

Congress since the National Defense Education Act of 1958, and it was the first broad education bill enacted in the post-World War II period that was not tied to national defense.

In 1964, Johnson signed the Library Services Act (P.L. 88-269) to make high quality public libraries more accessible to both urban and rural residents. The funds made available under this Act were used to construct as well as operate libraries, and to extend this program to cities as well as rural areas. Later that year, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act (P.L. 88-352), which among its landmark provisions authorized federal authorities to sue for the desegregation of schools and to withhold federal funds from education institutions that practiced segregation.

In 1965, President Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (P.L. 89-10) at the former Junction Elementary School in Stonewall, Texas, where he first attended school. Sitting beside him as he signed the bill was his first teacher, Mrs. Kathryn Deadrich Loney. This legislation was the first general aid-to-education program ever adopted by Congress, and it provided programs to help educate disadvantaged children in urban and rural areas. Later that year, he also signed the Higher Education Act (P.L. 89-329), which was the first program approved by the U.S. Congress for scholarships to undergraduate students.

In 1965, President Johnson launched Project Head Start, as an eight-week summer program, to help break the cycle of poverty by providing pre-school children from low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs. Recruiting children from ages three to school-entry age, Head Start was enthusiastically received by education and child development specialists, community leaders, and parents across the nation. Currently, Head Start continues to serve children and their families each year in urban and rural areas in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Territories, as well as many migrant children.

In 1966, President Johnson signed the International Education Act (P.L. 89-698), which promoted international studies at U.S. colleges and universities.

In 1968, he signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Amendments of 1967 (P.L. 90-247), establishing bilingual education programs for non-English speaking children, and providing more funds for special education for disabled children. Later that year, he also signed the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act (P.L. 90-538), which authorized experimental programs for disabled children of pre-school age.

After leaving office, Lyndon Johnson returned to his native Texas and continued his involvement in public education. His presidential papers are housed at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum at the University of Texas, which in 1970 established the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs, The "LBJ School," as is commonly known, pioneered what was then regarded as a novel approach to training for public service.

The curriculum combined courses in theory with courses that took students into government agencies to work and conduct research; the faculty included academics from various disciplines as well as practitioners from var-

ious levels of government; public service programs included an academic publishing program as well as workshops for government officials. This blend of the academic and the practical remains the distinguishing characteristic of the LBJ School and this highly effective approach to training for public service is today an accepted model for public affairs graduate programs across the country.

Mr. Speaker, Lyndon Baines Johnson, who died January 22, 1973, will be remembered not only as a great President and Member of Congress, but also as the greatest champion of accessible and affordable quality education for all. President Johnson truly understood the importance of leaving no child behind, and he didn't.

For all these reasons, Mr. Speaker, it is most appropriate that the House voted to rename the headquarters building of the Department of Education located at 400 Maryland Avenue Southwest in the District of Columbia as the "Lyndon Baines Johnson Department of Education Building."

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I pay tribute to President Johnson's leadership in the area of civil rights. In response to the civil rights movement, Johnson overcame southern resistance and achieved passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which effectively outlawed most forms of racial segregation. As he put down his pen, Johnson is alleged to have told an aide: "We have lost the South for a generation." In 1965, he achieved passage of a second civil rights bill, the Voting Rights Act, that outlawed discrimination in voting, thus allowing millions of southern blacks to vote for the first time.

In other actions on the civil rights front, Johnson nominated civil rights attorney Thurgood Marshall to the positions of Solicitor General and later Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, making him the first African American to serve in either capacity. After the murder of civil rights worker Viola Liuzzo, Johnson went on television to announce the arrest of four Ku Klux Klansmen implicated in her death. He angrily denounced the Klan as a "hooded society of bigots," and warned them to "return to a decent society before it's too late." He turned the themes of Christian redemption to push for civil rights, thereby mobilizing support from churches North and South.

On June 4, 1965 at the Howard University commencement address, he said that both the government and the nation needed to help achieve goals: . . . To shatter forever not only the barriers of law and public practice, but the walls which bound the condition of many by the color of his skin. To dissolve, as best we can, the antique enmities of the heart which diminish the holder, divide the great democracy, and do wrong—great wrong—to the children of God.

Lyndon Baines Johnson was a giant of a man and a towering figure in the history and life of our nation. We are not going to see his like again.

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

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

THE UNITED STATES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, as we take up the agenda of the new Congress in the 110th iteration, we should look to new issues which address the needs of the American people in this century, in this time.

When we look at what that new agenda should include, it should reflect the values and lifestyles and locations of Americans where they actually live today, and not the way that we think they lived 50 years ago.

When we look at the America of the 21st century, we see a country that has changed radically from an old vision of our Nation as one-third rural, one-third urban, and one-third suburban. If you hold that idea, you are about 40 years out of date. The new United States of the 21st century is a majority part suburban. In fact, in the last Presidential election, for the first time in our country's history, over half of all voters were living in suburban communities. When you ask these voters, "What do you think the Congress should work on to make sure that it is addressing key needs of your family and your community," they overwhelmingly put forward a list of priorities that have been consistent for the last decade and that is: action on public education, on health care, on conservation, and on economic growth.

Responding to these needs, in the last Congress we formed the Suburban Agenda Caucus to then develop a political program here in the Congress to address those needs; and in this Special Order that we are going to have tonight, we are going talk about the next chapter, the suburban agenda for 2007. By talking about what these key pieces of legislation are, we have gone beyond platitudes or general policy descriptions to describe actual pieces of legislation that should be adopted in this Congress addressing the education, health care, conservation, and economic needs of the American people.

The suburban agenda is presented here in its new 2007 form. It includes the Gang Elimination Act of 2007, legislation by Congressman Dave Reichert that would seek to identify the top three major international drug gangs in the United States that represent a threat to our country's security. In fact, if you added up all of the documented gang members in the United States, it would amount to the fifth-largest army on the earth and one that represents a clear and present danger to the safety and security of many kids throughout America.

□ 1820

I will just say that in my own congressional district the average gangland shooter in North Chicago or Waukegan, Illinois, is in the eighth grade;

and this legislation is critical to provide Federal backup to suburban law enforcement to take on the new threat of gangs moving into the suburbs.

A second piece of the Suburban Agenda is the Teacher and Student Safety Act, legislation by Congressman GEOFF DAVIS. This legislation seeks to make sure that every classroom in America is as safe as possibly can be maintained, using the judgment of full-time registered teachers who know their classrooms and their kids best.

Under this legislation, a full-time registered teacher would be allowed to search a book bag or a locker if they have any colorable suspicion that a weapon has come into the classroom.

In my own congressional district, in the Winnetka school system, and certainly we all remember the Columbine school attacks, we saw troubled kids bring weapons into the classroom with tragic results.

As a former teacher, I know that I knew my kids best; and, using that judgment, we can make sure that classrooms are safer in America.

One of the critical opportunities that we have in our country is improving health care, especially using new technology and expanding health insurance for Americans; and there we have the Health Insurance for Life Act by Representative CHARLIE DENT.

The Health Insurance for Life Act addresses a critical problem in America, which is that the average suburban family will have five different jobs over their life, and they may worry that in between jobs they would lose coverage or be dropped or develop a pre-existing condition which would interfere with the continuation of health care insurance for their family.

The Health Insurance for Life Act of 2007 simply says that for every American already in an insurance pool, who already enjoys COBRA health reinsurance rights for 18 months, that you can continue those, that insurance, for as long as you need to.

Almost every suburban family in America has a problem that they have heard about, either in their own family or in their neighborhood, regarding predators on-line, people that would be using, for example, the number one Web site on the planet, myspace.com, to reach out to kids and to attack them in a way that was simply alien or impossible in the previous century.

The Deleting On-Line Predators Act, which passed in last Congress by a vote of 400-15, says that our first line of defense are parents, moms and dads who know about this danger and are upgrading the protections of their kids on-line. For example, in the 21st century, how the computer should be really in the living room and not the bedroom, where parents can have routine and casual contact with their on-line habits of their kids; or that every 21st century parent should demand the rights of the passwords of their children to make sure that they know where their kids have been.

The Deleting On-Line Predators Act also says to schools and libraries that, as we upgrade protections for kids on-line in the home, that we also do them in public spaces to, consistently and across the board, deny opportunities to the estimated 50,000 sexual predators on-line who are on-line at any one time.

Congressman JIM GERLACH has also introduced another key piece of the Suburban Agenda. That is the Open Space and Farm Land Preservation Act to make sure that we improve the tax treatment and grant programs to preserve suburban open space, so that we do not enter a state of drift in which suburban open space disappears across the country, and we have an unending series of strip malls.

And the final piece of the Suburban Agenda for 2007 is the Senior Safety and Dignity Act by Representative GINNY BROWN-WAITE. That Act lays out a set of protections for seniors as America ages to make sure that their health care standards, especially in senior and life-long care, are maintained.

When we look at this all, there is one bill that stands above all others in the concern of suburban families, and that is how to pay for college to make sure that a child has a guaranteed road map into the middle class. And to talk about that legislation, let me yield to the author of that bill, my colleague from Illinois, Congresswoman JUDY BIGGERT.

Mrs. BIGGERT. Thank you so much, Mr. KIRK, for organizing this opportunity to discuss the Suburban Agenda. As a Member who represents part of Cook County, the most populous county in Illinois, DuPage County, the second most populous county in Illinois, and Will County, the fastest growing county in Illinois, I certainly share your strong interest in suburban issues.

So I am delighted to be able to talk a little about the 401(k) kids. I want to just take a few minutes to explain what I think is one of the most important issues facing my constituents and constituents all over, particularly in the suburbs, the rising cost of college education.

Other than buying a home, the cost of a college education is probably one of the first major expenses that families need to start saving for. The average cost of tuition at an in-state public school is now at least \$13,000; for an out-of-state public school, it is \$19,000; and an average tuition at a private school is \$28,000 and rising. These numbers have risen and continue to rise far faster than the rate of inflation.

Adding to this problem, let me put on my financial literacy hat just a little bit, is that personal savings rates in this country have dropped to a negative 1 percent, one of the lowest savings rates since the Great Depression. So what I fear here is we have a financial storm waiting to strike families across the country.

With students already carrying 45 percent more debt than they did 10 years ago, I simply don't think increasing loan amounts and reducing loan rates is enough. We have to provide more tools for parents and students to save for college. That is why we have introduced H.R. 87, the 401 Kids Family Savings Act of 2007.

This legislation would put American children on the path to an affordable education and a firm financial future. It allows an individual, including a parent, a grandparent, an aunt or an uncle, to set aside a total of \$2,000 annually in 401 Kids Savings Accounts for each child.

Like that Roth IRA, the money is contributed to the account after taxes, but interest accumulates tax free, and the balance can be used tax free for the approved purposes in the bill. In the case of 401 Kids Savings Accounts, the money could be withdrawn tax free, first of all, for the college education.

The legislation would extend through 2015, the Coverdell Education Savings Account tax benefits, and rename these accounts 401 Kids Savings Accounts.

Second, for housing. 401 Kids Savings Accounts also can be used when the child grows up and they haven't used the amount, all of the amount, for the purchase of a first home.

And third, retirement. When the child grows up, he can roll over his 401 Kids Savings Account into a Roth IRA for use much later during retirement.

By enacting these reforms, we really can supply families with a single vehicle to set aside money for their children's futures. Money contributed at birth could grow tax free for 18 years until needed for college.

Parents and relatives also would have the peace of mind of knowing that if the child chooses not to go to college, even though they put away the money, or chooses a more affordable school, any money left over in the accounts can be used for the child's first home or retirement.

I would be remiss, as we talk about financial literacy and talk about savings, if I didn't mention that even Chairman Bernanke of the Federal Reserve has said that creating savings accounts for children at the time they are born is a great idea. So I am really pleased to be with you.

Mr. KIRK. If the gentlelady will yield.

Mrs. BIGGERT. I yield.

Mr. KIRK. When we look at this problem, we see that the Congress has taken critical action in the past to change our culture in favor of more savings and investment. The 401(k) program was relatively new to our society and our culture.

□ 1830

And yet millions of Americans now, when they get their first real job, establish a 401(k) program, saving on their own for retirement.

Last Congress you were leading the effort on behalf of extending 529 college

savings accounts that are chartered under each State. We already have \$80 billion saved under investment. That is why I want to applaud you with the potential that this 401 Kids account bill could do.

I yield back to the gentlewoman.

Mrs. BIGGERT. Thank you. Yes, there are several States that have started this process, too. The more that we can entice people to start that saving, to know what is available, the more that it is publicized, whether it is a State account or a Federal account, it is very important that this starts.

I know that in all the work that we do in the financial literacy and financial education that still we have kids that don't understand the difference between checks, cash or credit cards. Nor do people understand compound interest. Adults don't understand that.

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, that may be the biggest benefit from this legislation. Not only will we save tens of billions of dollars for college education, and I think everybody in this Chamber knows George Washington University just crossed the \$50,000 a year tuition mark for kids, but more importantly, these accounts are going to have the names of each child on them. And so it is an education tool for parents. And I don't know if you want to talk about that. When the statement comes into the home that for a young teenage son or daughter, you might be able to talk about how the investment has gone.

Mrs. BIGGERT. Not even a teenager, but let's say a pre-teen, when the statement comes in and they look at it every month, they see how much interest, what interest means and what compound interest means, that they are getting more money every month, every year on this account. It isn't just sitting there static.

We have so many people in this country that are what we call "unbanked," that don't even have a bank account or anything. They don't get these statements. So this is a tool, you are right, that kids learn about how to manage money. And part of that is having the opportunity that will be gained, being able to go to college because they had their parents and their family that put money aside for them. And you could put aside \$2,000 a year, but you can start with \$50, \$100. Maybe families can't afford to put that much money in, but every dollar saved is a dollar towards education with the interest that is gained and reaped over the years in this account.

Mr. KIRK. I thank the gentlewoman. I think the Congress needs to pass the 401 Kids Family Savings Account Act. We know that the average college graduate in America earns a million dollars more than someone who only graduated from high school.

One of the other members of the Suburban Agenda Caucus and an author of one of the key pieces of legislation is my colleague from Pennsylvania, Congressman CHARLIE DENT, and I yield to him.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Speaker, I want to especially thank the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KIRK) for his strong leadership on this suburban agenda. I also want to thank him, too, for arranging this opportunity for members of the Suburban Agenda Caucus to come to the floor this evening to discuss issues that are important to all Americans and not simply just people who live in the suburbs.

Every congressman or woman has a unique district with distinct interests, but we can all support an agenda that defends our children's safety, improves educational opportunities and expands access to affordable health care.

When I am at home in my district, one of the issues that I discuss with my constituents is our mutual concern for the safety of our children, both in school and on the Internet. Parents have a right to send their children to safe, drug-free schools, and we took an important step last Congress when the House passed legislation, the Student and Teacher Safety Act, that would allow States and school districts to conduct reasonable searches to ensure that our schools remain free of all weapons, dangerous materials and illegal narcotics. Parents need to know that their children are safe when they are at school.

As a father of three young children, I am particularly concerned about the threat of online predators. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports that over 50,000 predators are online at any given time and one in five children has received an unwanted online solicitation of a sexual nature. We need to be vigilant as parents by supervising our children while they are browsing the Web at home. We also must do all we can to protect our children when they are outside our supervision by preventing them from accessing social networking Web sites and chat rooms like MySpace.com at schools and in libraries unless they are under adult supervision. The Deleting Online Predators Act will give parents peace of mind by ensuring that a responsible adult is monitoring their children's Internet use at all times.

Parents in my district know that a college education will double their child's earning potential, as you just mentioned, but they worry about how they will afford to send their children to a higher education institution. It is critical that we help families start saving early to send their children to college. By passing H.R. 87 and permanently extending the 401 Kids Family Savings Accounts, or college savings accounts, parents will be able to put money aside to invest in their children's future. And I want to thank the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BIGGERT) for her strong leadership on this issue.

Finally, one meaningful step we can take to ensure that individuals and families maintain access to affordable health care is to provide greater portability of health care coverage. Most

Americans with private group health insurance are covered through an employer, coverage that is generally provided to active employees and their families. A change in an individual's work or family status can result in loss of coverage. Americans are changing jobs more than ever before, averaging nearly seven different careers over the course of their working lives.

In 1985, Congress enacted legislation we refer to as COBRA to give workers and their families who lose their health benefits the right to choose to continue coverage provided under their group health plan. Under COBRA, an employer with 20 or more employees must provide individuals and their families the option of continuing their coverage under the employer's group health insurance plan in the case of certain events such as a voluntary or involuntary job loss, reduction in the hours worked, transition between jobs, death, divorce and other life events. But in most circumstances, the coverage under COBRA is limited to 18 or 36 months. And because of this 18-month limitation, during a prolonged job search, individuals and families have to purchase expensive policies in order to maintain their quality of care or they take the risk of becoming uninsured. During times of transition, families need the certainty of knowing that they will not lose their health coverage.

Later this week I will be introducing a bill, the Health Insurance for Life Act, which will remove the 18- or 36-month limitation on COBRA coverage, giving employees the option to continue their health insurance coverage indefinitely. Knowing that they can rely on continued coverage will provide individuals and families with consistency and security as they face change and uncertainty in their lives. And I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to advance this important agenda that has been outlined by my friend and colleague, Representative KIRK of Illinois.

And, again, I do want to compliment you and applaud you on your leadership.

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, we have seen that several hundred thousand Americans each year exercise their COBRA rights to continue health care insurance for their families after they are laid off or leave employment. But, each year, over 200,000 Americans will reach the end of their 18-month COBRA period and then be unable to continue their health care insurance. If they have a preexisting condition in their family, they could then be left out of a coverage pool later.

I think that is why it is so important that, at the discretion of the family, at their own cost, they can continue that health care insurance to have peace of mind.

I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. DENT. Yes. The gentleman is absolutely on point. The portability aspect of this legislation is absolutely

critical. When I served in my State legislature, in both the State house and the State senate, this was a common complaint I would hear from people who suffered a job loss and were at the end of their COBRA eligibility.

□ 1840

They were very frustrated, just for the reasons you identified, that there was a member of the family who had a particular illness and that they could not get coverage elsewhere. So COBRA was absolutely critical to them being able to provide for their families.

Remember, too, when you pay for COBRA insurance, you are basically paying the full premium. So the portability aspect and dealing with the pre-existing condition is absolutely I think one of the best selling points and the most salient points of this legislation.

Mr. KIRK. We also hear from job experts that in America generally it takes one month or \$10,000 to find a new job, on average, but many families will hit that 18-month limit before they find new employment.

Mr. DENT. That is absolutely true. And particularly I would also urge anybody watching us this evening to not only look at their COBRA options, and certainly endorse this legislation, but also be aware of the fact that we have programs in this country called SCHIP for children who are uninsured, that if their children need health insurance, they may be eligible for that.

When I was in my State legislature, we passed an Adult Basic Program providing a low-cost health insurance program for adults of working age who, for whatever reasons, were out of work.

So, again, the gentleman is on point, that when people are unemployed, there are options for them in health care in many States, either through SCHIP or, like my State, Adult Basic; and I would certainly encourage people to contact my office or even their State legislator's office to seek some assistance.

Mr. KIRK. I thank the gentleman.

For suburban families, health care issues are second only to safety and security and improvement of public education in their priority list. One of the key issues is access to care, especially at community health centers, and making sure we have enough doctors. No one knows this issue better than the author of the Family Health Care Accessibility Act, part of the Suburban Agenda, my colleague, Congressman TIM MURPHY.

Mr. TIM MURPHY of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Illinois for yielding.

As you said, few things are as important as the health of our families.

A lot of times in this Congress we talk about issues of health care accessibility, and a lot of times that becomes a discussion of health insurance. But the bottom line is, for families, they want to know that when their child or they are sick, can they get to see a doctor that they can afford, or

even having their well-child visits or other checkups and how do they do that.

Health care issues, being a top priority for the Suburban Caucus, includes my legislation, the Family Health Care Accessibility Act, which is an updated version of a bill I introduced last year to ensure that every family has a neighborhood doctor. Regardless of their income, regardless of whether or not they have insurance, families will have health care.

We oftentimes hear it quoted here, and sometimes misquoted, that there are millions of Americans without health insurance, and indeed there are, and we do not want Americans to do without that health care. But, in fact, many of these folks are covered, perhaps through their employer; and, as the gentleman from Pennsylvania was describing, when they are between jobs and they have that gap there, that is something that Mr. DENT's bill would help cover them.

But there are some who are also covered by Medicare and Medicaid and don't know it. We need to work with them to make sure they are aware of that. The census data simply asks who is covered.

But the other issue becomes what about those Americans, 12, 13, 14 million or so, who do not have anything, and those are the ones we need to recognize that there are some things we can do, and we need to act now. It is not a matter really of concern about spending vast amounts of money, but we have a solution at hand, a simple solution, a direct solution, and one that we should embrace quickly to help these families.

Understand that health care costs for families in the United States are rising. From 2004 to 2005, the medical costs for a four-person household increased by over 9 percent, to \$12,200-plus. This is a growing burden on all families and often many look at this as they can't afford health care.

But, fortunately, there are community health centers out there. These are nonprofit, community supported health care facilities that provide affordable primary and preventative health care on a sliding fee scale so that every patient who walks through the door can receive access to health care services. This is low-cost, affordable quality.

So instead of a family saying that they look at a health insurance bill of several hundred dollars a month, that would not be the issue, because what they could spend was a small, small fraction of that on a sliding fee scale to help them cover a doctor's visit, a dentist's visit or something else.

In fact, community health centers provide this high-quality care to over 15 million families who are the low-income, underinsured and uninsured. They provide a medical home for these folks and save even 30 percent for those who are on Medicaid, which is about a \$17 billion annual savings to the American taxpayer.

Community health centers provide a wide array of health care, such as prenatal, dental, podiatry, mental health, substance abuse counseling, hearing screening, vision screening, discount prescription drugs, case management, smoking cessation, blood pressure monitoring, blood cholesterol monitoring, weight reduction programs, a wide array of programs that are available there. But the issue is, are there enough of these centers around and are there enough doctors to staff them?

About 70 percent of those who use these community health centers have incomes below or at the poverty level, but there are also many other families who find themselves in a situation where they are working but are not insured and they can go to these, recognizing they can hold their heads high, because they are getting good quality health care and they have a health care home.

For many folks, these are the only health care services available, and while the number of uninsured patients at community health centers is growing, the number of physicians available to them is decreasing. There is a critical shortage of physicians available at community health centers to meet the health care needs of the uninsured and underinsured.

The Journal of the American Medical Association reports a 13 percent vacancy rate for family physicians, a 9 percent vacancy rate for internists, a 20 percent vacancy rate for OB-GYNs, and over 20 percent for psychiatrists. So what can we do to get more doctors at the community health centers?

Well, interestingly enough, physicians and other specialists hired by community health centers are covered by the Federal Torts Claim Act for medical liability costs. However, those who want to volunteer are not covered. They would then have to get their own insurance.

We have heard it spoken many times in this Chamber and other places where the cost of medical liability insurance is so high that many doctors retire early, they limit their practice or they leave the States where those prices are so high, in the tens of thousands, many times over, dollars per year. For example, many OB-GYNs will stop delivering babies in order to reduce their costs. In Pennsylvania alone, there are about only 4 percent of physicians who are under the age of 35, and we are looking for more shortages in the future.

Well, community health centers have limited resources to meet the current needs of the uninsured and underinsured, but there are many physicians and psychologists and dentists and others who want to volunteer at community health centers, but the current laws are a barrier to them. So when they do approach community health centers and say they would like to offer some time every month, the centers oftentimes find themselves in a position of turning them down.

This bill simply does this: Whether you are working in a community health center or you want to give your time at no charge to help those in need, you can be covered under the Federal Tort Claims Act, something that this Congress has done for those who are employed by those centers.

Let's extend that to those who want to volunteer. There is then no cost to those centers to hire those folks, and it is very limited cost to provide that health insurance for them. So there is a huge savings.

But the main thing is we provide more coverage for families, families have more doctors that they can go to, we don't have these shortages, we don't have long lines at these centers, and people have a health care home.

It is such a simple task for Congress to pass this. This bill is one I hope my colleagues will help me in co-sponsoring and help support as it moves through the process. We simply cannot afford to continue to address health care by talking about health insurance only. That is an important part, but it isn't just financing this system. It is a matter of fixing this system in a compassionate, quality way. Community health care centers provide that, if we only open the door for more doctors and others to provide that care on a volunteer basis.

What could be more humanitarian, what could be more compassionate, than to remove this government barrier that stands in the way of people reaching out their hearts and providing this care at this very low cost?

I would hope that all of my colleagues would join me in co-sponsoring this bill and helping to move it through. But it is, as part of the Suburban Agenda, one where we recognize that working families have tremendous needs.

We have in this country, reaching out of compassion, have helped those with very little income through Medicaid. We have helped those who are veterans through the VA system. We have helped the elderly through Medicare. Let's also help those who are in different thresholds, in different categories, who cannot afford health care, and let's do this very low cost, perhaps even a cost offset plan, that can provide this care to them.

Mr. KIRK. Reclaiming my time, I applaud the gentleman. I am a co-sponsor of the Family Health Care Accessibility Act. It is part of the Suburban Agenda, so many Members are backing it.

But my understanding on this legislation is that several trial lawyer associations are against this legislation because they want to preserve the right to be able to sue any doctor volunteering in a community health center out of that ability, which then would mean that there is no doctor present or the community health center closes down.

□ 1850

Mr. TIM MURPHY of Pennsylvania. Well, what happens is, right now, those

doctors who are paid are covered under the Federal Torts Claim Act.

What happens, if they can't see the patient, it is one of those things that medical care delayed is medical care denied. What they end up doing is sometimes going to emergency rooms, where the cost is many times over, and hospitals by law have to provide that care. They cannot turn them away. Again, we are taking children and families who should be seeing their physician for primary care, their immunizations, their flus and colds and earaches, and seeing a physician at a health center, and to have legal barriers are something that does not make sense to any family, let alone suburban families.

Mr. KIRK. You are an expert on health care in this Congress. When we look at the delivery of health care, in a hospital emergency room, we have the most expensive setting to care for a family. Generally they have waited until a very late moment, and now we are in an acute emergency situation.

Had that family gone to a community health center early in the process, we would have dealt with the problem without the drama and without a potential catastrophic result, and at much lower cost to the public and the family. That is why this legislation is essential, because it expands these centers and expands care at this level instead of the very expensive place we do it now, in the hospital emergency room.

Mr. TIM MURPHY of Pennsylvania. Yes, indeed. Hospital emergency rooms should be for emergencies and traumas. Those who have flus and other illnesses can be seen by other doctors that don't overburden the emergency room at a very high cost.

Those, however, who do not have those illnesses yet, by a checkup with their doctor, adults and children alike, we can reduce costs because they can get to see the doctor early, or the nurse or the nurse practitioner or the dentist.

Our focus should be on providing quality care, accessible care at low cost. Community health centers are a tremendous asset for our Nation and something that we should all be supporting. It is perhaps the most compassionate thing we can be doing for the underinsured and the uninsured.

We will continue the battles in other areas, and we will continue to work to provide all the care that families need. But this is such an important answer that is in communities now and something I think we need to pass now.

Mr. KIRK. If we don't pass this legislation, we will have fewer doctors and fewer examining rooms open in community health centers.

Ironically, because we did not provide this liability protection for community health centers, we don't have any issue of malpractice because there was no practice of medicine whatsoever in that setting which I think defies common sense. A greater access to care

and expanded capabilities for community health centers ought to be what this Congress is about.

Mr. TIM MURPHY of Pennsylvania. I thank the gentleman for pointing that out. I am not clear whether there are any associations that oppose this part; maybe there are. But I would hope that they would reach out and say, these doctors are covered by some liability insurance. It is a lower cost to them. But the main thing is, let's get these families and these children to see doctors now and get the care that they need.

Mr. KIRK. I thank the gentleman.

When we look at the suburban agenda, you can see, last year, we had quite a lot of progress made.

The School Safety Acquiring Excellence Act not only passed this House as part of the suburban agenda, but it was enacted into law, allowing full national criminal background checks for anyone coming in contact with kids in a school, especially recognizing the Jessica Lunsford problem.

We also passed the Charitable Donations for Open Space Act, enacted into law, and that was with the leadership of my colleague from Pennsylvania, JIM GERLACH, who is now, as part of this year's suburban agenda, is moving the Open Space and Farmland Preservation Act, and I yield to my colleague from Pennsylvania.

Mr. GERLACH. Mr. Speaker, I want to express my gratitude to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KIRK) for his terrific leadership in pulling us together for this terrific suburban agenda that we have been putting forward in Congress now for the last couple of years.

We made progress in the 109th Congress, but we want to see a lot more happen here in this 110th Congress. It is through this caucus that we have where I think we are bringing vital issues to improve the quality of life for our constituents across this country to the forefront of the national debate.

In the 109th Congress, we made great progress on considering measures to benefit all Americans; and in particular, addressing the challenges facing working families in fast-growing suburban areas.

In my congressional district, which is in the suburbs and exurbs of Philadelphia, tremendous growth is leading to the dramatic loss of prime open space and farmland. This pressure has led the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, many counties, and even local municipalities to enact laws to protect farmland from development through the purchase of conservation easements.

These voluntary efforts allow farmers to stay on their land and preserve it for future generations, as well as improve the quality of life environmentally in our local communities.

To promote and encourage the efforts of municipalities and private entities that wish to participate in that effort, we have introduced H.R. 1152, which is the Open Space and Farmland Preservation Act. This bill, which is virtually

identical to H.R. 5313, which was agreed to unanimously by the House in the 109th Congress, is designed to promote the protection of the most threatened farmland and open space, land that a State, county, municipality or even a private entity, have all agreed is worthy of preservation.

To do so, the bill reserves a small portion of the current Federal Farmland Protection Program to provide matching Federal dollars for preservation efforts that are already receiving a county, State and local or private dollar in preservation effort.

The bill creates a challenge grant that encourages States and counties and local municipalities or those private entities, such as local conservancies, to work together to obtain a Federal 25 percent match.

I believe this bill will go a long way towards using existing Federal dollars to encourage more States, counties, municipalities and private groups to take action to protect their vital open space and farmland.

It is important to note that the bill is also fiscally responsible. And in that, it does not authorize any new spending; it simply reserves a portion of existing program dollars. It is my hope that if this new program is enacted, it will lead to better and more effective Federal efforts to help our local municipalities, counties and States to preserve farmland and open space.

I hope the Democrat majority here in the House truly understands the challenges facing suburban communities, and realizes that enacting the suburban agenda legislation is vital to our communities.

Again, I want to express my thanks to Mr. KIRK for his great efforts and his staff to pull together this very important Suburban Agenda Caucus again in the 110th Congress, and I am glad we are focusing more attention on issues that will benefit families in suburban areas and remain hopeful that we can build on our success from the last session and have great achievement again this session.

Mr. KIRK. We look back on the tradition of great environmentalists, like Theodore Roosevelt, who started the National Park Service and expanded key habitats like Yellowstone National Park, and we are all for strengthening and expanding the park system out west.

But for my constituents outside the Chicago suburbs, or yours in the Philadelphia suburbs, that might be only part of a summer vacation.

We need to pass this legislation so there is green and open space near home so we don't have an unending set of suburban sprawl, but we don't have the Federal Government take over this role; this is a decision made by landowners and communities throughout our local areas making local decisions. But in some, create more green and open space, new greenways, to preserve a quality of life and an ecological ambience that has become part of suburban living.

Mr. GERLACH. Absolutely. We have seen a lot of growth in southeastern Pennsylvania in the last 20 years, and it is good-paying jobs and family-sustaining jobs. As that continues to happen, people at the same time, while that is where they go to work and earn their livelihood, they also want to see the environmental quality of life also preserved, so they have in their communities not only the good-paying jobs but also the green space, the open space to preserve for their generation and beyond.

At the same time, that growth is also coming up against the rural communities, those communities that for generations and hundreds and hundreds of years have been agrarian. They were founded on agricultural activity, and now, as that growth pushes up against that, the farmers want to be able to stay and keep the family farm going for future generations.

We found in Pennsylvania that the Farmland Preservation Program is an excellent way to do two things: keep the family farm going by providing, through payment of dollars for conservation easements to the families, the ability for them to sustain themselves economically and, at the same time, sustain that environmental quality of life that is important to what makes a good community.

We have been very successful using county dollars, some local dollars, some very important State dollars, and even Federal dollars to have that effort go forward. But there still needs to be encouragement for local municipalities to participate in that process. That is what this legislation is about and why it is important for us federally to look at the issue.

Mr. KIRK. Why I think this legislation is so important, too, is we have seen in the development of the environmental law and movement a trend away from our roots protecting green and open space and habitat to more regulation, more lawsuits and potentially ineffective policies.

I will just note, the Federal Superfund program, designated to cleaning up the most toxic places in America, has spent over half its funds on litigation and lawsuit costs, not on environmental cleanup.

Your legislation takes us back to the original core of what the environmental movement was first founded to do, which was to protect green and open space and key habitats for all time.

□ 1900

Mr. GERLACH. Again, I thank the gentleman, because really this effort is about really allowing it to be locally based, based on two very important factors.

Number one, it is voluntary. No one forces a farmer to participate in the program. It is not like an eminent domain action where a taking of land occurs and that farmer or that landowner is paid just compensation for the fair

market value of the land, with or without his approval. No farmer enters into a land preservation program or transaction without his approval, in that he volunteers for it.

It does recognize very important private property rights, that everyone is entitled to realize the economic value of his land, and so what this program tries to do is pay the economic value of that land to the farm owner who wishes to participate on a voluntary basis. So it is locally oriented, and it is oriented to those that want to participate on a voluntary basis, realizing the economic value of their land based upon the conservation easement they are giving up. That, to me, is the best way to preserve local and environmental conditions, local folks making local decisions on a voluntary basis and having the financial resources to make those good decisions.

Mr. KIRK. It also seems to me we are not empowering a large bureaucracy. There is no overhead in administration. The vast percentage of resources dedicated for this purpose actually goes to the environmental preservation.

Mr. GERLACH. Absolutely. We have in our local counties county preservation boards that administer the program. They obtain dollars, both locally as well as from the State, and, where appropriate, the Federal Government, and they administer that program.

This legislation that is on our agenda does not add to bureaucracy. It will not add another person at the Federal level or the State level, does not add to our county preservation board staff-wise.

So it is just additional resources on a voluntary basis that would be available to those that realize that the quality of life in a community is based not only on economics but also the environmental aspects of that community, and that is why it is an important initiative.

Mr. KIRK. I thank the gentleman for being a leading part of our Suburban Agenda Caucus and moving this critical environmental piece of legislation.

To recap, last year when we put this together, we passed legislation, enacted it, for safer schools, charitable space, for open space. We led the way in at least the House passing legislation promoting fully electronic medical records by passing the Deleting On-Line Predators Act, setting the example on student and teacher safety.

This suburban trend in America is not an Eastern trend, and it is not a Midwestern trend. It is not a Western. It is throughout the country. One of our suburban leaders is from Texas, my colleague from the Texas delegation, Pete Sessions, and a leader on suburban issues.

Mr. SESSIONS. I appreciate the gentleman yielding me the time.

Being from Dallas, Texas, does offer me the opportunity to come in and join the Suburban Caucus members here tonight from Illinois and Pennsylvania; and tonight I would like to speak about

something that I think is very, very important and that is our economy.

Just yesterday, there was a brand new study that was released in Europe that mostly you will see in Europe, you probably will not see in the United States, but talks about how the United States economy, as it was 20 years ago, is now the size, or said another way, Europe is now the size of, their economy, in 2007, what the United States economy was 20 years ago. It comes as a shock to many people in Europe, even though they have already seen incrementally where their countries fall out.

But what has happened in Europe is they have seen a continuation of high taxes, of overregulation, of requirements on single payer or what we might call single payer system in health care, as well as rules and regulations that are given to unions to not only organize but to put additional restrictions upon employers.

So, tonight, what I would like to say is, thank goodness we live in America. Thank goodness we live in an America where the free enterprise system is alive and well.

Tonight, the Suburban Agenda that is being talked about by the Republican party is a part of trying to make sure that we grow our economy, to where America has the very best not only economy in the world but also a leading-edge and moving-forward economy.

What I would like to talk about tonight is also a part of our Suburban Agenda of growing the economy, and that relates to making sure that we have the opportunity to have lower tax rates that allow investment in opportunity.

As we know, in just a few short years, I think it is about some 1,381 days from now, the tax cuts that were passed by the Republican majority over the past few years will be going away unless the Democrats were to allow a vote and we reauthorize those. What would be gone away is the marriage penalty, depreciation, capital gains; and our tax rates would rise, also.

Mr. KIRK. You are telling me that the marriage penalty will be reimposed by the American Tax Code unless this Congress acts?

Mr. SESSIONS. That is exactly right. What happened was, when Republicans came into office 12 years ago, we talked about how important it was to make sure that every worker in a family, in this case a husband or a wife, would have an opportunity to only be taxed upon their own income. What happened is, after 40 years of Democrat control, we had taxes at this high, high level, and what happened is that a married person would be taxed at the highest rate of the person in that household, whoever made the most money. That meant that if a wife worked full time and a husband worked part time, he would be taxed at her high tax rate.

So what Republicans did with President Bush is we came and passed some-

thing that was known as the marriage penalty, and that is that every single person would be taxed only at their own rate, based upon what their own earnings were.

Mr. KIRK. What we did is we made sure married couples did not pay a higher tax than two single people living together.

Mr. SESSIONS. That is exactly right.

Once again, said another way, a person would be taxed only at their own income, as opposed to combining that rate, which then would increase the amount of taxes that a person would pay.

What I am telling the gentleman is that in around 1,300 days, if the Democrat majority does not reextend these tax cuts, that all four of these taxes and more that I have talked about will go back to the rate that they were before the Republicans lowered those taxes.

Mr. KIRK. If we look at the suburban agenda about safe schools, extending health care, green and open space, et cetera, one of the things that is not part of the Suburban Agenda is a tax increase, especially a tax increase on working families.

One of the things that we have instituted as part of our general tax policy is to make sure that married families are not paying a higher tax, because a key part of the Suburban Agenda is a family together, raising kids under one household.

I am worried, though, that if there is inaction on tax policy by this Congress, many of the inequities in the Tax Code get reimposed and we start taxing families at a higher rate than people who are single.

Mr. SESSIONS. That is exactly correct. The gentleman from Illinois is correct, that as a result of what Republicans have done, by cutting taxes, is that we have not only given people back more of their own money, we have allowed for America to be in a position to where we are more competitive with the world.

Is it not interesting that just a few short years ago all the talk was about outsourcing and these jobs that were going to other countries. Ever since we passed these tax cuts, the debate and discussion now is how do we get enough workers to do the work that we need done here in America.

The greatest threat against that would be that we do not have enough work that can be done here, and so companies go offshore to have work done on behalf of corporations and people here in this country.

Mr. KIRK. We talk about the Suburban Agenda, what is in it, which is pro-school, pro-health care, pro-environment legislation, and what is not, which is a tax increase on the American people. There is the argument that is made very often here in Washington that the only way to cure our financial woes is a tax increase. But if I remember, looking back at the record of the 1970s, even when Congress did

raise taxes, for every dollar in taxes that it raised against the American people, it spent another \$1.08 in new spending. So the record of those years was that, even though we were raising taxes, spending here in the Congress went up even faster, and so our deficit woes became worse.

□ 1910

Mr. SESSIONS. That is exactly the point. The political debate in Washington has been that Republicans cut taxes and deficits go up. Well, the fact of the matter is, since 2001, exactly on 9/11/01, when we had a balanced budget at that point, we have seen the deficit go up, and that is because we lost 1 million jobs on or about that day in the months forward.

So what Republicans did is they said, we have got to spur our economy. We have got to do the things that will bring America back to work.

I am pleased to tell you that the budget is virtually balanced and is expected to be balanced by next year as a result of a strong, strong economy. Just 1½ years ago, we had a deficit of about \$500 billion. This year, it is down to \$140 billion. That comes from strong economic growth. That comes from the opportunity for people to go to work. That comes from investment and opportunity, but, most of all, we are competitive with the world, and these are the things that Republicans talk about that is a part of the Suburban Agenda but that is good for everybody.

Mr. KIRK. If I am not mistaken, last year was the largest increase in tax receipts coming into our Treasury, even though there was no tax increase by the Federal Government, simply because of economic growth, that since September 11, 2001, we have added over 2 million jobs. Maybe that is one of the key lessons of the Suburban Agenda: There is no Federal program or no social welfare act that is more powerful in improving the life of a suburban family than a job and a growing economy for small business.

Mr. SESSIONS. The gentleman is correct, and if I could have the gentleman also continue to keep focusing on how we have done this, what has been done is we have turned to the free market, the free enterprise system, to Americans, and said, we need you to go work as hard as you can work and bring this country back. That is exactly what has happened. It was not because of a government program.

What we did is, we gave people back more of their own money, allowed them to invest that money in places like Dallas, Texas, where I live, Chicago, Illinois. And we have this robust economy that, since 2001, 5 million new jobs have been added. Tax receipts are up, 3 years ago, plus 8 percent over the year before; then plus 13 percent in this last year, plus 15 percent more than we had received the year before.

We have more people at work today. More people own their own homes. There is more money being made, and

the government has more money at its disposal. I hope and believe that next year this budget is going to be balanced.

Mr. KIRK. As the gentleman points out, many people here in Washington will point to the European Union as the economic model, an example that we should follow, but the record is relentlessly negative towards their example of creating new jobs or economic growth, where we have seen a reactive decline of the European Union as against China and the United States. We also recall in the last decade how we all thought that we would all end up working for the Japanese and that Japan, Incorporated, was the big threat.

Now we see an old axiom of politics said by one great politician, never bet against the United States, and also never bet against freedom. What we have seen here is an unbelievable economic performance by our country, record tax receipts coming into the Treasury without a tax increase, and the ability then to focus on the future of the United States, which is largely being written in the suburbs, with safe schools, extending health care and making sure that we are planning for the long term in what will be aging America, with the baby boomers entering retirement, but hopefully, with these policies entering retirement with some safety and security based on private savings and investment, encourage through first the 401(k) program and then we hope through the 401 Kids Family Tax Savings Accounts.

Mr. SESSIONS. As we close down our time here with Republicans being on the floor, I would like to remind the gentleman of something that is heard over and over and over again, and that is how great America is. But I would like to ask a rhetorical question. Have you ever heard of the China dream, the Brazilian dream, the French dream, the German dream? Probably not, but every single person in the United States and billions around the world have heard of the American dream, and the American dream is tied directly to not only the dream that they have about themselves, but a dream about their future.

This is where Republicans, working together on the suburban caucus, making sure we have a healthy and strong economy, where investment and opportunity and reduction in taxes happens directly in front of us, and then we can support this agenda that is so important for every one of us.

Mr. KIRK. I thank my colleague. I will close out by simply saying that we now present to the American people and the Congress the suburban agenda for 2007, Action Against International Drug Gangs, moving into the suburbs where the Federal Government can help; Safe Schools, relying on the judgment of teachers, full time, using all of their abilities; 401 Kids Tax Deferred Savings Accounts, to make sure that families have more resources, more

flexibility, to save for their child's college education and first time home purchase. Health Insurance for Life, to make sure that we continue the COBRA insurance for Americans, for more than 18 months, the Deleting Online Predators Act to make sure we are empowering parents to control this 21st Century danger to their children; the Open Space and Farm Land Preservation Act to make sure that we have more preserved green and open space in the green and open suburbs, and finally, the Senior Safety and Dignity Act to make sure that as the baby boomers age, we are preserving our long-term health care for our Americans.

This is the suburban agenda, a vision for the future and a work plan for the Congress. We are looking forward to working with both sides of the aisle on this to make sure that we are representing and advancing the needs of America as it actually is, living in the suburbs and needing action on all of these items to realize the full potential of this Congress and the work ahead.

WALTER REED MEDICAL CENTER

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

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to stand in the well of the House tonight and address conditions at Walter Reed Medical Center, as well as other military medical hospitals, and I would also like to, in doing this, talk about why our soldiers and our veterans are so important to us.

I want to start by saying if we are truly concerned, if we are truly concerned about national security, then we have to be concerned about those who secure national security. We have got to be concerned about our soldiers. We have to be concerned about our veterans. Because, in fact, they make it possible for us to have these liberties that we have come to know and to love.

Tonight, as I start this explanation, I would like to first use the words of another, Major General John H. Bailey II, and I want to bring his words to our attention, because he has written an ode that really explains why the American soldier, the American veteran, is so important to this Nation and to the well-being of this country. His ode is styled from Boston to Baghdad, and his words capture the essence, the spirit of what the American soldier is all about, what the American soldier has done for this great country.

His words are:

I am the American veteran. I was born in battle on April 19, 1775. I am the total sum of my country's ethnic and cultural diversity. I am loyal, dependable and patriotic. My motto is, "Duty, Honor and Country," and my

battle cry is, "Don't Tread on Me." The tracks of my tears and the stains of my blood can be traced from Boston to Baghdad.

I was there at Lexington when the shot heard around the world was fired, saw the whites of their eyes, was battle-tested at Bunker Hill, Valley Forge and Yorktown, and won my country's independence.

□ 1920

I earned worldwide respect during the Spanish-American War while helping our friends in Cuba gain their independence. Names like Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders and the 9th and 10th Cavalry became household words. I saw action at San Juan Hill, Guantánamo Bay, and the Philippines. A young Lieutenant John Pershing was heard to have seen "white and black regiment fighters shoulder to shoulder unmindful of color in combat."

I was there at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, in the year of our Lord 1918. I was crowned in glory at the conclusion of World War II, the war to end all wars and the birth of Veterans' Day.

During World War II, in response to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the pearl of the Pacific, I rallied a nation, shouldered the weight of the world, defeating the Axis powers, preserving democracy around the world and preventing the annihilation of a race of people who called Germany home. In this country, we call these exceptional citizens Jewish people, and we know them as the Jewish community.

No words can better describe the effects of our entry into World War II than those of Admiral Hirohito when told by an aide, "Sir, we have scored a great victory," and he replied, "I'm afraid we have awakened a sleeping giant."

Thank you, World War II veterans. You are the greatest generation. Never before have so few given so much for so many.

In support of our friends in South Korea, I saw action at Bloody Ridge, Pork Chop Hill and Heartbreak Ridge, while introducing the helicopter and jet aircraft as battlefield tactics, actions which changed the course of military history.

I went to Vietnam to help the people of South Vietnam maintain the right to choose their own destiny. There I fought at Hue Dong Hai and Hamburger Hill. I refused to fall at the hands of a well-equipped and determined enemy during the 1968 Tet Offensive.

During Desert Storm, I engaged Saddam Hussein in his mother of all battles. I destroyed his will to resist.

And then there was 9/11, a day which must never be forgotten, a day which must never be repeated. It tested the soul of our Nation in a way not witnessed since December 7, 1941. And due to the atmosphere it created, I was again sent to Iraq as a part of the global war on terror. I am still there today