the World Trade Center Family Center that have been working hard to address the mental health needs of the children affected by 9/11 and have made great progress in helping them cope with this horrible tragedy.

In my office, I have a painting that was done several years ago by a young child on how they saw the world. And through therapy, you can now see the paintings have improved with the sun shining, meaning the young child is getting on with their life. Their work is equally as important as the search and recovery efforts following the attacks, and I commend them for it.

On September 11, 2001, our hearts were broken, but our spirits grew stronger. On September 11, 2007, I can think of no better memorial to those we lost on 9/11 than making their children and grandchildren's world a better place.

Some will say time has passed and it's time to move on with their lives. I have worked with many of those 9/11 families, and they have moved on with their lives. But again, through every great tragedy one never knows when you'll break down and cry because you remember something.

Every American remembers September 11, the year 2001. Every American knows where they were that day. Every American came together to make sure that those that needed help would have it.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the American people for standing together. I thank those that lost their lives to save other lives and, hopefully, we will never forget those that made the great sacrifices who still need our help. September 11 will be in everybody's minds forever in history. Let us not, here in this Congress, forget those that have survived but still need our help to get them through the illnesses they are facing.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO ROBERT RICCIARDI

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

Mr. FOSSELLA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute and honor to Robert Ricciardi, a New York City firefighter who's retiring today after many years of service to the city of New York and to the people of New York.

Robert is an exemplary model of what makes the Fire Department of New York the best Fire Department in the world. Like many other firefighters, Robert spent a great deal of his free time volunteering throughout his community on Staten Island. He was an active member of his church and spent much time coaching youth sports. As a matter of fact, I bet tonight Robert will be at the St. Claire's gym for youth basketball tryouts.

Robert has served New York City with distinction as one of New York's bravest. Over the course of his career he's helped save the lives of countless people, risking his own safety to protect others. Like his fellow firefighters and so many throughout the country, Robert rushed into burning buildings as others ran in the opposite direction with a singular mission, to save the lives of the people whose names he did

not know, that he never met and might never see again. Robert understood that one of the most important contributions we can make is to help others in need. He's dedicated his life to this principle, and he leaves behind a great legacy of service.

Robert, like so many firefighters across Staten Island and the city also knew many who lost their lives on September 11, as the previous speaker just mentioned, and with that, he carries that with him throughout his life.

We also know that Staten Island and all of New York are better off because of Robert's dedication and decision to be one of New York City's bravest. His service will be clearly missed, but we are fortunate that Robert will continue to be a positive force in our local community. We wish Robert and his wife, Dorine, along with their four children, Robert, Christian, Nicole and Gregory, the best of luck in their future, wherever it may take them.

I'm honored to call Robert a friend, and I'm delighted to have this opportunity to say thank you for all that you've done for New York City.

Good luck, Robert. We wish you well.

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

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

THE NEW DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, today marks the eighth month since my colleagues and I were given the privilege to enter this sacred institution to represent our respective districts across the country. The Democratic freshman class, one of the largest in recent history, also came at an historic time in changing control of both houses of Congress and leading America in a new direction.

Much has changed in eight months. Much has changed personally for each and every one of us. Eight months ago I stood in this very spot with my 2-month-old son, Gus, as we were sworn into this esteemed body. My 5-year-old was a kindergartner at the time.

Well, now, 8 months later, Gus is 10 months old, on the verge of walking; and that kindergartner is now an experienced first grader.

Much has changed for us professionally. I had the opportunity last week to go back and address the school where I taught. Many of us came to this institution from many different walks of life. We were teachers. We were newspapermen. We were law en-

forcement officers. We were physicians. We were farmers. We were many different things. But each and every one of us came to this institution with a very sacred duty: to change the direction that America was going; to listen to the American public; and to make sure that this institution was once again judged on effectiveness, not ideology. And this Congress has done just that.

This Congress has changed the priorities that have permeated Washington for the past 12 years. This new Congress has changed things from some of the most historic funding for veterans to the most sweeping ethics reform, described as some of the biggest changes since the Watergate era.

We have much to be proud of and much work yet to do. The Democratic freshman class was given an opportunity to change the course and to change the debate.

I had the opportunity to speak with some reporters asking what will the legacy be? What will this class have accomplished when all is said and done? And I think, in looking at this group of people and having the sense of pride that I have in serving with them, that the answer will not be known for many years. This class has thrown themselves into their work with such due diligence that I think the American people would be proud. We passed legislation not just on a Democratic agenda but on a bipartisan agenda.

We knew, each and every one of us that got here, that we did not come to this institution with an ideological mandate. We knew that the American people, when they were speaking last November, were not saying that they were enamored with just Democratic ideology. They were enamored with the speaking about changing the direction of the country, providing a new direction, providing ethics that actually work. Providing funding for our veterans, funding for our children, and taking this country in a new direction in the war on terror and what was happening in Iraq.

And I am proud to stand here today with my colleagues, and we are going to spend a little bit of time highlighting those achievements, and it is one that all American people should be proud of.

This Congress can do nothing with just one party. This Congress can do nothing with just ideology. When this Congress works together, things get done that would amaze the American people.

I, coming from Minnesota, have witnessed two of the biggest disasters that my State has ever witnessed. Back on August 1, the collapse of the I-35W bridge, to see a major interstate, eight-lane highway, crash into the Mississippi River. We lost seven people with a hundred injured. That tragedy and the response to it illustrates what can be the best in America.

Within 60 hours, the House of Representatives and the Senate had passed