

Mr. Speaker, any of these women would be amazed and proud to see an America where women are not only able to vote, but they are able to run for office. It is incredibly appropriate that this body, presided over by a woman for the first time in its history, should honor their work through a day set aside to raise awareness of their struggle.

Mr. Speaker, I am especially pleased to support this resolution because it gives much deserved recognition to one of my heroes, Sojourner Truth, the great abolitionist and suffragist.

In 1843, deciding her mission was to preach the word of God, Sojourner Truth—the name she gave herself as a traveling preacher who speaks the truth—left New York and traveled throughout New England, calling her own prayers meetings and attending those of others. She preached “God’s truth and plan for salvation.”

After months of travel, she arrived in Northampton, Massachusetts, and joined the Northampton Association for Education and Industry, where she met and worked with abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and Olive Gilbert.

As we know, during the 1850s, slavery became an especially issue in the United States. In 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law, which allowed runaway slaves to be arrested and jailed without a jury trial, and in 1857, the Supreme Court ruled in the Dred Scott case that those enslaved had no rights as citizens and that the government could not outlaw slavery in the new territories.

While traveling and speaking in states across the country, Sojourner Truth met many women abolitionists and noticed that although women could be part of the leadership in the abolitionist movement, they could neither vote nor hold public office. It was this realization that led Sojourner to become an outspoken supporter of women’s rights.

In 1851, she addressed the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, delivering her famous speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” The applause she received that day has been described as “deafening.” From that time on, she became known as a leading advocate for the rights of women. Indeed, she was one of the nineteenth century’s most eloquent voices for the cause of anti-slavery and women’s rights.

It was to give proper recognition to her contributions to the struggle to abolish slavery and secure equal rights for women that I introduced H.R. 4510 which would direct the Joint Committee on the Library to accept the donation of a bust depicting Sojourner Truth and to display the bust in a suitable location in the Capitol. In February of this year, that legislation became law.

I strongly support H. Con. Res. 105, and I urge my colleagues to join me in doing so.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 105.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA HOME RULE AMENDMENT ACT

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2080) to amend the District of Columbia Home Rule Act to conform the District charter to revisions made by the Council of the District of Columbia relating to public education.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2080

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

SECTION 1. CONFORMING DISTRICT CHARTER TO COUNCIL AMENDMENTS RELATING TO PUBLIC EDUCATION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The District of Columbia Home Rule Act is amended—

- (1) by striking section 452 (sec. 1—204.52, D.C. Official Code); and
- (2) by striking section 495 (sec. 1—204.95, D.C. Official Code).

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of contents of such Act is amended by striking the item relating to section 452 and the item relating to section 495.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) and the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield such time as she might consume to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON).

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, may I offer my thanks to the chairman of the subcommittee, particularly for the very expeditious way in which he has moved my request for early consideration of the matter before us now.

I rise to request passage of H.R. 2080, a bill to amend the District of Columbia Home Rule Act in keeping with District public school charter revisions proposed by Mayor Adrian Fenty and passed by the Council of the District of Columbia.

I very much appreciate that Chairman HENRY WAXMAN and Chairman DANNY DAVIS considered this bill expeditiously, and the leadership has kindly granted our request for early consideration of the bill on the House floor on the suspension calendar in light of the fact that the matter before the House is not controversial.

The bill supports the District in moving on its own to correct problems in its local school system.

In fact, H.R. 2080 is before the Congress only because the current Home Rule Act now in the process of being revised requires that certain changes

to the District’s charter be made by Federal legislation. I stress that the underlying school reorganization involves no Federal funds and is entirely a local school issue.

However, H.R. 2080 is of major importance to the District of Columbia. And if it were possible, the city would have made these revisions effective immediately. Therefore, I am grateful to the Federal Workforce chair, Mr. DANNY DAVIS, and Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman HENRY WAXMAN for moving this bill as soon as possible in committee, and the subsequent movement to the House floor the very next week, the week in which we now find ourselves.

The school structure change in particular puts a heavy and unprecedent burden on the administration of a new mayor, Mayor Adrian Fenty. Many in the Congress have over the years urged changes in the D.C. public schools; and therefore, I know that the last thing Congress wants to do is get in the way or slow a difficult local school reform process.

The extra congressional level of procedure for a local school restructuring is not within the expertise of a national legislative body whose agenda is packed with urgent national concerns.

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The necessity for a Member of Congress to introduce a bill for a self-governing city is an anachronism neither the Congress nor the District deserves or can afford today. I promise the Congress I will try to make this the last time the House or the Senate is requested to pass a charter bill of no concern and of little interest to the Congress of the United States.

I strongly ask that all Members support the swift passage of this bill today.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

I rise today in support of H.R. 2080 which will implement the District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007. The legislation was passed by a 9–2 vote by the city council on April 19 and was signed by Mayor Fenty on April 23. Because the local bill includes amendments to the Home Rule Act, Congress must pass this bill for it to be effective. I make a special note that this legislation relies solely on local funds.

Before approving the bill, the city council held over 70 hours of hearings. I commend Mayor Fenty for proposing this bold change in governance and the city council for its careful deliberation and amendments to the original proposal.

Key elements of the local bill include streamlined educational responsibility, spending controls and consolidation of functions. The legislation is also intended to resolve issues that have festered between the D.C. public school system and charter schools.

Every city and county is entitled to govern its own school system as it sees

fit, and the District of Columbia ought not to be an exception.

The challenges that have faced the city's public schools are well-known and extensively documented. Congress needs to pass this legislation promptly to ensure these reforms can be in place before school begins again next August. Changes in educational procurement are particularly important. Recent reports of failing boilers and high levels of lead in school water fountains lend a sense of urgency to this bill.

I wish the mayor and the city council well as they assume enhanced responsibility for public education. They have asked through this legislation to be held to a much higher level of accountability, and I commend them for stepping up to the plate on this core function of local government.

This does not obviate the continuing need to provide an alternative to underperforming neighborhood schools. That is why the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is so vital. Today, the program gives approximately 1,800 low-income students access to schools of their choice. Reauthorization of this excellent program, which will be required by 2008, is necessary as part of our vision to expand and improve opportunities for D.C. students.

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

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to close.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2080 repeals sections 452 and 495 of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act and permits the District of Columbia Council to establish the District of Columbia public schools as a Cabinet-level agency.

Under H.R. 2080, the mayor and the council will be held accountable for the management of the District's public schools. Section 452 describes the role and responsibilities of the mayor and council with respect to the annual budget process for the District of Columbia public school system. Section 452 provides the mayor and the council authority to establish the maximum amount of funds which will be allocated to the District of Columbia's Board of Education, but they are not allowed to change how the funds are used for educational programs.

H.R. 2080 will eliminate section 452 and allow the mayor and council to determine the level of funding allocations that each program receives. The money for this budget is entirely local money.

Section 495 established the D.C. Board of Education. H.R. 2080 would repeal the powers of the board and gives the mayor and council authority over the District's public schools. Mayor Fenty has been seeking the authority to reform the D.C. public school system since earlier this year.

On January 5, 2007, the mayor submitted the District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007, the act, to the D.C. council for

their consideration. The act transfers management and oversight authority for D.C.'s public schools to the mayor.

It transfers all State education agency responsibilities from the Board of Education to the State education office; creates an Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission; establishes an Office of Ombudsman for public education; and a Public Education Facilities Management and Construction Authority.

The D.C. council has held over 70 hours of hearings and heard the testimonies of residents, teachers, students, parents and leading educational experts on the mayor's proposal. The mayor believes that giving him control of D.C. public schools will lead to a dramatic improvement in the District's school system.

The District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 passed the District of Columbia council on April 19, 2007, by a vote of 9-2. H.R. 2080 will allow the mayor to implement his initiatives to reform D.C. public schools.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend Representative ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON and ranking minority member, Representative TOM DAVIS, for introducing this legislation. It is important to note that if D.C. had home rule, this legislation would not be necessary.

I urge all my colleagues to support this legislation because, in effect, what we are really doing is giving certification, in a sense, to actions that have been taken by the District of Columbia's city council and giving them the authority to exercise responsibility for their own public school system, which is obviously the right thing to do.

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

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of our time.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I would urge passage of this legislation, and I yield back the balance of our time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2080.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

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

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

FORMER U.S. BORDER PATROL AGENTS RAMOS AND COMPEAN

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. Mr. Speaker, today is the 112th day since a great injustice took place in this country.

On January 17, 2007, two United States Border Patrol agents entered Federal prison to begin serving 11- and 12-year sentences respectively.

Agent Compean and Agent Ramos were convicted last spring for wounding a Mexican drug smuggler who brought 743 pounds of marijuana across our borders into Texas. These agents never should have been prosecuted. Yet, the U.S. Attorney's office prosecuted the agents and granted immunity to the drug smuggler. The illegal drug smuggler received full medical care in El Paso, Texas, was permitted to return to Mexico, and has sued the border patrol for \$5 million for violating his civil rights. And he is not an American citizen.

The American people have not forgotten Agents Ramos and Compean, who should have been commended instead of indicted. I encourage citizens across this country to continue calling the White House and ask the President to use his authority to immediately pardon these two heroes.

Members of Congress and the American people are outraged and concerned with this administration's indifference to the plight of two honorable men who have been crucified unfairly by a Federal prosecutor. These two agents have given years of their lives in service to this Nation; yet they have been unjustly punished for doing their job to protect the American people.

By using the power of his office to pardon these two agents, the President has the opportunity to reverse a grave injustice.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to share part of the comments made by Chairman JOHN CONYERS on the floor last week following my remarks on these two border agents, and I quote the chairman: 'It's important that the kinds of concerns you have raised are known to all of our men and women who carry badges and weapons defending us, not just at borders, but in every State in the Union.' Again, that is a quote from Chairman JOHN CONYERS.

I want to thank Chairman CONYERS for his interest in this issue, and I am encouraged that the Senate Judiciary Committee and the House Judiciary Committee will soon move forward with hearings to investigate the injustice committed against these two border agents.